Who is "the man of many ways"?

Who is it who declares,

"I am nobody but myself"?

This course creates a dialogue between Homer's Odyssey and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, the masterwork that evokes the Odyssey even as it reimagines the scope of the twentieth century novel. We will focus on the historical and cultural specificities of each text but will also pursue the synergies and energies promoted by reading them together. We will thus consider what the ancient world has to say to the modern novel, and how modernity might reanimate a key text of antiquity.

Among the topics we will consider: formations and representations of subjectivity in antiquity and modernity; the status of race and ethnicity; the structuring effects of kinship, marriage, institutions, the state, the law; the cultural poetics and politics of narrative. What stories are we telling about "ourselves," and/or about "others," and to what ends? We will draw upon secondary readings in literary theory, gender studies, critical race studies, and other social sciences. Students need no background in these materials but do need critical energy and discipline.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Texts:


These books can be found at Shakespeare & Co. Bookstore, 716 Broadway (right across from Gallatin.).

Other readings will be found on NYU Classes [C] or on-line through Bobst Library’s electronic resources [Bobst: ].

Please bring readings to class.

Assignments include:

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES:

- Please post on the NYU CLASSES discussion board no later than 6 p.m. the night before class TWO clearly formulated questions about the week’s reading (primary or secondary) that you think will stimulate or enrich class discussion.

- Also, please post ONE response to a question posed by a classmate on NYU CLASSES the previous week. The response should be posted on NYU CLASSES no later than 6 p.m. the night before class.

- **Everyone will be responsible for reading all the postings each week and for being prepared to discuss them in class the next day.**

- Due dates are listed on the course outline below.

TEXT ANALYSIS:

We will assign a passage from *Odyssey* (due October 8) and *Invisible Man* (due November 12). In a paper of 2-3 typed pages, discuss the passage’s key features, the questions/themes it raises or points to, its style (diction, level of language, figures of speech, point of view), and its significance in the context of the larger work in which it appears. All papers should be handed in through the NYU CLASSES Assignment tab.

COLLABORATIVE ORAL REPORT:

The class will be divided into small groups. Each group will be assigned one selection of secondary reading [to be determined] and each member
of the group will report on it to the class in a presentation of 15 minutes in total. The report should contain a close reading of key passages in the assigned article/ essay and a commentary on the relation between this article/ essay and the Odyssey OR Invisible Man, OR both. Each member of the group will write up and hand in through NYU CLASSES her/ his individual presentation, with appropriate citations from the primary and secondary material. Remember, this should be a collaborative project; each group should meet together to discuss how to coordinate the individual presentations. Also, you do not have to upload a Question and Response the day you give your oral report. We invite you to consult with either or both of us as you prepare your report.

**FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM**

Due December 16.

**SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS**

**September 3**  
Problems And Perspectives: Identity, Visibility, Narrative

**September 10**  
Learning the Cities of Men

Readings:
- *Odyssey* Books 1-5;

Written Assignment:  
Questions and Responses

**September 17**  
Natural Order, Social Order

Readings:
- *Odyssey* Books 6-12.

Written Assignment:  
Questions and Responses
September 24  The Political Economy Of Homecoming OR Estrangement And Recognition

Readings:

Written Assignment:
Questions and Responses

October 1  The Bow And The Bed: Violence, Homecoming, Closure

Readings:

Written Assignment:
Questions and Responses

October 8  The Epic and the Novel

Readings:

Written Assignment:
Text Analysis (Passage to be assigned)

In class viewing of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

October 15  SEMESTER BREAK

October 22  Ideology, Invisibility and Hypervisibility

Readings:
Written Assignment: 
Questions and Responses

October 29 
Race and Melancholia

Readings:

*Invisible Man*, Prologue through Chapter 7.


Written Assignment: 
Questions and Responses

November 5 
“Harlem is Nowhere”

Readings


Razaf, A. “(What Did I Do to be so) Black and Blue” in *Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man*, ed. E. Sundquist (Boston and New York City: Bedford/ St Martin’s) 1995, pp. 115-6. [C]


Written Assignment: 
Questions and Responses

November 12 
O Brotherhood, Where Art Thou?

Readings:


Written Assignment:

Text Analysis (Passage to be assigned)

November 19 
The Woman Question

Readings:

*Invisible Man*, Chapter 21 – Epilogue


Written Assignment:
Questions and Responses

November 26  **Ellison, Rinehart and Classicism**

Readings:


December 3  **Collaborative Oral Reports**

Texts to be assigned
[Note: You are expected to read all of the assignments.]

Written Assignment (if you are not presenting):
Questions and Responses

December 10  **Collaborative Oral Reports**

Texts to be assigned
[Note: You are expected to read all of the assignments.]

Written Assignment (if you are not presenting):
Questions and Responses

December 16  **FINAL EXAM DUE** (No Class)
Learning Goals

- Strengthening our deep and comparative reading skills
- Developing skills and confidence in different modes of written and oral expression
- Developing a framework for understanding dialogues and divergences between ancient and modern texts
- Acquiring a transhistorical and non-universalist understandings of such categories as race and gender

Grading

Successful completion of this class includes:

- Faithful class attendance. More than one absence—beyond documented emergencies and religious observances—will automatically lower your final grade.
- Careful study of the assigned readings in time for class discussions
- Turning in written assignments on time. Late work—except for that caused by documented emergencies—will automatically be penalized.
- Active and thoughtful participation in class discussions.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- Class Participation 20%
- Question and Response Posts 10%
- Textual Analysis 15% each
- Collaborative Oral Report 15%
- Final Take Home Exam 25%
- Outstanding class participation will lead to ‘extra credit’

Academic Integrity

All your written work must be your own; “borrowed” work will be severely sanctioned in accordance with school policies. The following is taken from the Gallatin website:

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and
cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website
(http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)