FIRST YEAR SEMINAR (FYSEM-UA 753)

HEROIC JOURNEYS: HOMER, VERGIL, DANTE

Fall Semester, 2020                Instructor: Prof. Matthew S. Santirocco
Tuesdays, 12:30-3:00PM             mss1@nyu.edu
Silver 503A (Classics Seminar Room) Visiting Lecturer: Prof. Ronald Herzman
                                          herzman@geneseo.edu
                                          Office Hours: TBA & by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Homer’s *Odyssey*, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and Dante’s *Inferno* are key foundational texts of the West. These works span two millennia and very different cultures—archaic Greece at the dawn of western literature, pagan Rome of the first century BCE, and Florence during the Christian Middle Ages. Reflecting very different social, political, and religious values, they explore very different visions of what it means to be human, particularly with regard to the individual’s role in society and the individual’s relationship to the divine. But for all their striking differences, these three poems self-consciously engage with one another, by building on, competing with, and correcting their predecessors’ visions. Thus, all are cast as journeys by a hero, and these journeys are both literal and metaphorical. All three also involve a descent into the underworld, from which the hero is, in a sense, reborn with a greater understanding and a new sense of purpose. As if to underscore the way these texts talk with one another, the Homeric underworld in the *Odyssey* is actually Vergil’s model for the Roman underworld that his hero, Aeneas, will visit; and Dante goes even further by making Vergil a character in his poem, the virtuous pagan spirit who will guide his hero through and out of the Christian hell. This seminar will involve close reading and discussion of these three poems. It will also be research-intensive, in that it will seek to develop in students important research skills. These include how to ask the right questions about a text, how to conduct an internet search of relevant scholarship, how to construct a bibliography and write up a literature review, and finally, how to build on that work to produce a research paper that focuses on a well-defined topic and sets forth one’s own conclusions. No prior knowledge of these texts will be assumed, and no familiarity with research skills is required. What is required is intellectual curiosity and a commitment to work hard.

GRADING:   Class participation and oral reports: 10%
            Midterm exam: 10%
            Final exam: 20%
            Paper #1: 20%
            Paper #2: 20%
            Paper #3: 20%

[continued on p. 2]
ATTENDANCE is required. This is a small, discussion-based seminar and meets only once a week. Thus, missing even one class section deprives oneself and one’s fellow students of the opportunity to learn from multiple perspectives. For this reason, all anticipated absences must be cleared with the instructor in advance, and, in the event of sudden unanticipated illness or serious emergency, official documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note) must be submitted. Unexcused absences will result in a reduction of the final grade.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS are available for students with disabilities. The website of the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities is www.nyu.edu/csds. For more information, please contact the Moses Center directly (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu). Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

WELLNESS: It is not unusual for students to encounter medical or psychological problems. If you or a friend is experiencing difficulties, NYU offers a wide range of health and counseling services. To access these, you can reach out 24/7 to the Wellness Exchange hotline, 212-443-9999.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY is a paramount virtue in our academic community. Students should familiarize themselves with NYU’s published guidelines and policies in this area and carefully abide by them. Any questions should be referred to the instructor. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in a grade of F for an assignment or even for the entire course, depending on the nature of the infraction. Cases will also be reported to the Office of the CAS Dean (and also the Dean of the student’s school, if it is not CAS), which may impose more severe sanctions appropriate to the circumstances.

ASSIGNMENTS: The chief work of the seminar is the close reading and analysis of the three poems. Readings from these texts will average 60-100 pages a week, and it is very important not to fall behind, since it will be difficult to catch up. In addition, since this is a research-intensive course, students will develop their own scholarly bibliographies and read those books and articles as well. There will be two examinations, a midterm and a final. In addition, students will write three papers (together totaling at least 20 pages) of increasing depth and complexity, relying on their own reading of the poems and of relevant scholarly literature. The instructor will share possible paper topics with the class, and will also work individually with students who wish to come up with a different topic. Finally, there will be opportunities for students to give individual or group oral reports and to lead class discussions.

TEXTS: The following translations will be available at the NYU Bookstore. While you may have access to other translations, you should be aware that class discussions will refer to specific pages in these texts:
- Richmond Lattimore (trans.), *The Iliad of Homer* (U.Chicago)
- Allen Mandelbaum (trans.), *The Aeneid of Virgil* (Bantam)
- Stanley Lombardo (trans.), *Dante Inferno* (Hackett)

[continued on p. 3]
PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE OF CLASSES (all Tuesdays):

9/8  Introductory class: no prior reading assignment
     Course overview, expectations, and logistics
     Historical and literary background; working from translations

9/15  Introduction to research: online resources and techniques
       Prof. W. Gerald Heverly, NYU Libraries
       *Odyssey*, Books 1-6

9/22  *Odyssey*, Books 7-12

9/29  *Odyssey*, Books 13-18

10/6  *Odyssey*, Books 19-24
       PAPER #1 IS DUE

10/13  *Aeneid*, Books 1-3

10/20  *Aeneid*, Books 4-6

10/27  MIDTERM EXAMINATION (one hour)
       *Aeneid*, Books 7-9

11/3  *Aeneid*, Books 10-12
       PAPER #2 IS DUE

11/10  *Inferno*, Cantos 1-7

11/17  *Inferno*, Cantos 8-16

11/24  *Inferno*, Cantos 17-25

12/1  *Inferno*, Cantos 26-33
       PAPER #3 IS DUE

12/8  Catch-up, conclusion, and review

TBD  FINAL EXAM (two hours)