

I am providing a discursive syllabus partly as an experiment in the design of a syllabus and partly because the subject matter lends itself to a discursive syllabus.

Particularly marked about our course is the holiday in the second week (**September 1**); we meet once in August, and then we do not meet again for two weeks, until **September 8**. To take this hiatus into account and to make best use of our time, I expect you during this period to read in their entirety both Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, and Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. If you have not hitherto read Virgil's *Aeneid*, you might want, if you can afford the time, at least to begin it during this period also.

When we reconvene on **September 8**, I will basically oversee the entire class as a continuation of the second half of the first, introductory class, on **August 25**. I will make several interrelated presentations about the place of Lucretius and his astonishing epic in the world of classical literature and in the world of 21st-century interpretation of classical literature. In effect, then, your only task for what amounts to nearly 3 weeks, leading up to **September 15**, is to read these works that are central to the focus of the course.

In the second half of **September (September 15 & September 22)**, we will discuss together a number of the central issues raised by the two classical epics: sexuality (in particular, incest), violence, art, and "evolution," as Lucretius is understood to have brilliantly anticipated the theory of evolution, and as Ovid's epic might easily accommodate a theory of evolution, especially in the complex and brilliant relationships between Books 1 and 15 of his epic.

By **September 29**, if not sooner, we will begin incorporating Shakespeare's works into our discussions. We will work initially with the play *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, and the famous narrative poem, *Venus and Adonis*, often referred to as "Elizabethan soft porn." We will closely examine the representation of human sexuality, incest especially, in these two works, and we will begin to develop our sense of just how radical Shakespeare is in his explorations of the nature of sexuality as well as the sexuality of nature, "great creating nature," as he calls her in the *Winter's Tale* — also, as we will see, his version of Lucretius's Venus.

We will then turn to the problematic of marriage. We will consider several of the great comedies, the so-called "festive" comedies, in order to challenge the notion that a comedy is a comedy because it ends in marriage. We will pay careful attention to *Twelfth Night*, the last comedy that Shakespeare wrote, on **October 13**, perhaps introducing it on **October 6**, and we will consider in tandem with it *All's Well That Ends Well*. By the end of October at the latest (**October 27**), if not preliminarily on **October 20**, we will be discussing *Much Ado About Nothing*, in preparation for turning to *Othello*, since the two plays share much the same plot, especially the falsely accused wife (or bride), and we will examine in these two plays particularly Shakespeare's relentless, unflinching view of the terror of sexuality that always exceeds any human fiction, such as marriage, that tries to control it — as Lacan would have it, "Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel." By this time, we will have a very good grasp of how Shakespeare positions Lucretian understandings of nature — especially the atom and the swerve — in his later plays.

We will then turn to three of the most searching and searing examinations of the human sexual condition ever produced by the human imagination: *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and, above all, *King Lear*, the tragedy (1610). These three plays will dominate the final meetings of the course (**November 3, 10, 17, 24, December 1**). The only one that will be added to them, to contribute to our summary discussion on **December 8**, the final class, will be *The Winter's Tale*, where we will closely examine Leontes and his brutal treatment of his wife Hermione.

As we proceed through the term, I will assume responsibility for updating you in advance as to what play and/or poem we will address next in sequence. I will also as we convene weekly talk about options for essays that you are required to write for the course, the first one due **October 13**, and the last one at the end of the term (**December 8**). Discussion of essay topics and essay format will flow naturally from several of the discussions we undertake from our second meeting forward. The essays may be either extended explications of interrelated passages or fully developed research papers, depending on your preferences and your interests. I will be available to recommend topics and to help you develop your topic once you have chosen it.

In a subsequent e-mail, I will talk about the Reserve List I plan to place in Library West, and I will also provide a very brief overview of several recent studies we will need to remain aware of throughout the course. As you will see, I am basically an old-style comparativist (Latin & ...) with strong investments even so in psychoanalysis and feminism; this will be the obvious bias in our reading, to which you will need to make your own responses.

Please do not hesitate to email me if you have any questions about the syllabus or if you foresee problems for yourself in working according to a discursive syllabus such as this.