

**LAT240 (W11): Project 4**     *Subject presentations Feb. 28/Mar. 2; ca. 6 pp. due Mar. 11.*

The purpose of this project is to give you a fun way to demonstrate your nuanced grasp of Virgil's poetic techniques: by *applying* it to something with some interesting connections to the poetry of the *Aeneid*, but not too obviously linked to Virgil.

**The main requirement of the project** is to cite Virgil's poem *specifically* and *on every point* to support how what you're creating or analyzing is interestingly Virgilian (or un-Virgilian). This must **not** be in the form of simply pointing out an obvious connection/similarity. Instead you should do a **close reading** to show *how* Virgil and your other text create meaning. For example, "The poet uses nature similes to heighten the description of love, just like Virgil comparing Dido to a doe struck by an arrow" **is lame**, but a point-by-point analysis of how the images in the gorgeous wilderness footage of the Hollywood love tragedy can be taken figuratively to suggest a complex vision of the love situation similar in detail to some of what Virgil communicates in the points of his simile (which you also explain) **is cool**.

By "poetic techniques" we mean, for example

- everything analyzed in the Critical reports—these were all about noticing Virgil's particular way of constructing meaning in his poetry. Any meaning that could be analyzed by those critical techniques is automatically the kind of poetic construction of meaning you want to explore in this project (either by seeing how it works in a non-Virgilian text, or by applying it yourself to a non-Virgilian subject);
- What is Virgil's distinctive approach to the various subjects that have always inspired artists? How does he approach and tell about war? Politics? Happiness and unhappiness? History? Love? Loss and construction of personal and national identity? Etc.
- How does Virgil artfully select the details—events, images, etc.—to focus on for his purposes?
- How does Virgil's figurative imagination work (similes, etc.)?
- How does Virgil control the tone, rhythm, pace, montage, etc. of his narrative, and to what poetic ends?
- How does Virgil create a perspective that gives the matter of his poem the meaning he wants the reader/hearer to attach to it?
- What are all the techniques that go into creating the famous Virgilian pathos, the keen understanding and presentation of human suffering and difficulties?

Choose one of these options:

1. **Comparative option.** What Virgilian and interestingly un-Virgilian techniques construct meaning in some other work of literature/narrative/film?
2. **Creative option.** You are interested in what the Virgilian approach would be to something outside of literature—current events, natural phenomena, history, legend, or your own imagined scenario of ambition, social breakdown, whatever. (Note: You are analyzing what a Virgilian effect would be, not what an amusing travesty would look like; resist the temptation to do *mock epic*.) It is up to you whether you want to compose an extensive original text, or develop in a more analytic voice how each element would be treated (even then, you should at least have several illustrative examples of what the finished product would look like).

## What if I am stumped about what comparison text/nonliterary subject to study?

First, a tip:

- It might be better to start with your favorite images and descriptions in Virgil. It will be easier to answer the question “What else do I know that might speak this way work this way?” than to pick the comparison text first and then start asking, “What’s in the *Aeneid* like this?”

War movies are good to consider: *The Thin Red Line* (1998 version), *Platoon*, etc. In general, movies are good because, while you have some text (the script) to consider, you have to make yourself think about how the visual elements of film (not just the images, but the perspectives, order, proportion of different shots, etc.) correspond to Virgil’s “lens” on his subject. **If** you actually defend in detail **how** Virgil’s poetry creates some similar effects, then you’ve definitely cleared the interpretive bar.

It could also be productive to think of some of your favorite **serious** films in other genres. For example, tragic love stories, stories of struggle (vs. weather, disease, etc.), questing stories, and so on. The very distance from the obvious subject of the *Aeneid* (e.g. war) could encourage you to go deeper to explain how Virgilian pathos, disclosure of human motivation, etc., work.

In literature, for similar reasons to what I’ve expressed above about film, it is probably better to go to something serious—memoir, novel—that is *not* part of the “Virgilian tradition” in literature. For example, I have never read Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, but it’s obvious from any potted summary (see Wikipedia) that it could be done very successfully (and this has the advantage of having shorter stories). What serious novels or memoirs have you read?

We can also turn to journalism that tries to tell real human stories: see, for example, such lists as <http://longform.org/> and <http://trueslant.com/connorfriedersdorf/2010/02/17/the-best-of-journalism-2009/>. Of course, many of the stories linked there would be ridiculous to seek a Virgilian angle on! But many may be appropriate. Note that you could use this as source for either of the two options: if the journalistic stories are ambitious enough to establish a tone, significance, etc., then you can analyze it as the comparison text. Alternatively, you can take it as the supply of facts for the creative option.

If you’re sure you want to do something truly epic and Virgilian (*Paradise Lost*, *The Faerie Queene*), you must be very careful: you are *not* looking for the passages that too obviously imitate Virgil, but for ones that treat their own subject.

## Books to request in a hurry if you’d like to consider using them

“La terra promessa” in *Selected Poems of Giuseppe Ungaretti* (1975), request from Connect-NY

*Master Vergil: An Anthology of Poems in English on Vergil and Vergilian Themes* (1930), request from Connect-NY