Tradition & Individual Talent: Connections, Coincidence, Copycat, or Genius?
HON 490PP – 3 credit hours
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General Description:
We examine the phenomenon of how is art made from other art. What is the relationship between Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring and Eliot’s Waste Land? Between Shakespeare’s Tempest and Ingalls’s Mrs. Caliban? Between Greene’s Power and the Glory and the New Testament? Between Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, Cunningham’s The Hours, and Daldry’s film version? Between the paintings of Degas and Wagner’s Dancing for Degas? Is the relationship grounded in connections, coincidence, copycat methods, or genius?

We study novels, paintings, music, dance, film, and other media to see if we agree with Eliot’s pronouncement that “individual talent” is dependent on “tradition.”

Texts:

Additional readings include individual short works by a variety of writers. A quick reference site for a summary of Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophical perspectives on art is posted at http://www.rowan.edu/open/philosop/clowney/Aesthetics/philos_artists_onart/onart_frames.htm.


William Wordsworth’s “Preface” to Lyrical Ballads is on reserve or online at https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/essays/detail/69383 or http://www.bartleby.com/39/36.html.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s excerpt from Lectures on Shakespeare is in handout form, or you can find a summary online at http://web.uvic.ca/~mbest1/ISShakespeare/RJCourse/RJreadings.html.

We will also view visual art images, observe and learn about dance performances, listen to several musical compositions, have interactive conversations, deliver oral reports, and reflect individually and collaboratively in online writing and formal essays on questions of aesthetics and the origins of artistic achievement and influence.

**Syllabus:**

Week 1 – Introduction.


Week 5 – Greene, *Power & Glory*.


Week 7 – Speaker (art of Edgar Degas, Impressionists, and tradition vs. innovation). Wagner, *Dancing for Degas*.

Week 8 – Wagner, *Dancing for Degas*. Speaker (dance history & demonstration).

Week 9 – Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Week 10 – Woolf, excerpts from *A Room of One’s Own*. Speaker (Woolf & her work).

Week 11 – Cunningham, *The Hours*.


Week 13 – Paper preview oral presentations. Paper 2 due.


Week 16 – Final Project. Collaborative presentations. Emphasis on effective oral delivery enhanced by quality of research-based and creative application of course ideas and texts. The point is to demonstrate ability to comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate knowledge gained in course. In other words, the project should demonstrate your critical thinking skills and creativity, essential features of honors learning.

**Grading Policy:**
Grade distribution is as follows:

1. Consistency, extent, and quality of contributions to online discussion forum, determined by one grade which is the average typically of four periodic checks of reflective writing and two grades for overall performance = 30%.
2. Paper 1 = 20%.
3. Annotated bibliography = 10%.
4. Paper 2 = 20%.
5. Critical reflection essay = 10%
6. Final project = 10%.

Late written assignments receive one letter grade less per day. One of the keys to success in this honors course is to remain consistently and substantively engaged in the remarkable learning that occurs especially in virtual discussions where we cultivate ideas and sharpen critical thinking and writing skills. *Aren’t such goals part of the genuine aim of honors?*

Be aware that in the interest of building a community of learners, we will occasionally engage in oral and written assignments that are not individually graded but that add richness and value to our course. For instance, students conduct research on various texts, share reports, and compile helpful bibliographies of book, periodical, and web resources to share collaboratively with the class to enhance everyone’s learning. Let’s accept such charges enthusiastically, a key to the authentic honors experience.

The content of the course and my own teaching philosophy and style result in challenging, honest, and open conversations about literary, philosophical, religious, and personal themes and issues. As a teacher, I have always prided myself on being completely straight with students and never retreating from difficult topics such as religious beliefs, sexuality, gender, race, and other human realities that press against our comfortable convictions. The study of literature and other arts is a field that naturally engages us in transformative reflection that often leads to powerful learning. Such intellectual growth and personal development do not come easily, and one value of this course is to stretch students’ liberal-arts learning and expand their understanding of the complexities of the human imagination.
We must remember that learning involves risk. I invite students to take risks in pondering our materials, in reflecting on sensitive but meaningful issues, in remaining open to new ideas and new language, in becoming an honors learner! I also invite students to accept my mixture of formality and informality in teaching, my genuine desire to be a co-learner with them, a guide and mentor, a caring collaborator who also begs their best work as an honors student.

I desire students’ respect, courtesy, friendship, and forgiveness when I push toward academic excellence. I also expect them to be on time, mindful of the learning and dignity of their peers, and willing to contribute meaningfully and respectfully to the discourse in and out of class. Students are asked please not to leave class casually and to turn off cell phones and other distracting devices that interfere with learning unless used for learning. In return, I promise my best as a teacher.

Since this is a small, higher-level honors seminar, I assume that students will be responsible and thorough, conducting themselves as exemplary scholars. Here are some of the qualities that will make our honors seminar special:

- Small, optimum group of 8-12 students.
- Deliberative, discussion-based pedagogy.
- Independent, self-directed learning.
- Shared research through papers, projects, reports.
- Opportunity for reflection and critical inquiry.
- Collaborative learning: shared authority of knowledge.
- Writing intensive.

Finally, our schedule may change, depending upon discovered needs, sudden opportunities, new directions, and the mischief of fate! Midterm assessments, for example, will be valuable in helping us fine-tune our goals. An important dimension of engaged teaching and learning is the ability to remain open to change and risk in order to take advantage of spontaneous teaching and learning moments, especially in an exciting, advanced honors seminar. Advice: Be flexible . . . be open to surprises . . . have fun!

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