**Greek & Latin Classics in Translation**

CLAS 150.01/Summer 2015 Greek & Latin Classics in Translation MTWTh 11:00 AM -- 1:40 PM, King Hall 204

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**Course Overview and Scope**

The literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans has been upheld, throughout the entire span of western civilization, as containing some of the most beautiful and most profound expressions of the human mind. It is a treasure that has been looked to for inspiration and imitation at every turn in subsequent European history, whether one considers the philosophy of the middle ages, the poetry of the Renaissance, or the political ideals of the early modern period. This heritage of classical literature, however, is so vast and complex, requiring so many years of study even to begin to grasp its intricacies, let alone plumb its depths, that any introductory course on the subject must needs encounter the difficult challenge of deciding where to begin and what to focus upon. In this, the perspective of the ancients themselves appears most instructive, as throughout all of Greco-Roman antiquity the poetry of one figure loomed so large, and was considered so foundational to all other literary forms, that a knowledge of his works seems utterly indispensable for understanding everything afterwards. By this of course I mean Homer, yet even here we shall have to a make choice of what to focus upon, and, disregarding chronology, we shall be reading the second of the two epic poems traditionally ascribed to him. Likewise, in respect to Roman literature, there is little dispute as to what its greatest literary monument is, with the *Aeneid* of Vergil taking there pride of place. Accordingly, these two works will be the pillars around which we shall structure all the other material in this course, supplementing the rather substantial readings done at home with many in-class readings of poetry, plays, and philosophy germane to the main texts. By this approach, it is hoped that we shall not only learn the general contours of classical literature by surveying its mountainous heights from afar, but that we shall also enjoy many pleasant wanderings amid the woods and streams as well.

**Schedule of Classes**

**Week 1**

Monday July 6 Introduction to classical literature. Historical overview. Read for next class: Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* Tuesday July 7 Quiz and discussion of the *Agamemnon*. Background of the Trojan War. Read for next class: Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* Wednesday July 8 Quiz and discussion of *Libation Bearers*. Read for next class: Books 1-4 of the Odyssey. Thursday July 9 Introduction to Homeric Epic, the Homeric Question, and the nature of oral poetry. Read for next class: *Odyssey* Books 5-8.

**Week 2**

Monday July 13 Quiz and discussion of *Odyssey* 5-8. Keats' *On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer*. Read for next class: *Odyssey* Books 9-12. Tuesday July 14 Quiz and discussion of *Odyssey* 9-12. Tennyson's *The Lotos-Eaters.* Read for next class: *Odyssey* Books 13-16. Wednesday July 15 Quiz and discussion of *Odyssey* 13-16. Read for next class: *Odyssey* Books 17-20. Thursday July 16 Quiz and discussion of *Odyssey* 17-20. Read for next class: *Odyssey* Books 21-24. Bring text of *Argonautika* to class on Monday.

**Week 3**

Monday July 20 Mid*-*term, take home essay due. Tennyson *Ulysses.* Introduction to the Hellenistic Age. Read for next class: *Argonautika* Books 1-2 Tuesday July 21 Quiz and discussion of *Argonautika* 1-2. Hellenistic poetry, particularly Callimachus. Read for next class: *Argonautika* Book 3. Wednesday July 22 Quiz and discussion of *Argonautika* 3. Read for next class: *Argonautika* Book 4. Thursday July 23 Quiz and discussion of *Argonautika* 4. Ptolemaic political symbolism. Euripides' *Medea*. Read for next class: *Aeneid* Books 1-6.

**Week 4**

Monday July 27 Quiz and discussion of *Aeneid* 1-6. Read for next class: *Aeneid* Books 7-12. Tuesday July 28 No quiz; discussion of *Aeneid* 7-12; review for final exam. Wednesday July 29 Final exam.

**Required Texts -- All available at Queen's College Bookstore**

*The* *Odyssey*. (2002) Rodney Merrill, trans. ISBN-13: 978-0472088546

*The Argonautika*. (2012) Rodney Merrill, trans.ISBN-13: 978-1479128884

*The Aeneid*. (2007) Frederick Ahl, trans. ISBN-13: 978-1479128884

**Grading Rubric**

25% Quizzes (the two lowest quiz grades will be dropped, but quizzes cannot be made-up if missed because of lateness or absence)

25% Attendance and Participation

25% Mid-Term Paper

25% Final Exam

**Academic Integrity**

The policy on Academic Integrity, as adopted by the Board, is available to all candidates. Academic Dishonesty is prohibited in Queens College / The City University of New York, and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion. This policy and others related to students' issues are available to you at: www.qc.cuny.edu/about/administration/Provost/Policies

**Mid-Term Essay Topics. 5-7 pages. Due July 20th.**

1) Explore the interconnected themes of eating and moral degeneracy in the *Odyssey* (e.g. the lotus-eaters, the eating by Odysseus' comrades of the cattle of Helios, the gluttonous suitors, *inter alia*). What ramifications does this recurrent theme have for the moral cosmos of the poem as a whole? Can you place it in the context of any other Greek ethical ideals beginning to take shape in the late archaic period (such as the Delphic oracle's injunction "nothing in excess")?

2) James Joyce, the most celebrated of Irish novelists, and indeed one of the most renowned modern writers in general, stated that Odysseus (Ulysses) was the only complete person in literature: "Hamlet," he said, for instance, "is a human being, but he is a son only. Ulysses is son to Laertes, but he is father to Telemachus, husband to Penelope, lover of Calypso, companion in arms of the Greek warriors around Troy, and King of Ithaca. He was subjected to many trials, but with wisdom and courage came through them all. Don’t forget that he was a war dodger who tried to evade military service by simulating madness. He might never have taken up arms and gone to Troy, but the Greek recruiting sergeant was too clever for him, and, while he was ploughing the sands, placed young Telemachus in front of his plough. But once at the war the conscientious objector became a jusqu’auboutist. When the others wanted to abandon the siege he insisted on staying till Troy should fall." (Quoted in Frank Budgen's *Conversations with Joyce* {1934}). Discuss.

3) Odysseus is ever described as a man "of many wiles," and he often lies. Is it possible to make sense out of the narrative of the *Odyssey* if we were to assume that every supernatural adventure Odysseus narrates in the "Great Wanderings" (Books 9-12) is a lie? Are there any elements of the story that are vouched for by "Homer" as the narrator of the *Odyssey*? Can you work out any consistent standard to judge when Odysseus is telling the truth and when he may be lying? In a different, though related direction, when, in Book 24, Odysseus encounters his father Laertes, there is no longer any danger, and no longer any need for Odysseus to be careful or deceitful; why then does the bard make Odysseus decide to lie to his father?

4) The fates of Odysseus, Telemachus, and Penelope are constantly likened and contrasted in the *Odyssey* to those of Agamemnon, Orestes, and Clytemnestra. This is a significant motif that is constantly echoed from the first scene of the poem on Mount Olympus, to Athena's advice to Telemachus, to Agamemnon's advice to Odysseus in the underworld, and many other places. Discuss the various scenes in which these comparisons take place, and analyze the ways in which these two sets of characters are similar to one another, and how they are different.