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**English 107: War, Peace, and Ethics in Ancient Poetry and Prose
Fall 2015 (TT 10-11:20), 140 Allen Hall**

We will read foundational works from four different ancient cultures: China, Greece, India, and Israel. We will pay particular attention to the question of the kinds of values that these foundational works were meant to instill in their ancient audiences. What, for each culture, constitutes the exemplary person, sometimes referred to as the “hero” or “heroine”? In particular, what does each work have to say about the nature of war, peace, and ethics understood as my responsibility – impossible to shirk -- for the unique and irreplaceable other in front of me?

Emphasis will be on close and attentive reading of texts. Literature during this period was meant to be taken in by the ear rather than the eye, and we will emphasize the oral [spoken aloud]/aural [heard] dimension of these works. Students will train their ears to hear and scan ancient verse, even if they do not know the ancient languages (Chinese, Greek, Sanskrit, and Hebrew) themselves; and to hear modern attempts at approximating the aural effects of ancient poetry and prose.

In this class, you will develop the ability to appreciate and analyze literary texts from a variety of cultural and linguistic traditions in the ancient world. You will be asked to demonstrate this ability in both written and spoken English. In our increasingly multicultural world, both in the classroom and in the workplace, you will be increasingly expected to develop what is called “intercultural competence.” This class, by exposing you to foundational texts from four ancient and very different cultures, will boost your “intercultural competence.”

Required Texts:

The Book of Songs, trans. Arthur Waley (Grove Press)

The Iliad of Homer, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Anchor/Doubleday)

The Mahabharata, trans. Chakravarthi V. Narasimhan (selections from *The World of Literature*, eds. Westling, Durrant, Earl, Kohl, Laskaya, Shankman [Prentice Hall]), available on Canvas

Genesis, trans. Robert Alter (Norton)

*Note: It is important that you read the particular translations listed in the syllabus. Literary translation is an art, and the translations chosen for this course have been chosen for their artfulness and beauty.

Assignments

I. September 29: Introduction; Problems of Translation: Homer in English verse; Oct. 1: *Iliad*, Book One; *Book of Songs* 1, 5, 20, 23; translating the *Book of Songs* 1

II. October 6: *Iliad*, Book Three; *Book of Songs* 26, 29, 30, 32; Oct. 8: *Iliad*, Book Six;

Book of Songs 40, 41, 42, 45

III. Oct. 13: *Iliad*, Book Nine; *Book of Songs* 58, 61, 69, 76; October 15: *Iliad*, Book Eleven; *Book of Songs* 81, 92, 93, 104

IV. Oct. 20: *Iliad*, Book Sixteen; *Book of Songs* 110, 115, 143, 166; **first in-class writing assignment**; October 22: *Iliad*, Book Eighteen; *Book of Songs* 186, 201, 230, 234

V. Oct. 27: *Iliad* Book 22; *Book of Songs* 235, 241; Oct. 29: *Iliad*, Book 24; *Book of Songs* 245

VI. Nov. 3: *Mahabharata*, Chapters XXXVI, XXXVII, XL, XLI; Nov. 5: *The Bhagavad-Gita*, first, second, and eleventh teachings, trans. Barbara Stoler Miller; Nov. 7: *Mahabharata*, Chapters LXV, LXVI, LXVII, LXVIII, LXIX, LXXIVXCV, XCVI, XCVII

VII. Nov. 10: Genesis 1-8; Nov. 12: Genesis 9-15 (Abraham narrative begins in Chapter 12)

VIII. Nov. 17: Genesis 16-23; Nov. 19: Genesis 24-30 (Abraham narrative ends at 25.11)

IX. Nov. 24: Genesis 31-40 (narrative of Joseph and his brothers begins in Genesis 37); **THANKSGIVING BREAK**

X. Dec. 1: Genesis 41-45; Dec. 3: Genesis 46-50 (narrative of Joseph and his brothers ends in Genesis 50); **second in-class writing assignment**

XI. Final Exam (Oral), week of Dec. 7-11; please make an appointment to see me in the afternoon of that week for 15 minutes

Requirements:

Students must keep up with the reading assignments, regularly attend class, and participate in class discussions. **More than two unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your grade by five points per missed class.**

Written work will consist of two in-class assignments (identification and explication of passages from the reading).

The final will be an oral exam. I will meet with each student individually. Students will be asked to memorize twenty lines of verse from Robert Fitzgerald's translation of the *Iliad* and, like the ancient "rhapsodes" who recited the Homeric poems to ancient audiences, to "perform" their lines and to discuss the context and significance – for the concerns of the course as a whole -- of the passage they have chosen to memorize. I'll expect you to make comparisons between the passage you have chosen to memorize and the other works we have read. In other words, you'll need to be able to discuss the *Book of Songs*, *Iliad*, the *Mahabharata*, and the Bible.

Your grades for the course will be based on the following criteria:

class participation: **10%**

written assignments: **60%** (30% first in-class writing assignment; 30% for second in-class writing assignment)

final exam: **30%**