Humanities 2: Rome, Christianity, and the Middle Ages, Spring 2019

Humanities 2 focuses on the cultures and literature of the Roman Empire and the European Middle Ages. The scope of the course is to introduce students to the range of imaginative writing during this roughly fifteen-hundred-year period. The goal of the course is to illustrate the major literary forms in their intellectual and cultural contexts. The course thus begins with Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and works through major authors (Roman and Christian) of the Late Antique world – St. Paul, St. Augustine, and Boethius – before concluding with two representative vernacular writers of the Middle Ages: Marie de France (France) and Dante Alighieri (Italy).

We thus begin with Virgil’s epic poem on the origins of Rome, *The Aeneid*. The poem was completed by Virgil’s death in 19 BC, and portions of it were, in fact, read before Emperor Augustus himself. Virgil’s poem quickly became a kind of template for epic and heroic writing, for political narrative, and for the ideals of poetry itself. It was read in many ways over the next millennium and a half, but one of the ways in which it was most prominently read was as an allegory. In fact, much reading and writing in the literary West sought to find allegorical ways of reading in the *Aeneid*, along the following lines: what is a virtuous life; how is a geographical journey a model for a moral voyage; how are reason and sensuality in conflict; is human social and political organization a reflection of a higher, possibly divine order? And, primarily because only books 1-6 (that is, the first half) of *The Aeneid* were closely read and studied in the Middle Ages, we will focus on those books.

As Christianity took hold in the Empire, early religious thinkers began to codify these moral, social and literary questions. We’ll look at three representative figures from the first centuries of Christianity. St. Paul (died mid-60s AD) is the great theorist of the early Church, a brilliant prose stylist in his *Epistles*, and a codifier of ways of reading literature and the world allegorically. St. Augustine (354-430) remains one of the most original thinkers of any time, and his *Confessions* is both a brilliant autobiography and a chronicle of literary and imaginative understanding (and in many ways a direct response to *The Aeneid*). Boethius (c.480-534) brings together the inheritance of classical learning with Christian sensibility in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, an account in prose and verse of his personal imprisonment and spiritual growth.

All of these writers had a defining impact on the forms of doctrine, imagination, poetry, and interpretation in the course of the Middle Ages. Two writers who helped define their respective vernacular traditions, and who were all deeply indebted to Virgil, Paul, Augustine, and Boethius, were Marie de France and Dante. Marie de France (born about 1140) transformed the classical inheritance of adventure and fable into vivid, vernacular stories of the imagination. Her Lais remain one of the most important works of the European Middle Ages. And Marie herself stands as a female author seeking to transform the expectations of male authority into a performance of
gender and power. Dante (1265-1321) wrote, most famously, The Divine Comedy. But before that, his first sustained work was the wondrous Vita Nuova (“The New Life”), a story in prose and verse of his love for Beatrice and his growth as a poet. Part elegy, part poetic announcement, the Vita Nuova synthesizes all of the traditions we will be exploring in this course.

Books to Buy (in UCSD Bookstore)

- Virgil, Aeneid, trans. Mandelbaum
- The New Testament, King James English Version
- Augustine, Confessions, trans. Pine-Coffin
- Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, trans. Slavitt
- Marie de France, Lais, ed. and trans Waters
- Dante, La Vita Nuova, ed. and trans. Reynolds

Guidelines for this course: This is a large lecture course. The material on the final exam will be based on the readings and the lectures. I will post powerpoints from the lectures at the end of each week on the course tritoned site. You will be expected to come to lectures. You will be required to come to section. Your section leader will be your grader for the course. Sections are designed to enable discussion of the readings, preparation for the papers, and opportunities for exploring the course material in ways parallel to the lectures. ALL WORK FOR THIS COURSE MUST BE YOUR OWN. PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.

Point breakdown for grading:

- Attendance and participation in section: 10 points
- First paper: 15 points
- Second Paper: 20 points
- Third Paper: 20 points
- Final exam: 35 points
- Total: 100 points
Weekly Syllabus

Week I: Virgil: Rome, politics, power and heroism; *Aeneid*, Book 1. April 2, April 4

Week II: Virgil, *Aeneid*, Books 1, 2 and 3: Aeneas as story-teller; the Trojan horse; the ideals of Roman literature and virtue. April 9, April 11

Week III.

a. Virgil: Dido and Aeneas, love and duty; *Aeneid*, Books 4 and 5. April 16

b. Virgil: Aeneas in the underworld, allegory and memory: *Aeneid* 6. April 18

Week IV:


Week V:


Week VI: St. Augustine, Rhetoric and Conversion, reading the self. *Confessions*, Books 3, 6, 8, 9 May 7, May 9.

Week VII. Boethius: Fortune, free will, desire, and literary form: *Consolation of Philosophy* May 14, May 16. SECOND PAPER DUE THURSDAY MAY 16


Week IX:

a. Marie de France: Love and fidelity; Lanval; May 28
b. Dante, La Vita Nuova: writing, desire, and the creation of love poetry (VN, sections 1-9); May 30: THIRD PAPER DUE THURSDAY MAY 30

Week X. Dante, La Vita Nuova: the Boethian form; prose and verse; the making of literature

And the ideals of literacy and education (VN, complete to the end); June 4, June 6.

Final exam: a three-hour exam consisting of identification questions and a choice of essays.

FINAL EXAM, TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 8AM-11AM, IN THE LECTURE ROOM