A Basic Review of Lerer, Revelle Humanities 2, Spring 2017

PART ONE

Major themes:

Piety and politics: how do writers, characters, and readers come to understand the relationship between personal belief and adherence to social and institutional expectations? What happens when belief is in conflict with political realities?

Duty and desire: how do the works we’ve read explore the tensions between a person’s sense of public, civic, or moral duty and that person’s urges towards fulfillment of bodily, sensual, or sexual needs? How do characters make decisions based on those tensions?

Memory and action: what is the role of remembered experience in gauging future behavior? How do we use collective, shared memories of events to build up a sense of social belonging? Is learning a form of remembering? Is it possible to be too mired in memory to act effectively? How do writers announce their careers by celebrating the memory of the dead?

Rhetoric and reality: does language express the world as it is, or does language actually define that world? Does rhetoric manipulate our experiences and desires? How do we use language to convince, persuade, or emotionally move others?

Love: is love a movement of the body towards another? Is it a movement of the soul towards higher fulfillment? Is love something natural or can it (should it) be taught as a technique? Is being in love ennobling or degrading? What are the ways in which physical or sexual desire can be transformed into spiritual desire (and vice versa)?

Family: what are the relationships of parents and children in the works we have read? How are parents the source of support or humiliation, instruction or deception?

Men and Women: how do relationships of gender work themselves out in relationships of political or social control? How are women idealized (or demonized) figures of authority, or pedagogy, or spiritual grace? What is the difference between the interior lives of men and women?

Places and spaces: the sea, the garden, the bedroom, the couch, the dining area, the city street.

Poetry and literature: what is the function of literature in society? How does literature instruct and/or entertain? How is poetry: a medium of imperial identity formation; of personal enjoyment; of distraction; of spiritual allegory; of philosophical speculation; of praise; of elegy?

History:

Virgil’s Rome: the uses of imperial patronage to create epic narratives of cultural foundation; the uses of Latin as a formal language of expression; the uses of game to
define shared male companionship; the uses of literature to comment on political events (conquest of Egypt; consolidation of Augustan power; dynastic succession).

The world of early Christianity: the creation of an idealized figure of Jesus as the object of love; the nature of religion as a collection of beliefs rather than an assembly of practices; the development of a particular form of prose expression in the epistle and the gospel.

Late Antiquity: Christianity official in Roman Empire after 312; the establishment of Roman/Christian colonies in the periphery of empire; the world of Augustine’s North Africa; grammatical education as the pathway to social and economic advancement; the cultivation of a literate life based on the codex rather than the scroll. Later: in Boethius’s Italy: loss of the Roman Western empire to the Germanic tribes; Roman, senatorial culture as increasingly artificial and detached from political realities; the consolidation of Christian belief into particular doctrines (and, by contrast, heresies); the absorption of classical mythology into a Christian allegorical system of interpretation.

The varieties of medieval cultural experience: the illuminated manuscript book; the rise of the universities; courtliness and chivalry; scholasticism; the city-state and commerce; patronage and poetic service

The worlds of the French noble court; of the Italian city-state; of the English royal court.

Romance of the Rose: the vernacular, French experience of regional courtly behavior; the development of ideals of courtesy and chivalry; the use of the idea of crusade as a metaphor for all forms of accomplishment (literary, sexual, social); the representations of the non-Christian Middle East and Islamic cultures; sexual desire as if it were holy crusade; the ocular erotics of the blazon.

Dante, Vita Nuova: the vernacular, Italian experience of the commercially-driven, city-state; the development of ideals of civic behavior; the use of the pilgrimage as a metaphor for all forms of accomplishment; love as a form of worship, as ethical behavior; poetry as a form of social bonding; love as ennobling; the dolce stil nuovo.

Chaucer, Book of the Duchess: the vernacular, English experience of royal culture and the rituals of mourning; the creation of the poet as reader and writer; the uses of dream and dialogue; literature as a way of life; love as a hunt.

Philosophy: Stoic vs. Platonic epistemology: is the mind a blank slate or is it already imbued with innate ideas at birth? Does knowledge come from sense impressions or is it an act of remembering? Are acts of learning or loving acts of sight or insight?

Languages

Aeneid: Latin, epic poetry
Gospels: Greek prose (translated into Latin in the 5th century)
Confessions: Latin prose (quotes from scriptures in Latin)
Consolation: Latin poetry and prose
Romance of the Rose: Old French poetry
**PART TWO**

**Literary devices:**

**Epithet:** the use of a defining adjective with a proper name for purposes of codifying a character’s inner qualities or behavioral habits.

**Allegory:** the parallel narrative of literal and figurative expression; the creation of narratives that say one thing and mean another; using allegory to express socially challenging or transgressive or coded forms of experience; reading earlier works as allegories (transformation of pre-Christian classical literature and mythology into narratives of ethical behavior; transformation of Old Testament narratives into prefigurations of New Testament events). How is allegory like resignification – that is, pressing older forms of narrative or literature into new systems of social and intellectual understanding?

**The Muses:** the classical sources of literary inspiration; Virgil’s call upon the Muse at the opening of the Aeneid; Boethius’s listening to the muses of poetry; Philosophy’s banishment of the “whores of the theater”; Dante’s Beatrice as a kind of poetic/philosophical/spiritual Muse.

**Journey and narrative:** the uses of various forms of journeys as ways of presenting spiritual, personal, moral, or, artistic development: sea voyage; the road; the crusade; the pilgrimage; the hunt; conversion itself as a phenomenon of the journey (Paul, Augustine).

**Personification:** the creation of transparent, allegorical figures who represent moral or psychological categories; the interpretation of historical individuals as having transcendent spiritual meaning.

**Dream and poetry:** both forms of imaginative, coded narrative that can be subject to various interpretations.

**Beginnings:** how do writers establish their literary authority at the opening of a work? How do they get the attention and good will of their audience? What is the function of quotation and allusion in beginning a work? How does a writer establish clarity of argument, grammaticality of language, a level of knowledge and trust, and a use of illustrative quotation to enhance or support an argument? How does a character within a work of literature establish his or her authority or trust in these ways?

**Endings:** certain works end in challenging or ambiguous ways (e.g., CP, no poem; VN, Latin); others seem to end brusquely (e.g., the narrators of RofR and BD waking up);
certain sections of works end by reflecting on their beginning (e.g., Book VI of the
*Aeneid* ending with Marcellus recalling Icarus; or Aeneas and Anchises recalling
Daedalus and Icarus; note too how Book VIII of the *Confessions* looks back to earlier
scenes of reading silently, reading randomly, allegorical imagery of
trees/fruit/garden/book; etc).

**Axes or Parings**: teachers and students; Men and women; Parents and children; Rulers
and ruled; Divinities and people; Europe and the “East”; Poetry and prose; parataxis and
hypotaxis; Latin and vernacular; Literal and allegorical; Spoken and written; Courtesy
and chivalry; Civilization and wilderness

**Names and Characters**

Virgil, *Aeneid*; Aeneas, Venus, Dido, Creusa, Sychaeus, Iarbas, Iopas, Anna, Daedalus,
Icarus, Anchises, Ascanius (Iulus); Troy, Carthage, Hercules; Juno, Aeolus, Jupiter,
Rumor

Mark, Luke, Jesus, Martha, Mary, Road to Emmaus, Prodigal Son, Last Supper; Paul,
First Corinthians, Romans

Augustine, *Confessions*; Patricius, Monica, Ambrose; Thagaste, Rome, Milan, Hippo;
Mani/ Manicheism

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*; Lady Philosophy; the prisoner; Ravenna, Pavia;
Orpheus, Ulysses, Hercules; Fortune

**Romance of the Rose**: Gillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, Idleness, God of Love, Reason,
the Rose, the characters in the garden of pleasure; Hercules, Narcissus, Pygmalion

Dante, *Vita Nuova*: Dante, Beatrice, Florence

Giotto; painter, contemporary of Dante; paints Dante from personal knowledge; brings a
new realism to the painting of human faces, sustaining both realism and allegory in
religious art

Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*: Chaucer, Black Knight, White Queen, John of Gaunt,
House of Lancaster, Blanche the Duchess; Macrobius, Ovid, Romance of the Rose, Cyex
and Alcyone

**Words and Phrases**

*Arma virumque cano*; *Dux femina facti*; *Forsan et haec olim memnisse juvabit*; *Pius
Aeneas*; *Infelix Dido*; Augury; Haruspication; Scroll; Through a glass darkly; *Sartago*
*Codex*; *Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi*; Love conquers all; Relics; Blazon;
Love and the noble heart (*cor gentil*) are one; *volgari*; *Dolce stil nuovo*; canzone; Nine;
Rubric; Metamorphosis; She is dead; Yes No Yes