**CL3435**

**Nature & the Supernatural in Latin Literature**

**Course leader**: Dr. Richard Hawley **Value**: 1 unit = 30 credits

**Course Delivery**: one hour plenary lecture + one hour seminar per week, taught over the first two terms, with the exam in third term.

**Course outline**

This course will look at how Latin authors (prose and verse) of the first century BC to the second century AD approached their natural and supernatural worlds. All texts will be studied in English translation. While many of the authors to be studied may have been influenced by Greek predecessors, they nevertheless present a uniquely Roman perspective on the worlds in which they lived.

Topics to be covered will include:

* Why do we have gods? Do they care about us? How do they communicate with mortals?
* Superstition, prodigies, omens, augury, dreams, ghosts
* Descriptions of nature: real and ideal
* Geographical description of the Roman world: where science meets politics
* How the physical world works: e.g. climate, earthquakes, lightning
* Animals weird and wonderful: science and pseudoscience
* Understanding the human body: e.g. disease, pharmacology, surgery

The texts we shall study will include some authors already familiar to you, such as Cicero, Livy, Vergil and Lucretius, and some more familiar only perhaps to viewers of *QI*, such as Seneca, Pomponius Mela, the Elder Pliny, Celsus and Solinus.

**Course Moodle page & handouts**

The Moodle page will not be available until just before the start of the academic year, when course registrations are finalised and College ‘rolls over’ the Moodle pages for the next intake.

The course page contains a large number of extra learning resources, including the secondary scholarship that you will be expected to read and think about each week for seminar discussion, so you won’t need to access it in the library.

**The page also includes all the lecture handouts and seminar worksheets**: **you will be expected to access these electronically or to bring along your own printed hard copies to lectures and seminars**. Paper copies will not be distributed in class. This is in line with the College’s sustainability policy.

**Assessment**

* The course will require two essays of 2500-3000 words each, one submitted per term: the better contributes 20% towards the course mark, but both must be submitted to pass the coursework requirement.
* The remaining 80% is taken from one three-hour exam in Summer Term.

**Essential text**

You will need to have this translation of Pliny the Elder for the start of the Spring Term, when we shall spend most of term studying his work in detail: J. Healy (trans.) *Pliny the Elder. Natural History: a selection*, Penguin 1991.

A good, recent guide to the kinds of issues we shall consider: D. Lehoux *What did the Romans know? An inquiry into science and worldmaking*, 2012

Slightly more specialised, but still very useful for this course: R. French *Ancient Natural History: Histories of Nature*, 1994

**Suggested vacation work**

If you would like to read ahead in some key ancient authors that we’ll be using for the course, apart from the above, you could browse

* Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* (we’ll use the translation in Oxford *World’s Classics* series by R. Melville, D. & P. Fowler, 2008)
* Vergil *Eclogues* and *Georgics* (available in many translations)
* Cicero *On the nature of the gods* (we’ll use the translation in the Oxford *World’s Classics* series by P.G. Walsh, 1998)

Whatever ancient text you decide to read, start thinking about the following kinds of issues:

* What is the author’s attitude to nature and aspects of nature?
* What genre is the text? What are its aims? How do these affect its representation of nature?
* What response does the author seek from his reader? What kind of relationship with them is he seeking to create?
* Who are the desired readers? What might be their interests, social class, and educational background?
* What earlier (Greek or Roman) influences might be at work here? How is the author ‘Romanising’ them?
* Do the text comment on the author’s contemporary society? If so, how, and what is its tone? How does its treatment of nature/the supernatural fit in?

If you have any queries, please do email me. Otherwise I look forward to seeing you in the autumn.

RGH 5/2017