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**English 107: War, Peace, and Hospitality in Ancient Poetry and Prose  
Fall 2016 (TT 10-11:20), 191 Anstett**

We will read foundational works from three different ancient cultures: China, Greece, 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 does each culture have to say about extending or rejecting hospitality toward the stranger, on the one hand, and the very nature of what it means to be human, on the other? This question is vital to consider at this volatile moment in contemporary society, and particularly in the Western world, when Europe and the United States are dealing with the refugee crisis stemming from the brutal civil war in Syria and with questions of immigration more generally.

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, 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 three ancient and very different cultures, will boost your “intercultural competence.”

Required Texts:

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

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

*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 we’ll be reading in this course have been chosen for their artfulness and beauty.

Assignments

I. September 27: Introduction; hospitality and the end of Homer’s *Iliad* (24.477-86); reading for peace; problems of translation: Homer in English verse; Sept. 29: *Odyssey*, Book One; *Book of Songs* 1, 5, 20, 23; translating the *Book of Songs*

II. October 4: **NO CLASS** (Rosh Hashanah [Jewish New Year]); Oct. 6: *Odyssey*, Books

2 and 3; *Book of Songs* 1, 5, 20, 23

III. Oct. 11: *Odyssey*, Books 4 and 5; October 13: *Odyssey*, Books 6 and 7; *Book of Songs* 26, 29, 30, 32; **first in-class writing assignment**

IV. Oct. 18: *Odyssey*, Books 8 and 9; October 20: *Odyssey*, Book 10; *Book of Songs* 40, 41, 42, 45

V. Oct. 25: *Odyssey*, Books 11 and 12; Oct. 27: *Odyssey*, Book 13; *Book of Songs* 58, 61, 69, 76

VI. Nov. 1: *Odyssey*, Books 14 and 15; Nov. 3: *Odyssey*, Book 16 and *Book of Songs* 81, 92, 93, 104; **second in-class writing assignment**

VII. Nov. 8: *Odyssey*, Books 17 and 18; Nov. 10: *Odyssey*, Book 19; *Book of Songs* 104, 110, 115, 143

VIII. Nov. 15: *Odyssey*, Books 20 and 21; Nov. 17: *Odyssey*, Book 22; *Book of Songs* 166, 185, 201, 230

IX. Nov. 22: *Odyssey*, Books 23-24; *Book of Songs* 234, 235, 241, 245; Nov. 24: **NO CLASS** (Thanksgiving)

X. November 29: Genesis 37-43 (beginning of narrative of Joseph and his brothers); Dec. 1: Genesis 44-50 (conclusion of narrative of Joseph and his brothers); **third in-class writing assignment**

XI. Final Exam (Oral), week of Dec. 5-9; 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 three 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 *Odyssey* 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*, the *Odyssey*, and Genesis.

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

class participation: **10%**

written assignments: **60%** (20% for each of the in-class writing assignments  
class writing assignment)

final exam: **30%**