Epic Classes, TT 2024

In Trinity Term 2024 there will be a total of eight hours’ Faculty teaching for the Epic Link paper, aimed at Classics & English undergraduates in their penultimate year (second of three, or third of four). This teaching will focus on a) the comparative aspects of the paper, and b) the compulsory translation comparison question on the exam. Your college tutors will separately arrange tutorials for this paper for you, which may also take place during this term, or may be or have been spread across other terms.

All lectures and classes will be held on Tuesdays, 2-3pm, in Trinity College, Teaching Room 5, except week 5, when the class will take place on Tuesday, 12-1pm, in Trinity College, Garden Room.

23 April Week 1 Epic from Homer to Dante (lecture) Gail Trimble
30 April Week 2 Introduction to English Epic (lecture) Diane Purkiss
7 May Week 3 Modern Epic from 1800 (lecture) Fiona Macintosh
14 May Week 4 Political identities Emma Greensmith
21 May (12pm) Week 5 Narrative technique Christopher Metcalf
28 May Week 6 Gender Diane Purkiss
4 June Week 7 Divine powers Matthew Robinson
11 June Week 8 Epic translation Diane Purkiss

Preparation will consist of reading the set texts in advance of the course, and further reading specified by the tutors for the classes in weeks 4-8, which will be sent out at least a week in advance of each class.

The Faculty set texts are as follows. You should have read all of these before the start of Trinity Term.

Homer, Odyssey and Iliad. The critical text is Monro & Allen’s OCT; for an English translation Lattimore’s is serviceable, but there are other good ones too.

Vergil, Aeneid. The critical text is Mynors’ OCT; you can use the Loeb translation for an English text, but there are many other good English translations as well.

Lucan, Pharsalia. The critical text is Housman’s Blackwell; you can use the Loeb for a translation. Susan Braund’s World’s Classics edition is worth consulting.

Milton, Paradise Lost. The best edition is Alistair Fowler’s 2nd edition for the Longman Annotated Poets series; ideally, you should own a copy of this, and mine its footnotes whenever you want to make a comment on a particular passage of PL. It will help with the compulsory commentary question.

Dryden. You should read The Aeneid, books 7, 8, 12 in Dryden’s translation. Other relevant epic material in Dryden is ‘MacFlecknoe’; ‘Preface to Ovid’s Epistles’, in The Poems of John Dryden, ed. Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 5 vols (Harlow, 1995-2005), i.376-91, esp. 384-90; and his responses to Paradise Lost: ‘Epigram’ (included in Fowler’s edition of PL, at 55); ‘The Authors Apology for Heroique Poetry; and Poetique Licence’, preface to The State of Innocence (1677), Dryden’s libretto for an opera based on PL, in vol. XII of the Works; and the preface to Sylva.

Pope. You should look at Pope’s translations of the Iliad and Odyssey, especially for their paratextual materials. Please also read The Rape of the Lock; Peri Bathous, or, The Art of Sinking in Poetry, chapter XV: ‘A Receipt to make an Epic Poem’; The Dunciad (the four-book variorum, at least book I).

Individual tutors for individual classes may wish to propose further reading from other epics, and you shouldn’t confine your own reading to the set texts, in consultation with your college tutors.
Some Suggestions for Further Reading

General Reading on Epic:

Erich Auerbach, ‘Odysseus’s Scar’, in Mimesis (originally 1953; many editions since)
Ulrich Broicher, The Rise and Fall of the Mock-Heroic Poem (Cambridge, 1990)
-----, Imitating Authors. Plato to Futurity (Oxford, 2019) [substantially engaged with Milton and imitation]
Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie (eds), The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature. Volume 2: 1558-1660 (Oxford, 2015) [good general resource; esp. relevant are naturally the sections on epic poetry]
Denis Feeney, The Gods in Epic (Oxford, 1991) [look for relevant sections; esp. 129–87 as background reading for the Aeneid]
Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood (eds.), Homer in the Twentieth Century: Between World Literature and Western Canon (Oxford, 2007) [lots of suggestive material, as well as good introductions; also a ch. on Joyce]
Philip Hardie, The Epic Successors of Virgil (Cambridge, 1993)
W.R. Johnson, Darkness Visible (Berkeley, 1976)
C.S. Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost (New York, 1961), 12-31
Nancy A. Mace, Henry Fielding’s Novels and the Classical Tradition (Newark, 1996), esp. ch. 3
Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell, Stephen Harrison, and Claire Kenward (eds), Epic Performances from the Middle Ages into the Twenty-First Century (Oxford, 2018)
David Norbrook, Writing the English Republic (Oxford, 1999), ch. 10: Paradise Lost and English Republicanism (excellent section on Lucan in the seventeenth century)
David Quint, Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton (Princeton, 1992)
Herbert F. Tucker, Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse 1790-1910 (Oxford, 2008) [esp. ch. 5, if you’re working on Byron]
Simone Weil, ‘The Iliad, or the Poem of Force’, available in various places, including several offprints and single editions in the Sackler and in the Bodleian. Worth reading in the edition War and the Iliad, which also contains an influential essay by Rachel Bespaloff.

On Epic Translation(s):

K.W. Gransden, Virgil in English (London, 1996)

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