

Fall/Winter 2017-2018

AP/EN 4163 6.0A (Y)

Visionary Literature: From Dante to Bob Dylan

Course Director:

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Delivery Format:

Seminar

Time:

Thursdays 4:00-7:00pm

Description:

This course explores the visionary tradition in selected representative poets, prose writers, memoirists, and songwriters. The visionary element in literature is a often heretical tradition of ineffable experiences, trauma, trance, transcendental and metaphysical awareness, engagement, inspiration and speculation. Innovative techniques are often developed to express the apocalyptic or Beatrician moment. (Note: See the appendix of essential terms. This will help you to define these ideas.) Searching for forms of breakthrough to higher states of consciousness the poets and prose writers may explore alternative imaginative conditions through gnosticism, alchemy, hermetism, and kabbalah. These modes of consciousness often form a counter-tradition to official modes of academic study and to official religions. Writers often articulate a sense of transcendental pressures on their minds and sensibilities, and on their literary forms and expressions. The prophetic streak in writers can lead to proclamation and denunciation. We will be examining the nature of inspiration and what Hildegard von Bingen calls “greening”.

It is a thematic centre of this course that by studying these visionary traditions we will discover keys to imaginative literature. Prophetic traditions underscore the mythic, imaginative traditions of literature. Some literary artists may rest more comfortably in the dominant spiritual expressions of their day; others proceed to reinvent the contexts of inwardness and inspiration, often exploding both poetics and religious dogma, the social structures and repressive political and cultural systems, that they encountered. Writers driven towards finding ways of expressing the ineffable will often not fit into anything other than what they invent for themselves.

What are the words that identify the prophetic tradition? Trust, passion, wisdom, vision, stamina, eloquence, and the sparks of inspiration... However, these words are open to many levels of interpretation. The visionary tradition moves from Hildegard, Rumi, and Teresa of Avila, Dante through to Blake, Emily Bronte, Whitman, and Dickinson, and exists in fragmented inklings in Eliot, in occult twists in the ironic Yeats. It becomes masked, or deflected by ironies, in Kafka or Plath, and in Dylan and Joni Mitchell. It resurfaces reinvented in the Beats; sometimes in ironic or desperate contexts. The visionary tradition nevertheless persists in altered states.

Students are expected to come to class prepared for vigorous in discussions; and to be prepared to entertain challenging, often unusual, strands of metaphysical reflection.

Category: B
Area: 6
Period: N/A
Historical Requirement: N/A

Requirements: sent by professor

Reading List: ****The following is the sequence in which the works will be read or heard**

1. Hildegard von Bingen, *Selected Writings* (Penguin Classics)
2. Rumi, Selected Poetry, in *The Rumi Collection* (Shambala)
3. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (Riverhead)
4. Dante, *La Vita Nuova* (Penguin)
5. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Oxford)
6. Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford World's Classics)
7. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855 edition, in reprint)
8. Emily Dickinson, *Essential Dickinson* (Harper-Collins)
9. Arthur Rimbaud, *Season in Hell* (Intro. by Patti Smith)
10. HD (Hilda Doolittle) *Notes on Thought and Vision* (City Lights) and "Oread" (handout)
11. William Butler Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," "Byzantium", and "The Second Coming" (available on line; also on handouts). Selections from *A Vision* (handouts)
12. T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (Faber & Faber)
13. Franz Kafka, "Before the Law"; "The Hunger Artist" (stories available on line). Also *The Zuru Aphorisms* (Schocken)
14. Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* and "A Supermarket in California" (City Lights)
15. Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans* (Grove Press)
16. Sylvia Plath, "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus" in *Ariel* (Faber & Faber)
17. Paul Celan, "Psalm", "Envoi", and "Radix, Matrix" in *Selected Poems* (Norton)
18. Paulo Coelho, *Eleven Minutes* (Harper-Perennial)
19. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume 1* (Simon & Schuster); songs, "Like a Rolling Stone", "Desolation Row", "I Shall be Released"
20. Patti Smith, "Rimbaud" (poem) and *Just Kids* (Harper-Collins)
21. Joni Mitchell, "Woodstock" (song; lyric available on line)

Open To: Yr 4 Honours