Latin 204A
Vergil’s Italy and the Coming of Rome: Reading Aeneid Books 5-8
Winter 2016

The challenge of geocriticism of modern literature is to explore imagined and real geographies and to discover how fictive imaginations interact and meaningfully shape our actual worlds and physical spaces (Prieto 2011). This Latin seminar aims to apply this theoretical approach to Vergil’s Aeneid and to examine how the epic poet’s image of Italy and promise of Rome engages with and contributes to the cultural ideologies of an emergent Augustan Principate and world empire. What exactly did Italy mean to Vergil and readers of the Roman national epic? Was it merely a verbal signifier of collected geographies and peoples? Or, was it instead a new concept of cultural, ethnic, even political unity? What kind of concept, and whose?

Recent scholarship (Ando 2002, Reed 2007, and Fletcher 2014) has asked these and similar questions but the topic remains a fascinating and important approach to understanding the Aeneid. Our line of inquiry will be both interdisciplinary (literature, history, numismatics and architecture) and traditional. I propose a close reading of four books of the Aeneid as a unit. The richness and complexity of the poem’s architecture, its symmetry, contrast, and variety, have always invited readers to discover new methods of appreciating the cultural poetics and aesthetics of the Augustan epic. While critics have long emphasized the Homeric halves of the Aeneid’s structure, i.e. the Odyssey of the hero’s wanderings (Books 1-6) and the Iliad of the war in Italy (Books 7-12), a tripartite arrangement of the epic is also attractive, marking off meaningful thematic shifts of geography, character, and action. The Aeneid as trilogy, as George E. Duckworth first interpreted it in 1957, highlights the tragic stories of Carthage, Dido and love (Books 1-4) at the opening and Italy, Turnus and war (Books 9-12) at the closure of the epic. The middle section (Books 5-8), he judged in contrast, acts chiefly as transition, a dramatic interlude of light between darkness, happiness between grief, peace between conflict. But this powerfully central section also introduces the geographies and cultures of Vergil’s Italy, imagined and real, where overlapping scenes of promise, warning, ignorance and dire revelation shape the prophecy of the coming of Rome. Vergil’s dependence upon Homer is conspicuous in these books. The funeral games of Anchises, the underworld journey and parade of heroes, the catalogue of Italians, and shield of Aeneas evoke bold reworkings of the Greek epic material, but each of these passages, one following the other in succeeding books, embody the most vigorously Roman aspects of Vergil’s poem. Two main inquiries will guide the seminar: (1) what are the geo poetic features of Vergil’s Italy that Aeneas encounters upon travels to Sicily, Cumae and after his arrival in Latium and (2) how much of Augustan Rome, its foundation of civil wars, imperial architecture and spectacle, and political figures, fashion these cultural images. Along the way, we may stop to digress on other topics such as the marvelous and monstrous in the Aeneid, the physical space of Vergil’s world (Tiber, hills and plains), the archaeology of early Italy, and future paths and directions for Vergilian scholarship.
The format of the seminar will consist of weekly close readings of the four books, analysis of selected passages, discussion of pertinent scholarship and class reports (both formal and informal) on larger topics of study. All seminar participants will be asked to lead class discussion in three ways throughout the quarter: (1) explication of a passage; (2) review of a recent book on Vergilian scholarship (those by Reed, Fletcher, and Seider are recommended); and (3) presentation on a selected topic. Students who opt to take the course for 2 units will be required to take the two translation exams on Books 5-6 and 7-8, respectively and give small mini-reports, but not write a seminar paper or give a final presentation.

One of the seminar’s primary aims will be a one-page abstract of a talk that may be submitted for a conference. The final class (and perhaps the exam period of finals week depending upon class size) will feature 20-minute “highlight” presentations of the seminar paper. The seminar paper (8-10 pages) will constitute an initial draft of this proposed talk.

**Course Assessment and Grading:**

- Class Reports (Analysis of Text, Book Review, and Topic Report) 30%
- Translation Exams (2) 20%
- One-Page Abstract (ca. 850 words) 10%
- Seminar Conference Presentation (20-minutes) 10%
- Seminar Paper (8-10 pages) 30%

**Commentaries**


**syllabus**

**Week 1**

- JAN 8   No Class

**Week 2**

- JAN 15  Introduction: Geocriticism
  - Vergil, Augustus and Italy
  - Games for Anchises

  **Text:**  *Vergil Aeneid* 5.1-607.
  **Readings:** Duckworth 1957; Putnam 1962; Galinsky 1968; Farrell 1999; Ando 2002.

**Week 3**

- JAN 22  Ships, Sleep and Palinurus

  **Text:**  *Vergil Aeneid* 5.608-end.
Week 4
JAN 29
The Sibyl and Cumae


Week 5
FEB 4
Lecture by Professor Joseph Farrell (University of Pennsylvania)
FEB 5
The Underworld and the Parade of Heroes


Week 6
FEB 12
The Geographies of Italy

First Translation Exam (*to be arranged*)

Week 7
FEB 19
The Catalogue of Italians


Week 8
FEB 26
Aeneas and Evander at the Site of Rome
Graduate Student Recruitment Week


Week 9
MAR 4
Rome on the Shield of Aeneas

Text: Vergil *Aeneid* 8.608-end.
Second Translation Exam

Week 10
MAR 11
Seminar Conference (Part I)
Select Bibliography


Fletcher, K. F. B. 2014. Finding Italy: Travel, Nation and Colonization in Vergil’s Aeneid. Ann Arbor, MI.


Syson, Antonia. 2013. Fama and Fiction in Vergil’s Aeneid. Columbus, OH.

