

Love in Western Civilization (a.k.a. the Love course)

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1. The Course

Description

In this course we will discuss some of the most important accounts of love given in Western civilization – Plato’s *Symposium*, the *Letters* of Abelard and Heloise, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* – and several equally compelling works written more recently: a selection of short stories by George Saunders and Alice Munro. If there is enough time and interest, we will also consider students’ favourite contemporary poems and song lyrics.

Required course texts and editions

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (Bantam)
George Saunders, “Jon,” *New Yorker* (27 Jan. 2003)
Abelard and Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (Penguin)
Plato, *The Symposium*, in *The Dialogues of Plato* (Bantam)
Alice Munro, “Chance,” “Soon,” and “Silence,” in *Runaway* (Vintage)

The course texts are available at what used to be the bookstore but is now called "The Campus Store." All course materials will be placed on reserve at the library, for the time being still known as "The Library," or will be made available through other means if necessary. I’m aware that the course texts are available on Kindle. A Kindle edition might be fine for browsing purposes. My advice, however, is to resist the temptation to read everything on screen. Paperbacks are just better than screens because you can read without all those distractions and mark the books up in an active, more fully engaged way. In any case, the paperback pagination will be required for class assignments.

Course requirements and evaluation (summary; details below)

First essay
- outline (due: Feb. 8) 5%
- finished essay (due: Mar. 1) 30%
Second essay
- outline (due: Mar. 15) 5%
- finished essay (due: Apr. 5) 30%
Final examination (3 hr) 30%

Note: This syllabus is subject to change with due notice given to in-course students.

Class / reading schedule

1. Jan. 4 Introduction to the course
2. Jan. 11 *Romeo and Juliet* (introduction)
3. Jan. 18 *Romeo and Juliet* (continued)
4. Jan. 25 *Romeo and Juliet* (conclusion)
5. Feb. 1 Saunders, "Jon" <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/01/27/jon>
6. Feb. 8 Abelard's *Historia calamitatum*
* First essay outline due
7. Feb. 15 Screening: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (C. Kaufman, M. Gondry)
= Feb. 22 Reading week; no class
8. Mar. 1 Heloise and Abelard, "The Personal Letters" (numbers 2-5)
* First essay due
9. Mar. 8 *Symposium* (introduction)
10. Mar. 15 *Symposium* (continued)
* Second essay outline due
11. Mar. 22 *Symposium* (conclusion)
12. Mar. 29 *Runaway*, "Chance" and "Soon"
13. Apr. 5 *Runaway*, "Silence"
* Second essay due

2. The Expectations, a.k.a. Classroom Protocols

Students are expected to have read the assigned texts and made any requisite notes before coming to class. Books and notes should be brought to class. Marking up the course books is strongly encouraged, but not mandatory. Please note that marking up a text is more than highlighting (or underlining) passages. It involves writing down one's initial reactions and reflections. And this is best done by means of what is still the fastest, most efficient, and most transparent medium available for capturing thought: pencil (or pen) on paper.

Attendance is not optional. The course does *not* appear on "Avenue to Learn" or any other website. It is *not* a "distance learning" course. Attendance is necessary; however, attendance is not sufficient. Students are expected to be prepared to participate in class discussions of the assigned readings.

The course is not intended to provide students with information or data and test their memories; nor does the course instruct students in information literacy, digital literacy, or any other ersatz literacy. A basis of information will be established as necessary and assumed in our analyses and interpretations of the course texts. The primary pedagogical purpose of the course is to cultivate reflective judgment by encouraging students to read, investigate, question, and discuss intrinsically meaningful and challenging texts.

Books and notes are a classroom requirement. Laptops and other electronic devices are not. Electronic devices might be necessary to read or view a few of the required texts, and for writing and printing assignments, of course; but they are generally not necessary in the classroom. There is no across-the-board ban on laptops; however, they must be used reasonably. There is no etiquette of electronic devices that supersedes everyday etiquette; and the classroom is a learning environment, not a shopping mall, food court, movie theatre, or a room in one's home. The common-sense rule to follow concerning the use of any such equipment is that it must neither disrupt other students nor disrupt the pedagogical circumstances of the classroom. A specific rule, as an example: no phones in class, neither for calls nor for texting. Please turn them off before you enter the lecture hall. Another rule: no recording of lectures is allowed, no matter what the equipment involved, unless there are compelling and approved reasons.

Students interested in pedagogical arguments on the detrimental effects of a wireless classroom might begin by reading an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: Michael Bugeja, "Distractions in the Wireless Classroom," available at <chronicle.com/article/Distractions-in-the-Wireles/46664/>. There is also Clay Shirky's article, "Why I Just Asked My Students To Put Their Laptops Away," available at <medium.com/@cshirky/why-i-just-asked-my-students-to-put-their-laptops-away-7f5f7c50f368>. Other such titles are available on request. A Google search will turn up quite a few books and articles as well.

3. The Assignments

The essays – general requirements

Use only the course text to write your essays. In other words, do **not** consult any secondary sources, encyclopedias (should you happen to find one), or the internet. I repeat: **do not use the internet**. Any evidence of internet use in your essay will be penalized. As well, your essay must be proof-read the old-fashioned way for spelling and grammatical errors and clarity of style: relying on spelling and grammar functions of your software will not be enough.

The essay outlines and TA meetings

As part of the process of working up an essay, each student is required to submit an outline specifying a particular topic and the ways it will be addressed. An essay outline should be between one and two typed pages of prose; no point-form outlines, please. Each student must also arrange to meet with his or her teaching assistant to discuss a submitted outline in sufficient time to incorporate the results of this discussion into the finished version of the essay. The meeting itself is not graded; however, if a student fails to arrange or attend a meeting, that student's finished essay will be worth 25% (instead of 30%) of the overall course grade.

First essay

The essay will be: either (1) an analysis of some relevant aspect of the presentation of the nature of love in *Romeo and Juliet*; or (2) a comparative analysis of the presentation of the nature of love in *Romeo and Juliet* and George Saunders' "Jon." Each student is required to select his or her own topic, to formulate an argument, and to demonstrate it with appropriate textual exegesis,

presenting everything as elegantly as possible. The finished essay will be approximately 6 pages (not counting title page and any apparatus) – in other words, no less than 5 and no more than 7 pages – standard essay format (double-spacing, normal margins, 12-point font). It is due before the beginning of class on March 1st – and preferably sooner. The essay outline is due before class on February 8th, or sooner; and the meetings with the TA will be arranged for the following week.

Second essay

The essay will be: either (1) an analysis of some relevant aspect of the presentation of the nature of love in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*; or (2) a comparative analysis of the presentation of the nature of love in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* and Kaufman and Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Each student is required to select his or her own topic, to formulate an argument, and to demonstrate it with appropriate textual exegesis, presenting everything as elegantly as possible. The finished essay will be approximately 6 pages (not counting title page and any apparatus) – in other words, no less than 5 and no more than 7 pages – standard essay format (double-spacing, normal margins, 12-point font). It is due before the beginning of class on April 8th – and preferably sooner. The essay outline is due before class on March 15th, or sooner; and the meetings with the TA will be arranged for the following week.

Late penalties

Late assignments will be penalized a percentage of the grade a day, and weekends will count as two days. The penalty for outlines is 15% per day; and for the essays, 10% per day. Late penalties will not be waived unless your Faculty or Program Office sends notice that it has received documentation supporting your reasons for being unable to submit the work.

Final exam

The date, time, and location of the three-hour final exam will be set by the Registrar's Office. It will cover Plato's *Symposium* and Alice Munro's short stories. The exam will consist of essay questions requiring textual interpretation and analysis. In other words, there will be **no** multiple-choice questions on the exam. Further specifics of the form and content of the exam will be discussed in the last class, with student suggestions welcome.

Optional class presentation

For a few brave souls, another sort of assignment is possible. With the prior approval of the professor, of course, a student can volunteer to play a song or recite a poem during class, give an interpretation (no more than 5 minutes of lecturing), and lead a short class discussion afterwards. Only one such presentation per week will be possible, but at any time in the term. For any student who takes this option, the class presentation will be worth 10% of the overall course grade and the remaining assignments will be worth 90%.

4. The Word

Spelling counts

Written work will be marked on grammar, clarity of writing, organization and presentation as well as on the quality of its content and analysis. Students who wish to improve their writing skills might visit McMaster's "Student Success Centre" to ask about its "Academic Support" services. There are no shortcuts, however. The best way to learn to write well is to write a great deal, and more importantly, to read a great deal – "indiscriminately and all the time with [your] eyes hanging out" (Dylan Thomas).

Words and power

In everything they write, students should follow five fundamental rules recommended by George Orwell in "Politics and the English Language:"

1. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
2. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
3. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
4. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
5. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

41 other rules for writing good stuff

1. Always check your spelling.
2. Proof-read to see if you any words out.
3. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
4. Verb tense, today and always, was important.
5. Prepositions are terms one should not end sentences with.
6. Steer clear of incorrect forms of verbs that have snuck in the language.
7. The right way to use "is" is, is that it shouldn't be used this way.
8. Muster the courage to boldly refuse to incorrectly split an infinitive.
9. Don't use contractions in formal writing.
10. Use the apostrophe in it's proper place and omit it when its not needed.
11. Verb's and simple plural's don't require them.
12. Don't use no double negatives.
13. The adverb usually follows the verb.
14. Statements, like, aren't similes or guesses?
15. Write all adverbial forms correct.
16. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of ten words or more, to their antecedents.
17. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
18. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
19. No sentence fragments.
20. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.

21. If you write well and I write well, how is it that you and me don't? If this is a lesson to you, and to me as well, then why isn't it a lesson to you and I?
22. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!!
23. "It is best not to use too many 'quotation 'marks,'" he said.
24. Avoid commas, that are not necessary, and un-necessary hyphens, too.
25. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn't.
26. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
27. Don't string too many prepositional phrases together unless you are one of those walking through the valley of the shadow of death.
28. If you reread your work, you will find on rereading that a great deal of repetition and redundancy can be avoided by rereading and editing.
29. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
30. A writer must not shift your point of view in mid-sentence.
31. It's really unfair, but things such as human beings, which are animate, get to begin their subordinate clauses differently than other things such as rocks, who are not.
32. Eschew dialect, irregardless.
33. Also, avoid awkward and affected alliteration.
34. Of course, it is incumbent upon everyone to avoid archaisms.
35. Always pick on the correct idiom.
36. Take the bull by the hand and say no to mixed metaphors.
37. Avoid trendy elocutions that sound flaky.
38. From the dawn of time, we have been commanded not to utter sweeping generalizations.
39. Resist hyperbole, even if you have to remind yourself a thousand times.
40. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.
41. First, lists are not arguments; and thirdly, they are often numbered inconsistently.
42. Great green dragons might exist, but green great dragons certainly don't because the mysterious rule about adjectival order in English is opinion-size-age-shape-colour-origin-material-purpose before the noun. If you don't believe me, check out my lovely little old rectangular green French silver whittling knife.

5. The Law

Department specific

Staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not date-stamp or receive papers and other assignments. Students must submit their assignments in class or to the TAs or the professor during their office hours.

University Mandated Statements

1. Statement on Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent

means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity> The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: (1) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained; (2) Improper collaboration in group work; (3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

2. Note on Changes in the Course

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her or his McMaster email and the course websites (if any) weekly during the term and to note any changes.

3. Social Sciences Faculty E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

4. The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) and its Proper Use

The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/>) is a self-reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report MEDICAL absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work (that is less than 25% of the course grade). Please note: This tool cannot be used during any final examination period. You may submit a maximum of ONE Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation. If you are absent for more than 3 days, exceed one request per term, are absent for a reason other than medical, or have missed work worth 25% or more of the final grade, you MUST visit your Faculty Office. You may be required to provide supporting documentation. This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence. Also please note: If you find it necessary to submit the MSAF during this course you must arrange for an extension for any work missed. I do not redistribute grades for missed assignments.