

ENGLISH 200D: THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Instructor: Sam Hushagen, PhD

Class Times:

M/W 11:30-1:20

Office Hours: T, Th 2:20-3:30pm (and by appt.)

Email: samhushagen85@gmail.com

Class Location:

Zoom ID: TBD

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Tradition: from Latin *trāditōn-*, *trāditiō* handing over, delivery, surrender, transmission of knowledge, teaching, handing down of knowledge, item of traditional knowledge, belief, in post-classical Latin also body of Christian teachings transmitted orally (early 3rd cent. in Tertullian), handing over of sacred books to persecutors (late 4th cent.) < *trāditi-*, past participial stem of *trādere* to hand over, deliver” (Oxford English Dictionaries)

The organizing idea for this class is the hero or heroine's journey. The idea was popularized by Joseph Campbell's 1949 book *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*. But unlike Campbell's totalizing, and frequently reductive comparative mythology, which saw the hero's journey at *the* essential narrative structure transcending history, nation, language, and culture (“the one great story of mankind,” as he wrote), our focus will be narrower and more particularizing. We'll look at a few paradigmatic examples of “hero's journey” narratives to establish some of the mode's traditions. Then we'll pivot to look carefully at how writers from different times and places receive, strategically appropriate, defamiliarize, and repudiate the conventions associated with it, working our way from antiquity to the present. The “hero's journey” will thus provide a case study on the self-reflexive, self-organizing nature of craft traditions within literary history. No writer is *sui generis*. All successful writers are a product of extended apprenticeships in the craft of writing, which involves inheriting and mastering a set of conventions, formal features, styles, and narrative structures. The task of the developing writer is to take up these traditions and make them new by jettisoning what no longer works, incorporating new styles and techniques, adapting old materials to present conditions to create novel effects. It follows our focus will be formal and technical, but that doesn't mean we will neglect questions of belief, religious commitments, ideology, power, and identity.

Campbell's book, with its pithy formulation of the hero's journey, was said to have inspired *Star Wars*. He writes, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (*Hero*, prologue). Because it is schematic, it is hard to think of a story that doesn't fit this description in at least some sense: from Moses and Jesus in the Bible to Odysseus and Arjuna (from the *Bhagavad Gita*), from Beowulf to Santiago (the protagonist of Paul Coelho's riff on the theme), and virtually everything in between. But this characterization ignores what is distinctive or surprising about these stories. Our discussions will be attentive to commonalities among across our readings, and to connections to contemporary media, but also invested in the speciation events in literary history, when an established form becomes something new in the hands of a capable writer.

COURSE GOALS

- Introduction to literary historical and formalist techniques of literary analysis;
- Introduction to practices of attentive and deliberate reading, and collaborative discussion of literature;
- Introduction to transhistorical study of literary modes as they intersect with the history of ideas, culture, ideology, and politics;
- **Cultivate student capacities for imaginative intellectual experience**

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course is designed with a chronological structure. We'll begin with Virgil's *Aeneid*, written in the first century BC before turning to Dante's 14th Century riff on the hero's journey in *Inferno*. From there we will make a quick stop in the eighteenth-century to read Voltaire's parody of the genre, *Candide*. Those first three texts will make up the first half of the quarter. We'll spend the second half reading Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, and we'll finish with Jesmyn Ward's 2012 novel, *Salvage the Bones*. There will be a midterm assignment and a final. The midterm will be a mix of short answer and essay questions intended to provide you an opportunity to demonstrate your engagement with the readings and course content. The final will have a looser structure, giving you the option to explore hero's journey narratives that we haven't read or viewed in the class, write a research paper, or complete a creative project.

KEY DATES

SUNDAY, 5/2: MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT DUE

WEDNESDAY, 6/9: FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE

MATERIALS (IN ORDER WE WILL READ THEM)

- *The Aeneid*, Virgil, translator Robert Fagles (Penguin Classics Delux Edition)
- *The Inferno*, Dante, translator Allen Mandelbaum (Bantam Classics)
- *Candide*, Voltaire, translator Robert M. Adams (Norton Critical Edition)
- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, by Frederick Douglass (Modern Library Classics edition)
- *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf (Harcourt)
- *Salvage the Bones*, Jesmyn Ward
- Dependable internet access for Canvas and Google Drive
- Zoom for required discussions
- UW email address you check at least once a day (please no forwarding)

ASSESSMENT

This class will be evaluated using contract grading. A grading contract is exactly what it sounds like: you sign up for a certain grade (4.0, 3.5, 3.0, 2.5, 2.0). Each grade level has certain requirements articulated clearly in the contract that you and I both sign at the beginning of the quarter. You may renegotiate your contract up or down once during the quarter, but not within the last two weeks. Failure to fulfill your contract will result in a grade that corresponds to the

amount of work actually completed. The goal of the contract is to emphasize learning over evaluation, and to give you room to explore ideas and develop skills that are important to you.

Participation:

Being an active member of this community is imperative to you and your peers' success in this course. Come to class prepared and stay engaged through the session and you'll receive participation credit for that day. If you miss class: it's your responsibility to email me and tell me what you missed (hint: you won't get this information from me but from a kind classmate with whom you've exchanged information). From there, we'll set up a way for you to make up participation. Participation is central to the grading contract, and failure to fulfill the participation requirements amounts to a failure to fulfill your contract.

Our class sessions will be conducted entirely on Zoom, but 40 people in a Zoom discussion for two hours is unworkable. We will use a combination of small-group breakout room discussions, lectures, and larger group discussions. My expectation is that while working in small groups you will be present, engaged, and actively participating just as you are in the larger discussion with me.

It is important to note that this is experimental. Upper division English courses are meant to be discussion-based seminars – a structure and environment that is hard to replicate in a virtual setting. We will try a few different formats, including round-table discussions, small group work, and scaling discussions, and hopefully find some ways to exchange ideas and information that is productive and engaging for everyone. I will periodically solicit feedback on what discussion formats work best for you, as well as ask you to evaluate your own level of participation and engagement in the course.

LATE AND INCOMPLETE WORK

All projects (midterm and final) are due on Canvas by midnight on the date and in the file format specified. Projects that are submitted late, are in the wrong file format, or don't meet minimum requirements will not receive feedback. If you would like feedback on a late or incomplete assignment, come see me during office hours and we can discuss it. If you require an extension for a given project, let me know at least 24 hours before the deadline.

All assignments must reach minimum requirements and be present in the portfolio in order for you to receive a passing grade for this course. No extensions or late submissions for the portfolio will be accepted.

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Zoom etiquette is new and challenging. Digital technology can bring us together virtually, but it is replete with distractions. I have a Zoom protocol on the course Canvas and maintaining proper Zoom etiquette is part of your grading contract. The most important rules are your camera must remain on during discussion, and you must remain in front of it. We will have a scheduled break, but while we are in session, I ask you keep your camera on. When you enter, you will be muted.

Stay muted until you wish to speak and mute yourself again after finishing speaking. Try your best to not speak over others. Read the cues of your colleagues and support one another. Encourage one another to speak and ask questions. Be some place quiet without distractions during class sessions, and avoid non-class related conversations with roommates, friends, family, etc. Obviously I cannot see what you are doing on your screen, but please keep social media, YouTube, Netflix, and any number of other distractions closed so your attention can be focused on the work in class. Failure to do so will amount to violating the terms of your contract and will have negative consequences on your grade. Also, be nice to each other. This is hard and we need to be able to count on one another.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your projects for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing as long as you cite them. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review.

ADDITIONAL POLICIES AND RESOURCES

There is more information regarding class and departmental policies as well as on-campus resources available on the Canvas page under "Student Resources." Please visit this page early in the quarter for information regarding student accommodation, writing and research help centers, departmental contact information, and community and counseling resources.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION CLAUSE

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Faculty Syllabus Guidelines and Resources. Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form available at <https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/>.

COURSE CALENDAR

Arrive to class having completed the reading and any preparations listed under "Homework/Reading Due" for a given day in order to receive participation points for that day. You may occasionally be asked to complete short quizzes to ensure you're suitably prepared.

Disclaimer: This calendar is subject to change. I'll do my best to alert you to changes well in advance, but it's your responsibility to stay up-to-date. Email me if you're not sure how to prepare for class.

Week One (M 3/29, W 3/31)

Monday: *Aeneid* books 1-3

Wednesday: *Aeneid* 4-6

Week Two (M 4/5, W 4/7)

Monday: *Aeneid* 7-9

Wednesday: *Aeneid* 10-12

Week Three (M 4/12, W 4/14)

Monday: *Inferno* Canto 1-9

Wednesday: *Inferno* 10-18

Week Four (M 4/19, W 4/21)

Monday: *Inferno* 19-26

Wednesday: *Inferno* 27-33 (end)

Week Five (M 4/26, W 4/28)

Monday: *Candide* chapters 1-17

Wednesday: *Candide* chapters 18-30 (end)

Midterm Due Sunday, 5/2 at Midnight!

Week Six (M 5/3, W 5/5)

Monday: *Narrative* chapters I-IX (pgs. 1-63)

Wednesday: *Narrative* X-end (64-113)

Week Seven (M 5/10, W 5/12)

Monday: *Lighthouse* chs. I-XII (pgs. 3-71)

Wednesday: *Lighthouse* chs. XIII-XIX (71-124) – finish up to part two, “Time Passes”

Week Eight (M 5/17, W 5/19)

Monday: *Lighthouse* part two chs. I through chapter III of part three, “To the Lighthouse”

Wednesday: *Lighthouse* part three chs. IV-end

Week Nine (M 5/24, W 5/26)

Monday: *Salvage* chs. 1-4 (pgs. 1-82)

Wednesday: *Salvage* chs. 5-6 (pgs. 83-130)

Week Ten (W 6/2)

Monday: Memorial Day Holiday (discussion forum still due)

Wednesday: Finish Novel!

Midterm Due: Sunday, 5/2

Final Due: Wednesday, 6/9