

English 2305-16307: World Epic

Dr. R-J Frontain

Fall 2021

Office: Irby 317G

TTh 9.25-10.40 am

Office Hours: TTh 8.30-9.25 am

Irby 201

TTh 12.15-1.30 pm

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Epic poems are essential to a culture's development, providing a foundational set of actions and beliefs that establish that particular culture's identity. Ironically, as technology advances from orality to writing and then to print, that shared identity splinters, causing those originary actions and beliefs to decline into clichés, and the epic to lose its vitality and disappear from the culture except as an object of parody. This class will look at five foundational epics to consider how literature meets the religious needs of pre-modern societies, no matter on what continent or in what century. In addition, we will try loosely to identify the tipping point at which the epic becomes absorbed, and then replaced, by other forms, including parody.

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## TEXTS

*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. and ed. Benjamin R. Foster, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Norton, 2019)

Fa-Digi Sisoko, *The Epic of Son-Jara*, trans. and ed. John William Johnson (Indiana UP, 1992)

Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (Viking, 1990; Penguin, 1998)

*The Song of Roland*, trans. Simon Gaunt and Karen Pratt (Oxford UP, 2016)

Valmiki, *The Ramayana*, trans. Linda Egenes and Kumuda Reggy (TarcherPerigee, 2016)

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## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

R 19 Aug. From Orality to Writing to Print: The Transformation of the Hero

T 24 Aug. *Gilgamesh*, Tablets I-IV (pp. 1-36)

R 26 Aug. " Tablets V-VIII (pp. 37-68)

T 31 Aug. " Tablets IX-XI (pp. 69-100)

R 2 Sept. Conclude discussion of the nature of the hero

T 7 Sept. Fa-Digi Sisoko, *The Epic of Son-Jara*, lines 1-946

R 9 Sept. " lines 947-1669

T 14 Sept. " lines 1670-3085

R 16 Sept. Conclude discussion of the shift from oral to written transmission

T 21 Sept. EXAMINATION I

R 23 Sept. Homer, *The Iliad*, Books 1-3

T 28 Sept. " Books 4-6

R 30 Sept. " Books 7-9

T 5 Oct. " Books 10-12

R 7 Oct. " Books 13-15

T 12 Oct. " Books 16-18

R 14 Oct. " Books 19-21

T 19 Oct. " Books 22-24

FALL BREAK

T 26 Oct. *The Song of Roland*, stanzas 1-100

R 28 Oct. " stanzas 101-200

T 2 Nov. " stanzas 201-298

R 4 Nov. Conclude discussion of the religious elements of epic poetry

T 9 Nov. EXAMINATION II

R 11 Nov. Valmiki, *The Ramayana*, Prologue and Part I (pp. 1-48)

T 16 Nov. " Parts 2-3 (pp. 49-181)

R 18 Nov. " Part 4 (pp. 183-222)

T 23 Nov. " Part 5 (pp. 223-266)

THANKSGIVING RECESS

T 30 Nov. " Parts 6 (pp. 267-356)

R 2 Dec. " Epilogue (pp. 357-367)

Compute quiz average; review for final examination

T 7 Dec. FINAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

Remember to bring all five textbooks to use on essay portion of exam

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## OBSERVATIONS

1. The single most important service that a university education can provide is to foster in students the determination to take responsibility for themselves and their world- -whether in such small ways as arriving on time to class and writing legibly on in-class quizzes and exams, or in such major ways as expanding one's global consciousness and further developing one's critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. The disruption to educational processes caused by the coronavirus pandemic the past two years has made it all the more essential that students and instructors commit to maintaining as high a degree of personal responsibility as possible. When the local infection rate is so dangerously high that the university issues a Code Red, students must wear face masks that cover both the nose and mouth when inside a campus building. And every student would do well to make friends with another student with whom you may share notes should one of you fall ill or need to quarantine. The urgency of the moment makes it imperative that no one slacken off, but everyone work with increased determination and commitment.
2. UCA requires every student to have at his/her disposal the technology which will allow him/her to shift to a Zoom platform should circumstances require the suspension of in-person class meetings. Should (as happened midway through the spring 2020 term) the university be forced to suspend on-campus operations, the instructor will put out an email containing a link to future Zoom meetings during our normally scheduled class times. Every student should keep his/her video on but the sound off unless asking a question or taking part in discussion. Arrange for the care of animals and small children in advance of the start of our Zoom session in order to ensure that they do not interrupt the class.
3. Students forced to quarantine should provide the instructor with a notice to that effect from Student Health Services and arrange to secure notes from a reliable classmate. To make up for possible quizzes missed on the days that one is in quarantine, the student may submit *before the start of that day's class* a 500-word essay on the subject of that day's reading assignment. *Essays should be cut and pasted into the body of the email rather than attached to it.*
4. The final grade for this class will be computed as follows: Examination I (20%), Examination II (25%), Final Comprehensive Examination (30%) and Quiz Average (25%). Exam scores are weighted more heavily as the semester moves along in order to allow students to become accustomed to course expectations. Clearly, because the quiz average will make up such a heavy part of the final grade, students should keep up with the required readings and arrive on time for class. When late, be respectful of others and wait to enter the room until everyone has finished writing.

## Course Guidelines (rev. 1/20)

1. Spirit of education. Addressing a convention of high school teachers, James Baldwin observed that “the purpose of education is, finally, to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions. . . . to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity.” There are only two ways for a student to approach a class: actively, by working with as much energy and commitment as possible, taking maximum advantage of the opportunities presented by the material and instructor; or passively, by suffering through a class, hoping that a safety net of some kind (sloped grades, last minute extra credit assignments, etc.) will save one from disgrace.

Sustained and intense engagement with the course materials and ideas is the single-most important prerequisite to an A. Decide from the outset of the term either to take the course seriously or to drop it. Keep up with the reading, and come prepared to discuss the ideas that engage or trouble you. Never dismiss an author’s ideas out of hand, but come prepared with evidence from the text to support any objections you may have. Take notes, mark significant passages in your textbook for easy reference, and make certain that you understand clearly the major ideas of the course. In a literature class, where the first act of interpretation is to read the text aloud, everyone will be called upon to read aloud in the course of the semester: a student uncomfortable doing so must find a way to negotiate this hurdle.

Take an active role in your education, not a passive one. Passive students not only rarely succeed, but invariably are unhappy in the process.

2. Decorum. The Hindu concept of *dharma* teaches that the world runs smoothly and harmoniously if everyone does what he or she is supposed to be doing at that moment; social chaos and individual anxiety are the results of one person’s putting his or her needs ahead of the group’s. Follow the example of Rama, the prince of righteousness, and put the success of the course and consideration of your classmates before your own convenience—doing nothing that distracts the instructor or disrupts a colleague’s concentration.

\* You only have time for what you put first. Do not “multi-task” in the classroom. Turn off all beepers, cell phones, palm pilots, Blackberries, i-pods, watch alarms, etc. *before* entering the room. *Should one go off during class, distracting others-- or should a student be observed occupied with such a device-- it will result both in the student being counted as absent and in the forfeiture of all credit on any graded assignment that day.* Keep such equipment out of sight-- in a purse, a pocket, or a book bag-- during the entire period. Should one be in evidence during a class meeting, it will result in the student being counted absent that day. Should one be in evidence during a quiz or exam, it will result in an automatic Failure on that assignment.

\* Students who work on a laptop in class risk distracting their colleagues. Only those special needs students whom the Office of Disability Services has certified as dependent upon the classroom use of a laptop computer may presume the right to employ one in the classroom and should confirm this with the instructor on the first day of term. Otherwise, the lectures/discussions sponsored by this instructor are such as permit easy note-taking in textbook and notebook.

\* Recording devices are expressly prohibited in the classroom unless mandated for use by a particular student by the Office of Disability Services: students pay tuition to gain access to an instructor’s ideas, not to obtain a record of his voice or image.

\* Conduct private conversations, read the newspaper, do homework, eat snacks, and catch up on

sleep *outside* the classroom. Visit the restroom *before* coming to class; do not burden the class with your daycare problems; and discuss personal matters with the instructor *outside of* class, not during.

\* Disruptive behavior--that is, any behavior which interrupts or impedes another student's learning process--will be penalized as an absence and result in the forfeiture of all credit on any graded assignment that day. *Seriously or persistently* disruptive behavior will result in removal from the course.

3. Attendance. If you are able to pass this course without attending class, then you should either test out or transfer to a section that you find more challenging. *Attendance is defined as being present and engaged for the full 50, 75, 90, or 180 minutes of the class period.* After the second absence in an evening or summer class, the third absence on a TTH or MW rotation, or the fourth on a MWF rotation, a student will be dropped for non-attendance or find his/her final grade penalized (3.5 points per absence on a TTH or MW rotation, 3 points per absence on a MWF rotation, 5 points per absence for an evening or summer class). Remember that you only have time for the activity that you put first, and by signing up for this course you are agreeing to make this class your first priority during the specified time period. While the instructor is always willing to work with a student in the event of a legitimate emergency such as the death of a family member or a student's sudden hospitalization, you should schedule dental appointments, elective surgery, court appearances, family celebrations, work, and any other non-emergency activity outside of class time. Unless he or she is taken suddenly ill, under no circumstance may a student leave class early. Remember that no other instructor has the right to preempt your attendance in this class.

Disrupting class by entering late is distracting to both the instructor and your fellow students. Be seated at the start of class, with your notebook and your pen poised to begin. Tardiness will be treated as an absence and will prevent the student from receiving credit for any quiz administered that day. Keep a written record of your absences/tardies so that you know your precise status.

The university allows students whose scholarship aid depends upon their participation in certain activities (athletics, cheerleading, band) to miss class for scheduled events. These students *must* present the instructor with a printed schedule of such events before the end of the first week of term, and propose in writing how those absences will be made up (for example, by submitting in advance of the absence a 500-word essay on that day's reading assignment, the grade on which may be substituted for a pop quiz that day). To avoid any confusion at the end of the term, such an arrangement must be approved in writing by the instructor at least one week before the first university sanctioned absence.

Make-up exams are difficult to create and administer, inasmuch as the best questions have already been used on the exam proper. So unless a student is hospitalized for an emergency procedure shortly before the exam or has documented evidence of an emergency *accepted in advance of the exam by the instructor as such*, there will be no make-up exams. It is the student's responsibility to communicate with the instructor in advance of, or at the time of, the exam. Any make-up exam approved in advance by the instructor will be administered 3-5 p.m. on the last day of final exam week--that is, during the only time in exam week when no other exam is scheduled. It is the student's responsibility either to resolve potential conflicts well in advance of the exam in the exam's favor or to drop the course; never presume upon the instructor to resolve your conflict for you.

In the event of a personal emergency, Student Services will communicate with a student's instructors on his/her behalf, thus relieving the student of that burden. Make certain, however, that Student Services is fully informed as to your circumstances. Information regarding Student Services is available in the Student Handbook.

1. Legibility. The first requirement of communication is that your message is legible; do everything possible to ensure that your message can be received. Always write in blue or black ink pen, and make

corrections neatly and clearly. Illegible penmanship signals that the writer cannot be bothered to make the effort to be understood, which excuses the reader from making an effort in return; negotiate penmanship problems by double spacing or printing in block letters. Remember that it is the writer's responsibility to ensure that the message is accessible, *not* the reader's.

5. Writing skills. The second requirement of communication is that the message can be understood. Every student at UCA has had eight years of elementary school training, four years of secondary school training, and at least two semesters of freshman composition or their equivalent before taking English 2305 or above. Thus, no student has an excuse *not* to be able write standard English grammar, to punctuate properly, and to spell correctly. Any student who begins the term with problems remaining in his/her writing is encouraged to seek from the University Writing Center the tutorial assistance that will remedy these problems before the semester advances so far, and so much ground is lost, that a successful semester's grade becomes impossible.

6. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty. The UCA general counsel has decreed that the following statement must appear in every course syllabus.

The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university's Academic Integrity Policy, approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the *Student Handbook*. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in the course affirms a student's acceptance of this university policy.

Plagiarism, which is the failure to acknowledge any linguistic or ideational indebtedness on a formal writing assignment, will result in a zero being awarded the paper. If a documented paper is required by the course, be certain to keep readily available all research notes, drafts, and/or hard copies of the paper in its various stages of evolution until after a final grade has been assigned and accepted. Avoid even the appearance of possible impropriety during an exam or quiz: leave books and notebooks closed and out of sight; do not let your eyes stray to another's paper; do not leave the room while the exam is in progress; speak only to the instructor or the exam proctor; do not bring a cell phone into an exam room. A grade of zero will be assigned to any quiz or exam the integrity of which has been opened to question in any way; serious cases will be referred to the university authorities for discipline, which may include expulsion from the university.

7. Preparation and timely submission of assignments. Outside work is due at the start of the specified period; late work will be penalized at the instructor's discretion, generally one letter grade per day past deadline. Students who put off work on a paper invariably suffer last minute difficulties with unavailable library materials, temperamental computers, empty printer cartridges, and electronically corrupted files. Complete your research well in advance of your due date, lay in an ample supply of appropriate paper, and make certain that you have a printer cartridge in reserve. Do not wait to consult the instructor on a problem until the day before the paper is due. Master the requisite MLA documentation format. Leave yourself ample time to proofread your hard copy. You and you alone are responsible for the condition and submission of your paper.

8. Communication with instructor. Keep the instructor informed in a timely manner about any problems that you are having; your failure to do so may preclude his being able to help you to your satisfaction when

you finally do reach out to him. His office hours appear at the head of the syllabus. (Should you lose your syllabus, you may download another copy from the English department web page.) It is always best to conduct course business in person, but if you cannot come by his office remember that on a busy day he may only check his e-mail <RJFrontain@uca.edu> upon opening his office in the morning, so may not see your message for another 24 hours. When e-mailing the instructor, be certain to include your name and some indication of your business in the subject line; the instructor does not open messages the identity of whose sender or the purpose of which is not immediately apparent. Do not waste the instructor's time requesting electronically or over the phone information available in the syllabus.

9. FERPA – A federal act guaranteeing the privacy of every student specifies that an instructor cannot discuss a grade or any other confidential matter with anyone other than the student in an insecure medium. The university counsel interprets the latter to include telephone and e-mail. Thus, a student wishing to discuss his or her academic standing should seek the instructor out during his office hours or make an appointment to meet at some another mutually convenient time. The instructor cannot discuss a student's academic standing with a third party (for example, a parent, roommate, or spouse), even with the student present, unless both the student and the third party have signed a FERPA agreement, which can be found on the university's webpage.

10. Return of graded papers. The rate at which papers will be corrected, graded, and returned to students depends upon two factors: 1) the number of students in the class; and 2) the strength of student writing and argument. Thus, the greater the number of students in the class and the less polished their efforts, the greater the length of time required by a serious instructor. In general, the instructor makes every effort to return quizzes within one week, and exams or critical papers within two weeks.

11. Grade scale:

A (90-99)	excellent
B (80-89)	superior
C (70-79)	adequate
D (60-69)	inadequate or barely acceptable
F (0-59)	unacceptable

Sample unit conversion scale:

C+ / B-	79
C+	78
C+ / C-	77
C / C+	76
C	75
C / C-	74
C- / C	73
C-	72
C-	71
C - D+	70

Keep all graded quizzes, exams, and papers easily available for consultation until *after* the final grade has been recorded, both so that you may compute your average at any point in the semester, and so that any dispute over the final grade's computation may be efficiently resolved.

12. Withdrawal. It is always wise to speak with the instructor before withdrawing from any class in order to make certain that there is no confusion regarding your status, and to preempt your being dropped for non-attendance in the interim between the student's making a decision and executing it. After the

second graded assignment of the term has been returned, a student's withdrawal grade will reflect the student's class average on the documented date of withdrawal. Keep track of your average so that you know exactly where you stand at any point in the semester.

13. Handbook policies. The University encourages students to familiarize themselves with all policies listed in the Student Handbook, but especially the University's Sexual Harassment Policy and all academic policies. The following policy was implemented at UCA in July 2014: "If a student discloses an act of sexual harassment, discrimination, assault, or other sexual misconduct to a faculty member (as it relates to 'student-on-student' or 'employee-on-student'), the faculty member cannot maintain complete confidentiality and is required to report the act and may be required to reveal the names of the parties involved. Any allegations made by a student may or may not trigger an investigation. Each situation differs and the obligation to conduct an investigation will depend on those specific set of circumstances. The determination to conduct an investigation will be made by the Title IX Coordinator. For further information visit <https://uca.edu/titleix>.

In addition, the University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need accommodation under this act due to a disability, contact the Office of Disability Support Services at 450-3135. Remember that the instructor cannot certify you as disabled, and that he is able to make accommodations only *after* hearing formally from DSS. Such accommodations should be made *before* the close of registration on Wednesday of the first full week of class and are not retroactive.

14. Course evaluation. "Student evaluations of a course and its professor are a crucial element in helping faculty achieve excellence in the classroom and the institution in demonstrating that students are gaining knowledge. Students may evaluate courses they are taking starting on the Monday of the twelfth week of instruction through the end of finals week by logging in to myUCA and clicking on the Evals button on the top right" (Office of the Provost).

15. Emergency preparedness. "An Emergency Procedures Summary for the building in which this class is held will be discussed during the first week of this course. EPS documents for most buildings on campus are available at <http://uca.edu/my-safety-bep/>. Every student should be familiar with emergency procedures for any campus building in which he/she spends time for classes or other purposes."