

HUMA 1001, Section 19
Columbia University, Fall 2023
Time: MW 2:10PM – 4:00PM
Classroom: [TBD]

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LITERATURE HUMANITIES

Since 1937, Columbia faculty and students have come together in a course known variously as “Masterpieces of Western Literature and Philosophy,” “Literature Humanities,” or “Lit Hum.” Even after all these years, those teaching or taking the course still pursue the same fundamental project: by engaging influential examples of what has come to be called “Literature,” we still hone the aesthetic, conceptual, and ethical tools that comprise the “Humanities.” Amid crises both chronic (like climate change) and acute (like COVID-19), some might say this project is self-indulgent or even irrelevant. Yet in our time together, we will ask and answer questions that could not be any more urgent: On the one hand, how have authors as distant as Virgil and Virginia Woolf created cultures that have ever more efficiently exploited themselves, each other, and the planet? On the other hand, how have texts as diverse as *The Iliad*, *The Inferno*, and *The Metamorphosis* drawn attention to these problems—and how, in all their peculiar power, have they paved the way to possible solutions?

When Lit Hum was still in its infancy, the German Jewish critic Walter Benjamin underscored this very urgency, suggesting that “there is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism.” Following Benjamin, we will spend this semester appreciating Greek, Roman, and other ancient “civilizations” in their full ambivalence. Most concretely, we will consider how poets such as Sappho and priestesses such as Enheduanna wrought words that have fascinated and/or frustrated generations upon generations. More broadly, we will explore why these words have taken precedence over so many others—and in the US, why these words have been wielded against those racialized as Asian, Black, Latinx, or Native. Finally, we will discuss how these words have drawn on, diverged from, and otherwise related to what Benjamin called “barbarism,” whether in the seafaring empires of the past or the gas-guzzling empires of the present.

It should go without saying that these tasks are all but impossible: even in the best-known texts, there will always be unknowable tensions, and even in the longest-running debates, there will always be new interpretations. Instead of striving for mastery, we will therefore try to tolerate and even celebrate mystery: through our open-ended conversations, we will seek a better (but never *the best*) understanding of literature—and of humanity.

Course Objectives: As we delve into our literary past, you will develop a variety of skills:

- A. *Writing:* Through individual assignments and in-class exercises, you will learn how to design, draft, and revise academic essays. While advancing arguments about ancient cultures, you will refine abilities that are relevant to all academic and/or professional fields.
- B. *Reading:* By looking at, listening to, and experimenting with a range of media, you will become a more confident critical reader. Whether you are faced with a contemporary film or an ancient epic, you will be able to analyze its style, structure, and significance.
- C. *Speaking:* In our collaborative discussions, you will practice talking through difficult subjects, from the formal features of Greek poetry to the ethical imperatives of Biblical stories.
- D. *Historical Reasoning:* As we study the ways that different communities have reimagined and reshaped their worlds, you will gain insight into our past, present, and future.
- E. *Intercultural Understanding:* By considering the construction of gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and other forms of identity, you will experience both the similarities that unite peoples and the differences that define them.

READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

- Week 1 What is Literature?**
 Wed, Sep 6 • Homer, *The Iliad* (Chicago, trans. Richard Lattimore) (Books 1–6)
 • *What's in Your Core?* A Conversation about Reading and a Presentation from the Professor's Research on the US–Mexico Borderlands
- Week 2 What are the Humanities?**
 Mon, Sep 11 • Homer, *The Iliad* (Books 7–12)
 Wed, Sep 13 • Homer, *The Iliad* (Books 13–18)
- Week 3 Civilization and Barbarism**
 Mon, Sep 18 • Homer, *The Iliad* (Books 19–24)
 • Close-Reading Essay Assigned
 Wed, Sep 20 • Enheduanna, “The Exaltation of Inana” (Yale, trans. Sophus Helle)
 • *Enuma Elish* (Eisenbrauns, trans. Wilfred Lambert)
- Week 4 All-Too-Human / More-Than-Human**
 Mon, Sep 25 • *Genesis* (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael Coogan) (Chapters 1–24)
 Tue, Sep 26 • By 11:59PM, submit the first draft of your close-reading essay. On the 27, the 28, or the 29, we will discuss the draft in one-on-one meetings.
 Wed, Sep 27 • *Genesis* (Chapters 25–50)
- Week 5 Space and Place, Distance and Proximity**
 Mon, Oct 2 • Homer, *The Odyssey* (Norton, trans. Emily Wilson) (Books 1–8)
 Wed, Oct 4 • Homer, *The Odyssey* (Books 9–16)
 Thurs, Oct 5 • By 11:59PM, submit the final version of your close-reading essay.
- Week 6 Inventing the Human I: Gender and Sexuality**
 Mon, Oct 9 • Homer, *The Odyssey* (Books 17–24)
 Wed, Oct 11 • Sappho, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (Vintage, tr. Anne Carson)
 • Comparative Essay Assigned
- Week 7 Pleasure and Pain**
 Mon, Oct 16 • Sappho, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*
 • *Song of Songs* (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael Coogan)
 Wed, Oct 18 • *Job* (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael Coogan)
 Sat, Oct 21 • By 11:59PM, those workshopping on Monday circulate the drafts of their essays; the second batch will go out on the 23, and the third/fourth on the 28.

Week 8 (Im)morality and (In)justice

Mon, Oct 23 • Aeschylus, “Agamemnon” from *The Oresteia* (Chicago, trans. Richard Lattimore)
 • In-Class Writing Workshop

Wed, Oct 25 • Aeschylus, “The Libation Bearers” and “The Eumenides” from *The Oresteia*
 • In-Class Writing Workshop

Week 9 Inventing the Human II: Race and Ethnicity

Mon, Oct 30 • Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home from the Wars* (TCG)
 • In-Class Writing Workshop

Wed, Nov 1 • Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home from the Wars*
 • In-Class Writing Workshop

Sat, Nov 4 • By 11:59PM, submit the final version of your comparative essay.

Week 10 Democratic Dialogues

Mon, Nov 6 • No Class: Academic Holiday

Wed, Nov 8 • Plato, *Symposium* (Hackett, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Woodruff)

Week 11 Exploration and Empire

Mon, Nov 13 • Virgil, *The Aeneid* (Bantam, trans. Allen Mandelbaum) (Books 1–4)

Wed, Nov 15 • Virgil, *The Aeneid* (Books 5–8)

Week 12 Community and Conflict

Mon, Nov 20 • Virgil, *The Aeneid* (Books 9–12)

Wed, Nov 22 • No Class: Academic Holiday

Week 13 Transmitting Traditions

Mon, Nov 27 • *The Aesop Romance* (Indiana, trans. Lloyd Daly)

Wed, Nov 29 • *The Gospel of Luke* (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael Coogan)

Week 14 Reinvention and Reinterpretation

Mon, Dec 4 • *The Gospel of John* (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael Coogan)

Wed, Dec 6 • Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (Yale, trans. Sarah Ruden) (Books 1–6)

Week 15 Inventing the Human III: The Comedy of Class

Mon, Dec 11 • Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (Books 7–11)

Wed, Dec 6 • Concluding Conversations

Fri, Dec 15 • From 1:00PM to 4:00PM, you will take your Final Exam in Location TBD.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In Fall 2023, “Literature Humanities” is coinciding with crises that range from COVID-19 to climate change. Because we experience these situations in different ways—and crucially, because we arrive at them with disparate resources—we will need to be flexible with each other. As professor, I look forward to helping you with any challenges you may encounter, but as a starting point, I ask that you try your best to meet the following requirements:

Attendance, Participation, and Communication: This course is a seminar; it should be collective, collaborative, and convivial. Please come to each of our sessions prepared to talk and listen: if a text is interesting (or not), explain why; if an idea is confusing (which is totally fine), ask a question; and if you agree or disagree with another comment, describe your own position. In most meetings, we will spend at least a little time in small groups, but as a best practice, we should all aim to make at least one contribution to the full conversation; if this is hard for any reason, we can brainstorm solutions.

On that note, our most important rule will be to treat one another with respect: since we are coming to this course from distinct contexts, we will need to value our unique identities, and since we are engaging with some intense and perhaps irresolvable problems, we will need to maintain a culture of mutual understanding. Of course, the crucial thing will be to value one another due to and not just despite differences of gender, sexuality, race, Indigeneity, class, caste, citizenship, ability, and everything else. But on a more mundane level, we will need to take care with all our interpersonal interactions, including our (ab)use of digital devices: while some take their best notes on laptops or tablets, no one should spend class time checking social media, going online shopping, etc.

To participate in our community, you must be present. If you experience a medical issue or family emergency, or if you must observe a religious holiday, you can receive an excuse by writing me a brief, non-descriptive note. Otherwise, your “attendance and participation” grade will affect your overall grade as follows: if you miss one or two sessions, you will suffer a small penalty, but will remain eligible for an “A”; if you have three non-emergency absences, the highest grade you can earn in the course will be an “A-,” and if you have four such absences, it will be a “B+”; finally, if you have five or more non-emergency absences, you will likely fail the course.

While we convene on Mondays and Wednesdays, we can continue our conversations during other parts of the week. If you would like to review readings, think through assignments, or simply chat, please come to my office hours, which take place on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:00PM to 5:15PM (or, if you have class at those times, by appointment); to normalize this practice, I will schedule mandatory one-on-one conversations early in the semester. At any point, you can email me at can2162@columbia.edu, and I will almost always respond within twenty-four hours.

Reading: To succeed in “Literature Humanities,” you must read carefully and think deeply. Before you can annotate passages, take notes, and come to class with sensitive observations, you will need to acquire an array of texts. First, you should print the three PDFs that I have uploaded to CourseWorks:

Enheduanna, “The Exaltation of Inana” (Yale, trans. Sophus Helle)

Enuma Elish (Eisenbrauns, trans. Wilfred Lambert)

The Aesop Romance (Indiana, trans. Lloyd Daly)

Unless there is a specific reason you must remain on a digital device, you should then secure physical copies of the following texts *in the following editions* (e.g., with the following ISBNs):

Homer, *The Iliad* (Chicago, trans. Richard Lattimore), ISBN 9780226470498

The New Oxford Annotated Bible (Oxford, ed. Michael Coogan), ISBN 9780190276089

Homer, *The Odyssey* (Norton, trans. Emily Wilson), ISBN 9780393356250

Sappho, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (Vintage, tr. Anne Carson), ISBN 9780375724510

Aeschylus, *The Oresteia* (Chicago, trans. Richard Lattimore), ISBN 9780226311470
 Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home from the Wars* (TCG), ISBN 9781559365000
 Plato, *Symposium* (Hackett, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Woodruff), ISBN 9780872200760
 Virgil, *The Aeneid* (Bantam, trans. Allen Mandelbaum), ISBN 9780553210415
 Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (Yale, trans. Sarah Ruden), ISBN 9780300198140

You can buy these texts at [Book Culture](#), the [Columbia University Bookstore](#), and many other places. Anyone can check them out of the [Butler Library](#), while those who identify as first-generation and/or low-income can use the [Columbia FLI Partnership Library](#) and the [Barnard FLI Partnership Library](#). If the above resources prove to be insufficient, and if for any reason you have trouble getting your hands on the texts, please speak to me or email core-curriculum@columbia.edu; we're happy to help!

Reading Journal: In eight of the semester's fifteen weeks, you will need to add an entry to the reading journal available in the "Discussions" section of CourseWorks. Due each Wednesday by 12:00PM, these entries are *informal* experiments graded *on a completion basis*: instead of scintillating sentences in perfect paragraphs, they should be experiments with big ideas and questions without easy answers. During our first week, we will talk through the instructions available on CourseWorks, as well as the five- to six-minute reading journal presentations each student will do at one point in the semester.

Informal Study Guides: To help all students prepare for the final exam—and to help those students who miss a session for a medical or family emergency—you will work in pairs to create and circulate an informal study guide about a single week's readings. Early in the semester, we will discuss the instructions and rubric available on CourseWorks and sign up for our specific weeks.

Formal Essays: While the reading journal, the study guide, and the final exam cover the breadth of our syllabus, a four- to five-page close-reading essay and a six- or seven-page comparative essay invite you to deal in more depth with a total of three texts. For the first essay, you will receive a prompt on September 18, submit a first draft on the 26, hold one-on-one professor conferences on the 27–29, and submit a final version on October 5; for the second essay, you will receive a prompt on October 11, circulate a workshop version between the 21 and the 28, proceed through the workshops between the 23 and November 1, and turn in the final version on the 4.

Final Exam: On December 15, you will take a timed exam that is cumulative—it covers the full sweep of the semester—as well as common—taken by all students enrolled in Lit Hum this fall. In preceding weeks, we will discuss in detail how the test will be formatted and how you should prepare.

Grading: All grades are non-negotiable. They will be calculated as follows:

Attendance and Participation	20%
Reading Journal (Including Presentation)	20%
First Essay	15%
Second Essay	20%
Study Guide	10%
Final Exam	15%

COURSE POLICIES

Formatting: Essays and study guides should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in a nice-looking twelve-point font (a few good choices: **Georgia**, **Cambria**, or **Times New Roman**; some bad

ones: *Mistral*, HERCULANUM, DESDEMONA). The first page should have a header in the upper left-hand corner that includes your full name, my full name, the course title, and the date. Each subsequent page should have a header in the upper right-hand corner with your last name and the page number. The file should be titled “Name_Assignment_Date,” i.e. “Nugent_Close-Reading Essay_090817.” The rest of the essay should be formatted in Chicago Style as defined in the most recent edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>).

Submissions: Essays should be uploaded under the “Assignments” section of CourseWorks, study guides should be uploaded under “Collaborations,” and reading journal entries should be pasted into “Discussions.” One of your essays is eligible for a forty-eight-hour extension, no questions asked. Except in cases of emergency, any other assignment that is late will be marked down one third of a grade per day (from an ‘A’ to an ‘A-,’ from an ‘A-’ to a ‘B+,’ and so on). If an assignment is more than forty-eight hours late, I may provide a grade but withhold more substantive feedback.

Academic Integrity: Among other things, this course will teach you how to draw on and develop scholarly conversations. In this context, appropriating someone else’s words or ideas without proper documentation is incredibly disrespectful, both to them and to yourself. Therefore, any instance of academic dishonesty (especially plagiarism, but also the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT) will be grounds for failing the assignment and, in all likelihood, the course. If you have any questions about citing sources, attributing ideas, or avoiding plagiarism, please get in touch. In addition, please see Columbia’s guides at (<https://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>).

Resources: Especially in the context COVID-19, we must all look out for one another, and during our time together, I stand ready to support you in whatever ways I am able. In addition, I encourage you to take advantage of Columbia’s many other resources. The Office of Disability Services (<https://health.columbia.edu/disability-services>) helps students secure the academic accommodations they need in the context of one or more learning differences, so reach out to them early in the semester if you could use their assistance. Columbia Health (<https://www.health.columbia.edu>) is staffed not only with doctors and nurses, but also professionals skilled in adjusting to college culture, coping with substance use disorders, and more; particularly important are Counseling and Psychological Services (<https://health.columbia.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services>), Student Services for Gender-Based and Sexual Misconduct (<https://studentconduct.columbia.edu/gbm>), and the Rape Crisis / Anti-Violence Support Center (<https://health.columbia.edu/content/sexual-violence-response>). On a more exclusively academic level, the Writing Center (<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/swriting-center>) offers individual writing consultations and other programs, while the Libraries (<https://library.columbia.edu/research.html>) have many ways of helping with your work. Academic Success Programs (<https://www.cc-seas.columbia.edu/asp>) connects these resources with individual and group-based activities to help you fulfill your academic potential. Finally, with specific regard to our seminar, the Literature Humanities Website (<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/lithum>) is top-notch, while the Core Scholars Program (<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/scholars>) offers students paid publication opportunities.