

Professor Elaine Scarry
Freshman Seminar 39n The Call of Beauty
Monday 4-6

Philosophers, poets, scientists, and mathematicians have meditated on the nature and power of beauty. Beauty calls on us to educate ourselves, but also calls on us to repair the injuries of the world. Readings include Plato and Sappho; Aquinas and Lady Murasaki ; Rilke and Maya Lin today. We will study aspects of beauty such as color (e.g. “The Lady and the Unicorn” tapestries depicting the five senses) and symmetry (a book on symmetry by astrophysicist Mario Livio). Topics include the beauty of earth (e.g. the writings of environmentalist Rachel Carson) and the beauty of faces (Homer on Helen, Seamus Heaney on an unnamed soldier).

Sequence of Readings

Week 1: Introduction and overview

1/26 Philosophic and artistic accounts of beauty from Plato to the present

Part One Early Reflections on Beauty

Week 2 Plato *Phaedrus*

2/2 Sappho “Cricket” Barnard translation, #7
“Without warning” Barnard #44

Week 3 Plato *Symposium*

2/9 Sappho “To Dica” Barnard #19
“I have had not one word from her” Barnard # 42

February 16 No class Presidents’ Day

Week 4 Sappho trans. Mary Barnard #1, 3, 12, 17, 29, 34, 39, 45, 50, 53, 94, 96, 118

2/23 Plato *Greater Hippias* (brief dialogue of uncertain authorship: 8 pages)

Week 5 Symmetry

3/2 Mario Livio *The Equation that Couldn’t be Solved: How Mathematical Genius
Discovered the Language of Symmetry* Chapters 1, 2, 6
Augustine *De Musica* excerpt 15 pages

Part Two

The Medieval Passion for Beauty

Week 6 Color

3/9

Bernard Guineau, Francois Delemare *Colors: The Story of Dyes and Pigments* Especially Chapter 3: "Colors in the Middle Ages" pp. 67-96 (book on reserve and chapter excerpt)

View on line: Six Tapestries "The Lady and the Unicorn"
Taste, Sight, Touch, Smell, Hearing, and "To My Only Desire" Musée nationale du Moyen Âge. Paris

http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/ang/pages/page_id18120_u112.htm

Rilke 3 poems "Blue Hydrangea," "Pink Hydrangea," "Bowl of Roses"

Spring Recess March 14 - 21

Week 7: The Five Senses

3/23

View a second time: The Lady and the Unicorn (and the Five Senses)

Reading: Aquinas Selections from *Summa Theologica*

(45 pages Course Reader)

I. 1.9 on Metaphor; I.5.4 on Goodness, and the relation of
Beauty to Goodness; I. 13. 1-12 Naming God; I.39. 8
On the Distribution of Divine Attributes to the 3
the Trinity; I.76. 5 and 8 on Relation of Body and
Human Beings: is Soul in Some Body Parts More
Others?; I.91.3 and 4; I.92.1-4; I.93. 1-9 On Men
Women and whether Man is an Image or
I. 102. 1-4 "Of Man's Abode, Which is

Persons of
Soul in
than
and
Likeness of God;
Paradise"

Week 8: Lady Murasaki *Tale of Genji* (10th century Japan)
3/30 Arthur Waley translation
Selected chapters in Course Reader (70 pages)

Part Three

Beauty and the Pact of Aliveness

Week 9: Film Andy Goldsworthy *Rivers and Tides* (dir. Thomas Reidelsheimer, time
4/6 to be arranged. Also available on youtube).

Helen Keller "Three Days to See" (1933) *Atlantic* online.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/33jan/keller.htm>
Heaney "Mud Vision"

Week 10 Beauty of Persons
4/13 Review accounts of beautiful persons in Plato, Aquinas, Sappho, Murasaki

Readings: in Course Reader (30 pages)
Marquez "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World"
Salinger Description of Zooey in *Franny and Zooey*
Heaney "Crossings xxxiv"
Helen of Troy Homer, Herodotus

Viewing: Photographs from Sebastiao Salgado *Migrations* and
Migrations: The Children

Week 11 The Beauty of Earth
4/20

Reading:
Rachel Carson *Silent Spring* with emphasis on chapters "Elixirs of
Death," "Surface Waters and Underground Seas,"
"Earth's Green Mantle"
Peter Manus, "One Hundred Years of Green: A Legal Perspective on Three

Twentieth Century Nature Philosophers," 59 *University of Pittsburgh Law Review* (Spring, 1998), 557-587.

Five Poems: Wordsworth, "I wandered lonely as a cloud,"
Keats "Ode to Autumn"
Hopkins "The Woodlark"
Yeats "Wild Swans at Coole"
Heaney "St. Kevin and the Blackbird,"

Week 12 Voices, Names, Faces

4/27

Viewing: *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*, dir. Frieda Lee Mock, 83 min., Docurama
Saint-Gaudens, *Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Regiment*, Boston Common

Reading: 3 speeches

Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address November 19, 1863

John F. Kennedy, "Peace Speech," June 10, 1963

Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream" August 28, 1963

Requirements:

1) Seminar attendance and participation

2) Short papers: 1-page response paper every week.

5 times during semester, a two-page response paper (instead of the usual one page) to the week's reading. Please do the first paper in either week 2 or week 3.

Please hand in weekly papers 10 a.m Monday morning

3) Final Paper: 5-7-pages May 7

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