



Independent Learning

ENGLISH 283

*INTRODUCTION TO GLOBAL LITERATURES:
ROMANTIC THROUGH MODERN*

Syllabus Preview

Instructor: Nicholas Margaritis
Credits: 5 Quarter Credits
Lessons: 5 Assignments
Exams: No Exam
Format: Self-paced independent learning with instructor guidance
Note: This course fulfills the WWU General University Requirement for Humanities.
WWU English majors/minors may apply up to 10 credits earned through distance learning to their major/minor course of study.

The following pages are an excerpt from the full course syllabus. Western Washington University reserves the right to cancel courses and change instructors, course requirements and textbooks at any time. Check with the Independent Learning office regarding course availability.

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GOALS OF THE COURSE:

This course has three ambitions: (1) to acquaint you with five of the greatest novels written in Europe and Russia in the last two centuries (2) to make you, in the process, a finely trained independent reader and (3) to give you an understanding of the development of the novel from the early 19th century Romantic period to the experimental forms of the contemporary novel in the mid-20th century. You can achieve the second goal by reading each work with exquisite care and following my suggestions below on the art of reading, as well as by studying the accompanying questions I provide as a guide. I have tried to accomplish the third goal by organizing the reading chronologically and by selecting not only exemplary works from each period, but also works which function beautifully together in mutually illuminating ways. Still, my interest is not historical but literary, my criteria aesthetic: I am concerned with inspired works of individual genius, not with trendy issues, political, social, or otherwise. This is not a course which seeks to redress social inequity by tugging at your moral conscience or by introducing you to hitherto neglected voices. I simply wish to have your mind ignite against the spark of genius, to have you confront greatness and real inspiration. In this short span of life, which Dante called *the brief vigil of the senses*, which books is it a pity, a crime, a spiritual loss not to have read? Which books merit not only reading, but rereading? On this basis I have made my choices.

A work of literature is above all a crafted entity, a coherent design of the creative imagination, and, as such, the result of innumerable artistic choices and decisions that the artist has exercised in the laborious and loving process of its composition. As you read, I would like you to avoid the common fault of identifying with any of the characters in the fiction and identify instead with the author: put yourself in the artist's position and see how he has crafted the work. In time you will acquire the knack for cracking open any unfamiliar text, no matter how initially difficult, and making sense of it, unraveling its weave, tasting its delights, penetrating to the throbbing heart of its mystery. You should be able to understand the ticking of a work of art in the way that an experienced mechanic understands the viscera of a car or a skilled surgeon the mechanics of the human body he has laid open on the dissecting table. People assume that this sort of analysis kills the sensual pleasure of reading, but the very opposite is true. Not only my own lifelong experience with books, but the repeated experience of my students over the years, confirms that the better you understand a beautiful work the more you love it, and the more you love it the better you understand it.

Consequently, my accompanying study questions are mainly stylistic. Style is the enchanted key to the *terra incognita* of the individual work. Each work, being unique, makes its

own peculiar demands on the reader. You cannot apply the criteria of Tolstoy's 'Reality' to a novel by Kafka in an effort to understand the latter; the two authors see entirely different realities that have hardly any point of intersection. Music critics - a breed essentially no more intelligent than literary critics - once faulted the sonatas of Schubert for sounding nothing like Beethoven's; this was after Beethoven had accustomed the critics to the fact that his didn't sound like Mozart's. The only way to know how to read a given work is to allow that work to instruct you by its stylistic peculiarities. This requires that you let go of all preconceptions about what the work 'ought' to be doing, and see instead what it chooses to do, what it is repeatedly fond of doing, what practices, tricks, and tics the author indulges in. You begin to investigate these, to reflect on their purpose and function within the work, to puzzle out the logic of their interrelationship within the unified design. In the same way that you hold up your thumb before your eye, when viewing a painting, to block out a detail or a color so as to understand what that detail or color contributes to the painting, so you try to imagine the contributory significance in a literary work of a given scene or detail. All of this requires patience, close reading, and the benevolent predisposition to believe that what may seem initially baffling, if not infuriatingly pointless, ultimately does make sense and has an important purpose. The greatest obstacle to understanding is the hasty intolerance that chafes and frets because the book is not behaving according to the reader's expectations. Humility is the only 'open sesame' that will make these visionary worlds accessible.

A final word. Taste, being formed by one's experiences in life, varies. I don't expect that you will necessarily love every work here, but I do hope you will give each one your best effort and that, in the process, you will discover at least one work that will become meaningful to your life. That, in itself, is an accomplishment.

THE ART OF READING

1. Choose a time when you can read intensely with all your lights burning. You do yourself and the works a disservice if you read books at low voltage in order to 'unwind' at the end of a long day.
2. Keep a pencil or pen handy (high lighters are a vulgar eyesore and an impossible nuisance for fine annotation). Virgin pages are not sacred, and it is enormously helpful to mark them in various ways: drawing a vertical line down the margin, underlining important parts, circling occasional words. Most important of all, learn to cross-reference. Authors construct parallel scenes which acquire their full significance only when you compare them and reflect on their interrelationship. But since such scenes are often separated by hundreds of pages, do the following: if a scene on p. 230 is an echo of a parallel incident on, say, p. 50, write 'A50' on p. 230 and 'A230' in the margin of p. 50. This will give you a superb command of even the longest and densest texts.
3. Especially in the case of long works, keep a concise outline by writing, on a sheet of paper, a single line that gives the gist of the particular organizational unit, whether chapter or 'book,' or a dramatic scene. A phrase will suffice. I recommend it for all our texts, but this kind of outline is especially indispensable in the case of the plays.

4. Keep a list of themes and patterns that run through the work, together with corresponding page numbers.

5. Leave all preconceptions behind. Be open to whatever good art chooses to offer you and do not fret whenever you find that it is not doing what you expect it ought to be doing.

6. In the same way, dissociate your own values from those expressed by the work or by any single character in the work. Whether you share a character=s point of view or, more importantly, the author=s point of view, is irrelevant. Your first obligation is to understand the work. People and things outside oneself have the existential right to be whatever they are.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Please use ONLY the following translations; others are unreliable.

- Lermontov, Mihail, *A Hero of Our Time* (tr. Vladimir Nabokov. Ardis) ISBN 9780679413271
- Flaubert, Gustave, *Madame Bovary* (tr. Paul de Man. Norton Critical) ISBN 9780393096088
- Tolstoy, Leo, *Anna Karenina* (tr. Louise and Aylmer Maude. Norton Critical) ISBN 9780393966428
- Kafka, Franz, *The Metamorphosis* (tr. Stanley Corngold. Norton Critical) ISBN 9780393967975
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain, *Two Novels: Jealousy and In the Labyrinth* (tr. Richard Howard. Grove) ISBN 9780802151063

I don't expect you to do any outside critical reading; in fact, I discourage it. At this point you ought to draw your own unpolluted insights from the artesian purity of the texts themselves.

However, I do recommend that - AFTER reading the given text - you read certain of the accompanying prefaces or notes in it. I highly recommend the following:

- (a) in the Lermontov: Nabokov=s foreword and endnotes
- (b) in the Flaubert: Flaubert=s letters. Also, the critical essays by Lubbock, Auerbach, and Rousset.
- (c) in the Tolstoy: Tolstoy=s diary extracts are very worth reading.
- (d) in the Robbe-Grillet: Though undoubtedly helpful, the prefatory essays by Morisette, Barthes, and Minor ought to be read only AFTER you give *Jealousy* your best concerted go. Otherwise they will spoil the real delights of discovery.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

For this course you will write five papers, each of which will account for 20% of your course grade. The papers may treat any topic dealing with theme, style, structure, characterization, etc.

Students often feel uncertain when asked to choose their own topic for a paper. Don't be hesitant. Follow your instincts and trust yourself enough to create a pertinent, exciting subject. The individual questions I list by way of study guide for each text might prove helpful in suggesting a topic to you. Don't be overwhelmed by the questions; they are meant merely to guide you as you progress bit by bit through each text.

Papers are to be submitted **ONE AT A TIME**, as you complete each text.

GRADING SCALE:

A	Superlative	100-93	C	Average	76-73
A-	Excellent	92-90	C-	Weak	72-70
B+	Very Good	89-87	D+	Minimal	69-67
B	Good	86-83	D	Minimal	66-63
B-	Fairly Good	82-80	D-	Minimal	62-60
C+	Fair	79-77	F	Failure	59 or below

I give Fs only in exceptional circumstances, e.g., failure to submit an assignment, failure to conform to format, plagiarism, etc.

I will give you both a letter and number grade for each paper and then average these out for the course grade. If the latter hinges on a few feeble points, I might, if circumstances warrant it - e.g., your papers show steady improvement or a consistent level marred by a unique instance of poorer work - award you a course grade higher than the strict numerical average.

Papers are to be typed or printed on word processor with suitable margins so that I may write comments. Please attach a blank final page (unless faxing) so that I may write a brief concluding evaluation together with the grade.

The quality of a paper is determined by everything: the quality of its insights, the coherence of its organization, the clarity of its language, even the cleanness of grammar and printing. An insightful but poorly organized or badly written paper will suffer on that account just as will a paper which is grammatically flawless but whose ideas are weak, unsupported by evidence, or insufficiently developed. Mechanics count: you ought to submit professional work, free of typos, coffee stains, smudges. Earlier faults should not persist in later papers; if they do, I will make appropriate recommendations.

PAPER FORMAT: Please make sure that your papers conform to the following format:

1. 750-1000 words (about 3-4 pages)
2. Typewritten or printed on computer, and double-spaced
3. Margins (1-1.5 inches) on all sides
4. Cover Page: centered title (all papers must have a title), name, course number, date
5. Your last name at top left or top right of each page (after the first page), followed by a dash (or colon) and page number: for instance, Schmitz - 2, or Schmaltz:3
6. Staple pages together (unless faxing)
7. Include blank last page (unless faxing) for my general evaluation and grade
8. Quotations: Though helpful and sometimes essential, use them sparingly; don't overdo the quoting so that your paper ends up looking like a skeleton stringing together bits of quoted matter. Use them only for strategic effect (to highlight an important or difficult point, to illustrate a subtle matter of style). Two types of quotation:
 - (a) short (from a phrase to 3-4 lines): Incorporate such quotations smoothly into your own sentence with some kind of subtle transition.
 - (b) long (more than 4 lines): Detach the passage from your own text by double-spacing twice, both at the beginning and at the end of the passage. Indent the whole passage about ten spaces. Normally when submitting articles to journals, such passages are also double-spaced, but since you are writing short essays here, where space counts, I will have you single-space the quoted passage.

SUBSTANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER

1. Limit your topic. It is far preferable to do something manageable in detail than to attempt too much and end up talking in vague and uninteresting generalities.

2. Provide a thesis as soon as possible, in your introductory paragraph. Don't squander time and space on rhetorical nonsense: "Tolstoy was a famous Russian writer of the nineteenth century . . ." We know this. Get to the point.

A thesis is not the same as a subject or a topic: it is considerably more specific. In this paper I will talk about the character of Emma Bovary is not a thesis; it is a topic, and as a statement it is worthless because it doesn't get you very far. The reader's immediate (and understandable) question is: "So? What are you going to tell me about her?" Your answer to this question - in a complete grammatical sentence with subject and verb - will be your thesis sentence. You could say innumerable things about her. Choose something specific and

manageable, and write an appropriate introductory sentence that will provide direction to your paper. Try to avoid mechanical formulas: AI intend to discuss. . . . Be more fluently natural.

As a general hint, always avoid threadbare statements, such as, AThe character of Pechorin is interesting.@ So what? Where do you go from here? Your thesis will tell your reader not what your subject is, but, rather, what particular thing you wish to say about that subject. Avoid thesis sentences that are based on Ais@ or Aare@ + a general complement, such as Agood,@ Ainteresting,@ Aimportant,@ and so on. Notice in the following non-literary examples how weak the first sentence is and how much better and more helpfully specific the second and third versions are:

- (a) The rising cost of higher education is a serious problem. (weak)
 - (b) The rising cost of higher education restricts the kind of student who can go to college. (better)
 - (c) The rising cost of higher education is making it difficult for private colleges to remain open. (also good; and you notice how a single topic can provide many theses)
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- (a) The neighborhood I grew up in was a good place to live. (weak)
 - (b) Although the neighborhood I grew up in was crowded and noisy, it was always friendly and secure. (good)
 - (c) Although the neighborhood I grew up in was open and quiet, it was sometimes lonely. (also good)

The same guidelines apply to literary topics:

- (a) Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* is concerned with relationships between men and women.
- (b) Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* contrasts, in its double-plot, the realistically successful marriage of Lyovin and Kitty, on the one hand, and, on the other, the tragically doomed extramarital union of Anna and Vronksy.
- (c) The deterioration of Anna's relationship with Vronsky is a compassionate, though unflinching, portrayal of the tragedy that follows the breakdown of genuine communication between lovers.

3. Write concisely. Do not squander words, but say things effectively, with care and precision.

4. Development. Make sure your paper is organized in lucid paragraphs and that your argument progresses, that you don't merely repeat yourself. Each point you make should advance your argument by following clearly from the previous point and leading just as clearly to the next.

5. References. Whenever you make important statements of inferences or conclusions, support them with evidence from the story itself. Do this by making deft references to an important scene, or detail, or phrase. DO NOT SUMMARIZE THE STORY. There is no need to tell the reader point by point Awhat happens@: assume this knowledge in your reader. If you

wish to refer to a detail in the conversation between Dolly and Anna in Part 6, you don't have to say: "Dolly is staying on Lyovin's estate. She has long promised to visit Anna. Now she finds the chance to go to Vronsky's country estate. At the end of her first day there, she has a private conversation with Anna, who speaks to her confidentially. . . ." All you need to say is: "In her confidential talk with Dolly in Part 6, Anna explains that. . . ."

A NOTE ON NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW:

I use this term in my discussions below, and it is important to know what it means. Narrative point of view is the traditional name given to the manner in which the story is told by a certain type of teller. The events described are filtered through the perception, and recorded by the voice, of a narrator. Thus, "point of view" means not "opinion," but the technical angle of vision from which events are observed; "narrative," because a story is being told. There are four major types of narrative point of view:

(1) First-person. The narrator speaks from a personal, and therefore very limited, angle of vision, using the pronouns "I," "my," "mine." The narrator here may be either of two types: (a) a character in the story itself, or (b) a person who has no direct connection to the events narrated, but is telling a story secondhand from something previously narrated to him. In either case, you will notice that this kind of narrator is severely shackled. He cannot enter infallibly into the various characters' minds, but is obliged to make inferences and hypotheses, unless retrospective knowledge has provided him with certain information. In this respect, the narrator is not entirely "reliable." In addition, however, he might be unreliable because of some peculiar tic or prejudice, some idiosyncratic bias, or grudge, or predisposition that causes him to color and misrepresent the events he relates. The author can give the narrator any personality he wants: he can choose to make him brilliant or stupid or naively kind or malignantly evil. There are many tantalizing possibilities for irony here, for games with the reader. It is precisely this kind of perceptual irony that the author wishes to exploit. And there are also certain not negligible advantages in the direct immediacy in which a first-person narrator stands to events.

(2) Third-person limited. The narrator stands alongside, or behind the shoulder of, one main character, and filters events mainly through the eyes of that character. We do not necessarily share the attitude or outlook of this character. We often have the privilege of seeing and understanding more than his limitations allow him to understand. The character is not necessarily always present in every scene of the story.

(3) Omniscient. The narrator is like God: he can enter, at will, the minds and thoughts of any character in any situation and give us the infallible truth, often knowing and perceiving what even the character in question does not fully perceive or wish to admit to himself or herself. Tolstoy even enters the mind of Laska the dog.

(4) Dramatic. There is no "narrator," as such; the story is told (as is a play) through gesture and dialogue.

NB: One crucial warning: never confuse author and narrator. The author of our first novel is Lermontov, a real historical personality; the narrator of most of it is Pechorin, a fictional persona, who might or might not bear any kind of resemblance to his creator.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR:

Nicholas Margaritis received a B.A. in International Relations and European History and Diplomacy from the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University (1976). He received an M.A. (1977) and Ph.D. (1982) in Medieval English Literature from the University of Virginia. From 1982 until 1987 he taught literature at the American College of Greece in Athens, and then briefly directed programs at the British-Hellenic Language Institute in Athens. Since the fall of 1989 he has taught at WWU in the English Department, and also, since 1991, in the University Honors Program. His areas of special interest are ancient Greek and Roman literature, medieval English, French, and Italian literature, Shakespeare, 19th and 20th century French and Russian literature. He has written articles on, and translations of, the modern Greek poetry of C.P. Cavafy. He is the author of two plays and is currently at work on several novels.