

Revelle Humanities 2

Seth Lerer [slerer@ucsd.edu](mailto:slerer@ucsd.edu)

Office: Literature Building 228

Office Hours: M/W 3-4pm

Today:

Three things

1. Introduction to the course: goals, themes, approaches, overview

2. Introduction to the Aeneid:

Roman Culture

Virgil as an Author

Politics and Poetry

3. Introduction to reading Book I of the Aeneid

Themes and Techniques

The Virgilian Sentence

The Epic Simile

The Idea of narration

At end of class; logistics and details: books, papers, final, section TA's

Issues on originality and plagiarism

Intro to the course

LOVE: what is the nature of desire?

how is human desire a function of related to spiritual desire?

how is the emotional experience of human love akin to the experience of reading – can you love a book?

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE:

to read closely in the literary presentations of love and desire

to see how literature reflects social worlds

to develop a “humanistic” sensibility: narrative and story,  
interpretation of signs; the cultivation of empathy

Literature is often the narrative of how things go wrong; the study of literature prepares us for the unexpected

In the end: to find your self as a reader in literary narrative; to see how literature works on you; to see how the challenge of being a reader is to “find yourself” in all senses of that phrase

The challenge:

Where does meaning lie?

Authorial Intention vs. Reader Response

Is meaning something we recover or something we make

Theme of the books we read: how do we engage with human expression?

What happens when we read or hear something amiss?

What happens when our intentions go misunderstood?

What is the nature of literary understanding and the relationship of reading to living?

How are these historical issues for understanding culture, in particular at the start, Ancient Rome?

Four axes for the course:

Duty / Desire

Piety / Politics

Memory / Action

Rhetoric / Reality

## Virgil and Rome

Virgil: 70 BC – 19 BC

Period of political upheaval

Came from a small landowning family in northern Italy: key point is that, Though Italian, he is not of Roman birth

Educated in traditions of Greek and Latin Rhetoric, literature and science

Led a largely intellectual and literary life

Developed a sense of a literary career through the progression of literary forms

Political origins of the commission of the Aeneid: Octavian (nephew of Julius Caesar and his adopted son and heir) defeated Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC; sought to commission a major work of literature

Virgil took up the commission, but in his own way:

Set out to write a poem not about Octavian (who became Augustus Caesar After 27 BC), but about Rome itself: its founding, its cultural ideals, its notions Of paternity and duty – all of which Augustus was seen to embody

Roman idea of literature: a moral and political purpose

The Aeneid is a celebration of Roman identity but also a synthesis of the Poet's own educational and cultural inheritance: a synthesis of the Greek Inheritance in Latin form

Nation and Narration: why does an empire need an epic?

Political and social identity keyed to narratives of action and character

Background to the Aeneid:

Troy: Trojan War; foundations of culture and politics; male/female relationships  
Defined by abduction of Helen

Homer: Iliad and Odyssey: the Homeric model of direct epic narrative; the technique  
Of in medias res narration; character; gods; heroes, epithets, similes

Rome: history: founding of Rome and search for Trojan lineage  
politics: the Julian dynasty; the imperial project  
Latinity: the making of the Latin language as an imperial as well as a literary  
language

Culture: duty (pietas); family (gens); political home (patria)

Literary form: epic (primary and secondary; oral and literate; Greek and Latin)  
rhetoric: oral and political performance; ideals of social eloquence  
the simile as the key device of the epic: literary and political function  
of comparisons

The first sentence of the Aeneid in Latin

**Arma virumque cano**, *Troiae* qui primus ab oris  
*Italiam*, fato profugus, *Laviniaque* venit  
litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto  
vi superum saevae memorem *Iunonis* ob iram;  
multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet  
**urbem**,  
inferretque deos *Latio*, **genus** unde *Latinum*,  
*Albanique* patres, atque altae moenia *Romae*.

Mandelbaum trans:

**I sing of arms and of a man:** his fate

Had made him fugitive; he was the first  
To journey from the coasts of *Troy* as far  
As *Italy* and the *Lavinian* shores.

Across the lands and waters he was battered  
Beneath the violence of High Ones, for  
The savage Juno's unforgetting anger;  
And many sufferings were in his war –  
Until he brought a **city** into being

And carried his gods to *Latium*;

From this have come the *Latin* **race**, the lords

Of Alba – and the remnants of high Rome

Statement of purpose;

First person poet

Arms + man = Iliad/Odyssey

The geography of Aeneas's  
journey: Troy to Rome

Founding of Rome is the goal  
of the poem and its hero.

The word "Romae" is the last  
word of the first sentence.

How does this opening capture  
our attention? Our trust?  
our interest?

The role of the gods: Juno's  
anger. Anger of the gods as  
a key theme of classical epic.

Question: does the hero have  
will to act or is he subject to the  
whims of the gods? Is his story  
fated?

**urbs / gens**

Reading Book I : beginning

The first sentence

The figure of Juno

Speech of Aeolus

Sonic effects

The uses of the simile

When does Aeneas show up? How is he a public orator

Rhetoric and cookery; civilization and group eating

Venus: her speech; her appearance; Olympus as a law court

History and rhetoric: BOOK I IS A STORY OF NARRATIONS; HOW DO WE JUDGE THE VERISIMILITUDE OF THE STORY AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE TELLER?

The bee simile and Carthage

## Course planning and performance

Three short papers (paper 1, 15% of grade; paper 2, 20%; paper 3, 20%)

A scheduled final exam (30% of grade)

Attendance and participation in the sections (15% of grade)

Attendance and attention at the lectures (priceless)

Bring the books to lectures and sections

Attendance and participation:

the study of literature and the humanities goes on through close, attentive discussion of texts, objects, and ideas

much of our course material is about how people speak, argue, tell a story, and listen to and understand the words of others

the shared, proximate experience of listening and discussing is central to the study of our works

This is more than a course giving you information

This is a course that asks you to engage with information, relate information to experience, and find ways of expressing your responses to that experience.

**ALL WRITTEN WORK MUST BE YOUR OWN**