

LS 800 - REFLECTIONS ON REASON AND PASSION, I

Fall 2025

Wednesdays, 6:30 - 9:20 on Zoom

Dr. Emily O'Brien

COURSE DESCRIPTION

LS 800 invites you to explore and reflect on the human condition through the twin lenses of reason and passion. Beginning in ancient Greece, our course traces how these two concepts have shaped understandings of human nature, society and the good life well into the sixteenth century, and, in so doing, have left a lasting imprint on the philosophical, literary, and artistic traditions of the Western world. Our selection of readings aims to capture the voices of both men and women from ancient Greece and Rome, medieval Europe, and the Italian Renaissance. Over the course of the semester, we will complement these sources with occasional and brief excerpts from other literary and philosophical traditions (e.g., Chinese philosophy, Sufi poetry) and with in-class conversations about selected works of art.

As the introductory course to the GLS program, LS 800 is designed to give you a foundation for the years ahead. Weekly in-class seminars will offer you regular opportunities for leading and guiding discussion, and in a variety of ways. Written assignments will introduce you to the wide range of writing that you will encounter both in your coursework and in the MA project option (e.g., argument-based papers, creative writing, close-reading and analysis of both prose and poetry).

OPTIONAL SUMMER INTRODUCTORY SEMINAR

It has been a tradition in GLS to offer incoming students an optional introductory seminar in the second half of August (tentatively scheduled this year for August 19th). This is a chance for you to meet one another and to get a first taste of what it's like to discuss a text as a group. Our seminar will focus on the remarkable exchange of letters between the twelfth-century philosopher Peter Abelard and his student and lover Heloise. Materials will be distributed via email by August 1st.

OPTIONAL IN-PERSON WEEKEND

For those of you residing in the Lower Mainland or able to travel to Vancouver, we will be having an optional in-person weekend in Week 7 of the semester (Friday, October 17th and Saturday, October 18th). The weekend will begin with a group dinner on Friday evening near SFU's Harbour Centre campus, followed by a discussion in the GLS Seminar Room (or Harbour Centre classroom) about the week's assigned reading. We will reconvene on Saturday morning to continue our discussion and wrap-up in the early afternoon after lunch. Those of you unable to attend the in-person weekend seminar will meet for a discussion on Zoom on Sunday, October 19th, 6:30 – 9:00p.m. **(Note that these options are in lieu of the Wednesday evening seminar class this week.)**

ASSIGNMENTS

Seminar participation (+ discussion posts)	25%
In-class presentation	10%
Close-reading and analysis assignment	15%
Argument-based paper	25%
Final project	25%

A fuller description of these assignments, together with due dates, will be circulated in the first week of classes.

REQUIRED TEXTS

A note on the editions and translations assigned for this course

There are many different English translations available for almost every text we'll be reading in LS 800. Some of these translations are just as good as the ones I've selected, but others are problematic. It may simply be that the English is outdated (that's very common in online editions). But in other cases, it's the quality of the translation itself that's questionable; and it's often difficult to discern how and where that translation falls short. One reason why I've assigned specific editions of our readings is to get around these obstacles: it's a way of ensuring that we're all working with reputable editions and solid, accessible translations. And quality and accessibility are essential when you're doing graduate-level work. It's also much easier to follow and to contribute to seminar discussion if you're using the same edition of a text as everyone else in the class. And

finally, there's a specific assignment in LS 800 (in-class presentation) that makes having the same edition essential.

There are two exceptions to this requirement: you'll see on the course outline that I've given you the choice of two different (and very good) translations for Dante's *Inferno* and Machiavelli's *Prince*. In the case of these texts, we will be spending some time discussing how the original Italian has been rendered differently in English, and so it's important that we work with different translations of these works.

If you have any difficulty finding any of the editions on the booklist below, or if it turns out that something you've ordered won't arrive before we discuss it, please get in touch with me so that we can find a solution together.

**** = electronic copy available through the SFU library**

Plato, *Phaedrus*

Trans. Christopher Rowe. Penguin Classics, 2005.
ISBN 978-0140449747

****Euripides, *Medea***

Trans. Michael Collier. Oxford University Press, 2006.
ISBN 9780195145663

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Sophocles 1: Antigone, Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus. Trans. Mark Griffin, Glenn Most, David Grene, and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago University Press, 3rd edition, 2013.
ISBN 978-0226311517

OR

Sophocles, Greek Tragedies 1: Aeschylus: Agamemnon, Prometheus Bound; Sophocles: Oedipus the King, Antigone; Euripides: Hippolytus. 3rd edition. Trans. Mark Griffin, Glenn Most, David Grene, and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago University Press, 3rd edition, 2013.
ISBN 978-0226035284

Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*

Trans. David Ross. Oxford University Press (Oxford World's Classics), 2009.
ISBN 978-0199213610

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Trans. Stephanie McCarter. Penguin Classics, 2022.
ISBN 978-0143134237

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Trans. Gregory Hays. Modern Library, revised edition, 2003.
ISBN 9780812968255

Augustine, *Confessions*

Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford, 2008.
ISBN 978-0199537822

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*

Trans. Victor (V.E.) Watts. Penguin Classics, revised edition, 2000.
ISBN 9780140447804

****Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart***

Trans. Burton Raffel. Yale University Press, 1997.
ISBN 978-0300071214

Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*

Inferno. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. Penguin, Random House/Bantam Classics, 1982.
ISBN 978-0553213393

OR

****Dante's *Inferno*. *The Indiana Critical Edition***. Trans. Mark Musa. Indiana University Press, 1995.

ISBN 978-0253209306

Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*

Trans. G. H. McWilliam. Penguin Classics, 2nd revised edition, 2003.
ISBN 9780140449303

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

****Trans. Peter Bondanella. Oxford University Press (Oxford World's Classics), 2008.**
ISBN 978-0199535699

OR

Trans. George Bull. Penguin Classics, reissue edition, 2003.
ISBN 978-0140449150

ADDITIONAL READINGS - distributed as PDFs or as links to online texts

Sappho, poetry - selections

Ovid, *Heroides* - selections

Seneca, "On Tranquillity of Mind"; "On the Shortness of Life"

Marie de France, *Lais* - selections

Francesco Petrarca – selected letters

Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, *The Tale of Two Lovers*

Vittoria Colonna, poetry - selections

Francesco Guicciardini, *Maxims and Reflections* - selections

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

**August 19 ** (to be confirmed)	<u>Optional</u> introductory seminar <i>The Letters of Abelard and Heloise</i> (distributed by August 1 st)
Week 1 - September 3	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i> Sappho, selected poetry
Week 2 - September 10	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i> Euripides, <i>Medea</i>
Week 3 - September 17	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (selections)
Week 4 - September 24	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> (selections) <i>Heroides</i> (selections)

Week 5 - October 1	Seneca, "On Tranquillity of Mind"; "On the Shortness of Life"
Week 6 - October 8	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i>
Week 7 - October 17/18 or 19	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> Optional in-person weekend: dinner + discussion on Oct. 17 + discussion Oct. 18; OR Zoom seminar evening on Oct. 19
Week 8 - October 22	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>
Week 9 - October 29	Chrétien de Troyes, <i>Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart</i> Marie de France, <i>Lais</i> (selections)
Week 10 - November 5	Dante Alighieri, <i>Inferno</i>
Week 11 - November 12	Giovanni Boccaccio, <i>The Decameron</i> (selections) Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch), selected letters
Week 12 - November 19	Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pius II), <i>The Tale of Two Lovers</i> Vittoria Colonna, poetry (selections)
Week 13 - November 26	Niccolò Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> Francesco Guicciardini, <i>Maxims and Reflections</i> (selections)