

**LS 811 – TRADITION AND MODERNITY:
THE CITY OF ROME IN THE WESTERN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION
FALL 2025**

Mondays, 6:30 – 9:20 pm; Harbour Centre Campus

**Dr. Emily O'Brien
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Rome – the eternal city, *caput mundi* and the place where all roads lead. This course explores the extraordinary power this city has exercised over the intellectual culture of the West. We begin our exploration by studying a series of ancient, medieval and Renaissance texts (including the works of Virgil, Livy, Ovid, and Augustine) that shaped in fundamental ways the visions and experiences of later authors. We will spend the bulk of the course in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, examining works by some of Europe and America's most celebrated intellectuals (Goethe, the Shelleys, Byron, Twain, Dickens, and Wilde, among others). In the final weeks, we will move into the twentieth century and complement a selection of short stories (Moravia, Wharton, Updike) with a monumental film from the Italian neorealist tradition (Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*). The course concludes in Rome of today with the perspectives of its immigrant communities (Lakhous, Lahiri). To help give focus to this chronologically wide-ranging course, we will give particular (though not exclusive) attention to examining how our texts speak to the following six themes and, in the process, to one another:

- (1) Rome as a physical space (including architecture and the interaction between nature and the man-made environment)
- (2) War, violence and destruction
- (3) The spiritual landscapes of Rome and the city as a site of self-discovery
- (4) Art – its purpose, power and meanings
- (5) Time and history, tradition and modernity
- (6) Migration and the immigrant experience of Rome

Weekly class meetings will be dedicated to discussing assigned readings and analyzing related works of art and architecture. Brief background lectures will occasionally preface class discussions or be recorded and posted to Canvas.

BOOKLIST

Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*.

Recommended edition: Penguin Classics, 1998. ISBN-13: 987-0140434316 (but any edition will do).

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Italian Journey*.

Penguin Classics. Reissue edition, 1992. ISBN-13: 987-0140442335

Amara Lakhous, *The Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*.

Europa editions, 2008.

ISBN: 978-1609457228

Jhumpa Lahiri, *Roman Stories*.

Knopf, 2023.

ISBN: 978-0593536322

ASSIGNMENTS

Seminar participation	25%
In-class presentation	10%
Reflections and short analyses	35%
Final Project	30%