

# ROMAN EPIC



**The University of Western Ontario  
Classical Studies 3150F, Fall 2026  
Dr. Kyle Gervais**

## INSTRUCTOR

Hello! I'll be your instructor for this course. I moved to UWO in 2014 after completing my Ph.D. in Latin literature at Otago University in New Zealand. Before that, I studied at Queen's (that other great university in Ontario), where I was planning to be a dentist until I took one particularly good Introductory Latin course. In my research I focus on Roman epic poetry such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae*, and especially Statius' *Thebaid* (a fantastically dark poem about the sons of Oedipus, who kill each other in a war for their father's throne). I also work on some medieval poetry that adapts the Greco-Roman mythology of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to a medieval Christian audience. I'm particularly interested in how we (that means you and I) respond to the ancient world and its literature; I hope we'll be able to learn some things about that this year. Teaching is both my job and my pleasure, so please contact me in or out of class if you have any questions or thoughts about Latin or the ancient world in general.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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Email: [kgervai2@uwo.ca](mailto:kgervai2@uwo.ca)

Office Hours: by appointment, or just drop by and see if I'm in

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will read some of the most ambitious and enduring literature of the Roman empire: the epic poems of Vergil, Ovid, and Statius. These poets, writing in times of change and conflict in the empire's first century, thought and spoke about their contemporary worlds by turning to Graeco-Roman myth, including the stories of Achilles, Aeneas, Perseus, Orpheus and Eurydice, and Hades and Persephone. We'll explore in particular how the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses* constitute two contrasting poetic visions from the "Golden Age" of Augustan literature, and a little bit about how these visions were developed in later periods. We'll read each epic in modern English translations by contemporary poets. Some issues we'll pay attention to in are: the contemporary relevance of the epics; the common features of the epic genre; the depiction of men and women in epic; the role of family, religion, and politics; the function of violence; the allusive links between the epics; the reception of Roman epic in later time periods; and the difficulty of translating them into English.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this course I expect you will have gained or improved:

- an appreciation of Latin epic poems and literary themes
- knowledge of various issues important to modern Latin literary criticism
- a basic knowledge of Roman culture
- skill in scholarly research and writing

- skill in analyzing both ancient literature and modern arguments about that literature
- organized study habits

## REQUIRED TEXTS

I have ordered the three required texts for the UWO bookstore. You may obtain these texts however you wish, but it is your responsibility to get them. If you choose to obtain these texts from somewhere other than the UWO bookstore, please make sure you get the correct translation (there are many different translations of each of these poems): if in doubt, search by ISBN number.

Virgil. *The Aeneid*. Sarah Ruden (translator) and Susanna Braund (introduction, notes). Yale University Press. 2021. ISBN: 0300240104. \$16  
- make sure to get the revised edition, published in 2021 (not the original 2009 edition)

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Stanley Lombardo (translator) and W. R. Johnson (introduction). Hackett Publishing Company. 2010. ISBN: 1603843078. \$22

Statius. *Achilleid*. Stanley Lombardo (translator) and Peter Heslin (introduction). Hackett Publishing Company. 2015. ISBN: 1624664067. \$14

## Readings

Each week I'll ask you to read two or three books of the epic poem that we'll be discussing (ancient epics were divided into "books" instead of chapters). Our in-class discussion of these readings will often be based on an article or book chapter written by a modern scholar; although I won't require you to read these secondary materials or test you on them, I will make them available electronically. Reading them will increase your appreciation of the poems we study, familiarize you with Latin literary scholarship, and potentially help you develop your essay.

## ASSESSMENT

- 20% Participation
- 10% Short presentation
- 20% One in-class short answer test
- 10% Short essay
- 40% Final exam (short answer and essay)

## CAN I HELP?

It's important to me that you meet your goals in this course, and I'm eager to help either in or out of class with any academic matters. Moreover, I'm especially aware that there are many challenges (physical, cognitive, emotional, or personal) that can prevent students from performing to their full

potential. In some cases, I may be able to make accommodations; in some cases, formal accommodations through your Academic Counsellor or Accessible Education will be the right decision. No matter how big or small the problem, the sooner you speak to me (or the appropriate person), the more likely it is that we'll be able to find a good solution.