

The Age of Nero



The University of Western Ontario

Latin 9902A, Fall 2024

Randall Pogorzelski

Welcome

Welcome to “The Age of Nero!” In this course we’re going to read some selections of Neronian literature in Latin as well as some historical and interpretive secondary material. We’ll try to strike the right balance between working on Latin language skills and developing research projects.

Instructor



My name is Randall Pogorzelski, and I will be your instructor for this course. Please call me Randy. I’ve been working in Western’s Department of Classical Studies since 2011. Before I came to Western, I was a Lecturer at Scripps College in Claremont, California, at the University of California, Irvine, and at the University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales. I teach mostly classical Latin language and literature courses, but I also have some experience with Greek language and literature courses as well as ancient history courses. My research focus is on the poetry of the early Roman Empire, most especially Virgil and Lucan. I also have an interest in the use of classical literature and myth in modern literature and culture. I wrote my Ph.D. thesis at the University of California, Santa Barbara on Virgil and James Joyce, and I’ve taught courses including texts like *Watchmen* and *Frankenstein*. There are few things I enjoy more than talking about classical literature and history, so please feel free to contact me any time with questions about the course or about ancient Greece and Rome in general.

Contact

Email (rpogorze@uwo.ca) is the best way to get in touch with me, but I’m also happy to talk in person or by Zoom. Sometimes talking about things is easier and better than trying to type everything. I’m in my office (Lawson Hall 3205B) a lot, so feel free to drop by any time. Or you can send me an email and we can set up a time for a chat.

Structure of the Course

For most of the semester, this course will have a regular, weekly structure. For each week there will be a reading assignment of a primary (i.e., ancient) text and a secondary (i.e., scholarly) text. We will begin each class meeting with a 20-minute translation quiz. The quiz will ask you to translate a passage from the assigned reading for the week. The quiz will be followed by a sight-reading exercise. I will distribute a short passage of Latin related to the assigned reading, but not from the assigned reading. We will all take 10 minutes to read the passage quietly without the use of any external materials. We will then go over the passage as a group. I won’t call on anyone and you will never have to hand in a translation of the sight-reading passage. The point is not to test you or embarrass anyone, but to encourage you to practice the skill of reading Latin at sight.

In class, I will not call on people to translate, but our class discussions will sometimes involve issues of morphology, syntax, vocabulary, meter, and/or textual variants. After the sight-reading exercise, our class discussions will be structured around brief, informal presentations. Each student will come to each class meeting with a three-to-five-minute presentation prepared. This presentation should be about any one aspect of the primary or secondary reading assignment. You don’t need to choose something you especially liked or didn’t like. Instead, you should choose something you found interesting. There will be time for discussion after each presentation, and after everyone has had a turn, there will be a chance for general discussion as well. Our class meetings will last for at least two hours, but not more than three hours. We will take a short break at some point in the middle.

In the last two weeks of class, instead of following our usual pattern, we’ll instead have a class

conference. Over the course of the semester, each student will develop and write a conference-style research paper, and in the last two weeks, everyone will present their paper as though we were at a conference. Presentations will be 15-20 minutes, and each presentation will be followed by 5-10 minutes of discussion. I have flipped a coin and used that to decide that the first half of the alphabet (by last name) will present in the final week (on December 2nd) and the second half of the alphabet (by last name) will present in the penultimate week (on November 25th).

Recommended Method for Translating

One of the primary aims of this course is for you to develop independence in your reading and translation of Latin, and that means you should develop habits that allow you to continue reading and enjoying Latin after this semester is over, even if you never take another Latin class again. The following method is what I recommend you do both to complete the assigned reading for the course and as you keep up your Latin skills independently after the course is over.

Step 1: Choose a short passage of a few lines. Let the punctuation guide you to a good stopping place, and don't feel like you need to choose a complete sentence. Just find someplace that looks like a good stopping place. As you get more advanced and comfortable reading Latin, you will want to select longer chunks, but for now five to ten lines is ideal.

Step 2: Read your passage on its own and try to translate it without the aid of any tools. No dictionaries, no commentaries, no parsing tools, no translations. Just spend some time seeing what you can get on your own. The more advanced and comfortable you are reading Latin, the more important this step is. Especially if you're a Ph.D. student, you'll want to read your passage several times through, really emphasizing this step. If you're an M.A. student and not yet super comfortable with assignments as long as the ones for this class, just give it a try, but don't stress about it too much.

Step 3: Use any tools you want except a translation. Look up the words you don't know in a dictionary. Identify the forms you're not sure about with a parsing tool. Read a commentary (or several) on the lines to get some help. Look up constructions you're unfamiliar with in a grammar book (e.g., if it's a condition and you can't identify which type, it's time to review your conditions).

Step 4: Look at a published translation to confirm that you've understood the passage correctly. It's important that you make a good-faith effort to complete steps 1-3 before doing this, but this step will help you to build confidence and independence. Once you're used to using a published translation to confirm or correct your own, you'll need a teacher a lot less.

Step 5: Write out a translation on a separate page or in a separate document, but not in smooth or stylish English. This translation should be in a kind of code that reminds you of the morphology and syntax. It should be more a set of detailed notes than a smooth translation.

Step 6: Repeat and review. Once you've written out your translation notes, move on to the next chunk of text, but after you've done a few chunks or completed the assignment, go back to the beginning and reread from a clean copy of the Latin, referring to your notes on a separate page when you need a hint. Do this review several times, with increasing intervals between review sessions. Our quizzes and exam are designed to encourage you to do this kind of review.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, you will be familiar with the history and literature of the Neronian period. You will understand the most important scholarly issues and debates surrounding the period and its leading authors. In some cases, you may make a substantive contribution to these debates.

You will have practiced and improved your ability to read Latin, gaining familiarity with the stylistic features of imperial Latin.

You will have practiced and developed your scholarly research and writing ability—an ability useful not only for professional scholars, but in a variety of careers.

You will have read, analyzed, and critiqued both primary and secondary sources, communicating your views orally and in writing. In the process you will have developed your critical reading and thinking skills as well as your oral and written communication skills.

You will have practiced public speaking in your presentation, which will be useful for future academics as practice for conferences and well as teaching. Public speaking skills are also useful in a variety of professions.

By practicing and advancing these skills, you will make studying classics in general and Latin literature in particular easier, increasing your enjoyment of reading Latin, discussing it, and writing about it. This will encourage a lifelong interest in Latin literature, whether you intend to become a professional specialist in the area or not.

Required Texts

There are no officially required texts for this course. You may use any texts of the assigned readings you like. Sometimes using different texts will allow us to discuss critical issues. I will take the passages for the quizzes and exam from the Loeb Classical Library, to which you all have access through Western Libraries. All secondary reading assignments will be available in PDF form on the OWL site.

I have not ordered any texts for the bookstore, but when you are reading the Latin texts, you might want to use a commentary or two. I recommend consulting the following: For Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, use P. T. Eden's 1984 "Green and Yellow." For Tacitus's *Annals*, use the second edition of Furneaux's Oxford commentary. Volume 2 of that commentary is the relevant one, and it's the 1907 edition revised by Pelham and Fisher. For Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*, use Martin S. Smith's 1975 Oxford commentary.

Schedule of Reading Assignments

Please do not feel limited by these assignments. To accommodate different levels of skill and experience, I set assignments shorter than used to be common in graduate Latin courses. It wouldn't hurt to read more primary and/or secondary material than the minimum assignment. Particularly for Ph.D. students or M.A. students thinking about a future Ph.D. program, doing additional reading from related Latin works can help you prepare for Ph.D. exams.

Monday, 9/9

There is no reading assignment for this week. In class, we'll talk about the organization of the semester and how the course is going to go.

Monday, 9/16

Primary Reading: Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 1-4

Secondary Reading: Thomas Wiedemann 1996, *The Cambridge Ancient History* (2nd edition, volume 10, chapters 5 and 6) pages 221-265 (covering the years 37 to 68).

Monday, 9/23

Primary Reading: Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 5-8

Secondary Reading: Susanna Braund and Paula James 1998, "Quasi Homo"

Monday, 9/30

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Our class will not meet this week.

Monday, 10/7

Primary Reading: Tacitus, *Annals* 14.1-5

Secondary Reading: Judith Ginsburg 2006, *Representing Agrippina* introduction and chapter 1

Reading Week (Saturday 10/12-Sunday 10/20)

Monday, 10/21

Primary Reading: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.37-42

Secondary Reading: Larry Ball 2003, "An Introduction to the Esquiline Wing of Nero's Domus Aurea"

Monday, 10/28

Primary Reading: Petronius, *Cena Trimalchionis* 26.7-31

Secondary Reading: Barbara Blythe 2020, "Petronius' Talking Birds"

Monday, 11/4

Primary Reading: Petronius, *Cena Trimalchionis* 32-36

Secondary Reading: Heinz Hoffmann 2014 "Petronius, *Satyrice*"

Monday, 11/11

Primary Reading: Petronius, *Cena Trimalchionis* 37-41

Secondary Reading: Ulrike Roth 2016, "Liberating the *Cena*"

Monday, 11/18

Primary Reading: Petronius, *Cena Trimalchionis* 49-54

Secondary Reading: Laura Donati 2022 "Purple Wool: The Imperial Texture of Trimalchio's Domestic Jurisdiction"

Monday, 11/25

Student Presentations

Monday, 12/2

Student Presentations

Paper Due Monday, 12/9 by midnight

Final Exam Monday, 12/16, 2:30-4:30pm

Expectations and Assessment

One of the more common items of feedback I get from graduate students is that they know that my expectations of graduate students are different from my expectations of undergraduate students, but they don't know what the differences are. As far as classes go, I think the biggest difference for me is that I don't care that much if undergrads miss class. I'm the teacher and they're the students, and if I have to miss class it's a problem for everyone, but if a student has to miss class it's only a problem for that student. Graduate school is about making a transition from being a student to being a teacher, and that's not just about being a TA or only for students who want to become professors. Even those of you who are not ever going to teach a class will learn how to be your own teachers of yourselves. Graduate school asks you to take responsibility for your own education. It means that in this class I expect each one of my students to act like they're teachers. I'm not going to lecture or produce content, or at least not more than anyone else. We are all going to produce the content together. If you miss class, it's a big deal and it's a problem for everyone. Imagine your professor having an emergency and having to miss class. That can happen, and it's the nature of emergencies that they can't wait and they happen at the worst times. My point is that it would be a big deal. If your professor is sick or goes to a conference or gets a flat tire on the way to campus, we all understand, but there are consequences for the whole class. I want you to act like your presence and participation matters that much.

That also means that I expect you to be as prepared for class as you would be if you were going to teach it. If there's a bit of the Latin you don't understand, figure it out and remember what you figured out. Of course, there are going to be really difficult bits that will require discussion, but I expect that the parts you don't understand will be the same as the parts I don't understand. We can talk about and figure out those parts as a group. The same is true of the secondary reading. Don't ever skip the reading, and if you do, don't ever admit that you did. If there's something you don't understand, figure it out. This doesn't mean you can't ask questions, and in fact asking questions about difficult topics is an important part of our class. It just means that you need to make an effort to answer your own questions. Be prepared to discuss the reading in class. If you act like your presence matters, your silence or your talking too much makes the class worse for everyone. Don't prepare because you want a good grade. Prepare for class because if you don't, you're letting the whole class down.

I had some brilliant teachers when I was a graduate student. They cared about their students, they published awesome articles and books. I take unreasonable pleasure in dropping their names. And yet, what I remember from my graduate classes is as often what my classmates said as it is what my professors said. Classics is about community, and even though it feels less effective and less efficient, a community of people stumbling around a groping for an idea is a better, more lasting, and more effective form of learning than listening to even a brilliant professor. I know that some base of knowledge is necessary for that, but I expect you to get that knowledge for yourself outside of class so that you can participate actively in class. That means that if an article doesn't make sense to you because you don't understand the theory, go read the Wikipedia page about that theory. I really don't know things that you can't find out.

Grading Scheme

There are things that are going to be difficult about this class, but from a grading perspective, my class is easy. Here's my grading scheme: If you perform normally for your career stage (e.g., like I would expect of a second-year M.A. student), you get a grade in the 80s. If you do something outstanding, you get a grade in the 90s. If there's something wrong, you get a grade in the 70s. With very rare exceptions, I don't give graduate students grades below 70. If you show up some of the time and you write the tests at some point and hand in any kind of paper, no matter how bad, you pass. I'm not interested in motivating you with grades, and I don't want you to worry about your grades. Your grades will be fine. Instead, I want you to be motivated by a feeling that you have an obligation to make this class good for your classmates.

My first graduate advisor told me that advising graduate students is like saying, “We all know that nobody can run through a brick wall. Here’s a brick wall. Please run through it.” I have high expectations of you, and I want you to act like it’s important to live up to those expectations. But I also think it’s even more important for you to know that the consequences for failure to do what’s being asked of you are not significant. You really will do fine in this class. Don’t wreck your health, don’t become paralyzed by fear or shame, and don’t lose sight of the joy that brought you to classics in the first place. The more you bring to this class, the more you and all of us will get from it, but the bottom line is that fulfilling the minimum requirements of this class is genuinely easy. I’m serious about that. If you’re worried that you aren’t good enough to succeed in my course, stop worrying. You’ll be fine.

Percentage Breakdown

Class Participation: 15%

Presentation: 5%

Quizzes: 20%

Final Exam: 30%

Paper: 30%

Class Participation

Each week, you should come to class prepared to give a three-to-five-minute presentation on the aspect of the primary or secondary reading you found most interesting. You do not need to have any slides or a handout prepared. Just have something to say. This can be a close reading of a short passage, an idea for a research project, a comparative analysis of something from outside the assignment, an argument for a textual emendation, or any other thing you think will be interesting and relevant. I will call on students in alphabetical order by last name, and the one who goes first will rotate alphabetically each week so that we don’t always have the same student going first. I will go last. There will be time for discussion after each presentation, and after everyone, including me, has had a turn, there will be a chance for general discussion as well.

Your participation grade will be based on your informal presentations as well as your participation in the discussion of other participants’ presentations. I will judge both the quantity and the quality of your participation. It is just as possible to speak too much as it is to speak too little. My aim is for a balanced discussion, in which there are not just a few voices dominating our discussions every week.

Presentation

In addition to weekly participation, you will also at the end of the semester give a formal, conference-style presentation. This presentation will be a version of the final paper you hand in at the end of the semester. Your presentation may be on any topic related to the course. If you have difficulty thinking of a topic, please see me outside of class to discuss some possibilities. We will devote the last two class meetings to student presentations. I have flipped a coin and used that to decide that the first half of the alphabet (by last name) will present in the final week (on December 2nd) and the second half of the alphabet (by last name) will present in the penultimate week (on November 25th). Each presentation should be a formal fifteen to twenty minutes, and we will follow it up with a brief discussion. You should read from a prepared paper rather than speak extemporaneously. Pretend you’re at a conference rather than teaching a class. Because I will grade the content of the paper when I read it after the final submission, the 5% of your grade for the presentation will be based on the form and style of your presentation, including your slides and/or handout.

Quizzes

At the beginning of class each week there will be a 20-minute quiz that asks you to translate a short passage from the week's reading assignment. You will not be allowed to use any books, notes, websites, or digital tools during the quizzes.

Final Exam

At the end of the semester there will be a cumulative final translation exam. This exam will include a sight-translation component. You will be given two unseen passages of Latin from some text related to our course, and you will choose one of those passages to translate. In addition, you will be given four passages from the assigned reading, and you will choose three to translate. You will not be allowed to use any books, notes, websites, or digital tools during the exam.

The Paper

This is one of the areas where graduate students feel like expectations of them are different from expectations of undergrads, but in an unclear way. What I want from you is a professionally written conference paper. That means you have to be able to read it from a script in 15-20 minutes. It also means that I expect it to be written clearly, with attention paid to the fundamentals of thesis statements and topic sentences. It means I want it to be thoroughly documented and footnoted, not just pointing me to where you got ideas from, but also pointing me to where I can go for more information about a topic that just came up. The purpose of citations is not only to give credit to other scholars, but also to situate your argument in a larger scholarly conversation, and that means you should always be looking for opportunities to cite some scholarship. If the technology of timekeeping comes up in passing in your paper, I want to see a footnote to an article or two about that topic, telling me that if I'm curious about it I can read more. Finally, I want your paper to be original and significant. I want you to advance the state of knowledge in the field. That may be impossible to do in a semester, and not all of you will achieve that goal, but it should be your goal, and the papers that get marks in the 90s will achieve it.

At the end of the semester we'll have a conference in the last two class meetings. Everyone will get a half hour, which will be 15-20 minutes of you reading your paper and 5-10 minutes of the class discussing it. Then you polish it up and hand it in as your paper.

Your paper will be a written version of your presentation. There are a few standard lengths of papers you will need to learn to write. A full-length article should be approximately 8,000-10,000 words. A shorter article or a long presentation (e.g. for a job talk) should be 5,000-6,000 words. A conference paper should be about 2,500-3,500 words (depending on whether you include footnotes and how long you have to speak). For this course, since 50% of your grade will be determined by translation quizzes and the exam, your essay should be relatively short. Please write approximately 2,500-3,500 words, including quotations, translations, and footnotes, but not including bibliography.

The Due Date of the Paper

Your paper is due by midnight on Monday, December 9th. If your paper isn't ready in time, wing it, and do your best. If you hand in a half-written paper, that's not ideal, but you'll still pass. The students who don't make it through our M.A. program are the students who can't write at all. The students who write crappy papers, but actually write, do fine. If your paper is awesome, that's great, but if it's not, that's totally fine. It's not that big a deal. My own training in how to write was just to write a little bit all the time and throw a lot of it away. I've written articles that got published very good journals and one of my articles won a prize for being the best paper of the year in its journal, but I've also written papers that have been rejected several times, including by pretty mediocre journals. They're not all going to be winners. Writing is not a big deal. One of my scholarly heroes sent me a draft of a paper that had been

rejected by a couple of journals and asked for help in trying to fix it up. Even the best of us write both good and bad things. If you never write something that doesn't work out, you're playing it too safe.

At the end of the semester, give me the best of what you've got, and if it's a piece of crap I won't be angry or even disappointed. All the time ideas don't work out and it's fine. The main thing is just to keep writing. In the end, your paper is supposed to be short enough that you can write it the night before and be fine. One of my teachers used to tell me that writing a dissertation is a process of cutting back expectations. You start with an idea and a proposal that this is going to be the most significant thing ever and it's going to make your career. As you write you slowly come to terms with the fact that what you're writing is not the vision you had. Writing every paper for grad school is like that. It's hard, but you have to submit the crap anyway. And look, I'll be proud of you if you hand in a crap paper, because I know that takes courage, but it's the right thing to do.

Other professors in this department will tell you that they would rather have a paper that's really good than one that's on time. I think it's good for you to experience that teaching philosophy, but I think there are serious drawbacks to it. First, it means that you could spend all summer writing a brilliant paper just for one class, and I will not put the expectation on you that you should spend more time than you have in the semester on the paper for my class. Second, it creates the impression that the only writing that's worth doing or sharing is the good stuff, and that can lead to paralyzing writer's block. There's great value in writing and sharing crap. So, for my class, the deadline is all important. I do not want a good paper more than I want an on-time paper. Unlike Beth or Chris, I would rather have a piece of crap early than a brilliant paper late. I'm glad that not all of the classes in our department are like that, but I think it's good that some of them are. If your paper is late, you'll pass and you'll still get a fine mark, and really a lot can be forgiven if a paper is brilliant, but I'm serious when I say that your mark will be better and I'll be happier if you give me the on-time piece of crap.

Instructions for Turning in Your Paper

I will create an assignment on the OWL site so that you can turn in your paper online. Please attach your paper as a PDF. The filename should begin with your last name.

Style/Formatting Instructions

You will find that when you submit articles to journals, the style guidelines vary considerably, but you will be expected to adhere closely to the sometimes arbitrary guidelines. For this course, whatever system you want to use is fine with me. Just use a system that makes sense and use it consistently. If you're unsure what to do and want a suggestion from me, my preferred guide is the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which is accessible online through the UWO library.

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Policy on Using AI Tools

We'll spend some time in class talking about AI and how it might affect the future of the field of Classical Studies. It's an interesting issue, and it's impossible to predict with any precision how it will develop. I have a lot of thoughts about it, and I hope you do too. That means that the details of my expectations about the use of AI in this course may change as a result of our discussions. In at least some ways, we'll create those expectations together.

I think it's important, however, to explain ahead of time a core policy about the use of AI in our course, and it's also important to promise that that core won't change. Here it is: Anything goes. No student in this course will suffer negative consequences for using AI tools. There will be no kind of disciplinary action for using AI for any part of your work, and I will not give you a low grade simply because you've used AI for your assignments.

My basic plan is that in addition to taking some class time to discuss AI and its implications, some of you will use AI tools to help you complete the work for the course and others won't. After I've submitted the grades for the course, I'd like you each to send me a brief report explaining if and how you used AI, and whether you found it helpful. By waiting to send that report until after I've submitted the grades, you'll help me to be sure that I'm not letting my knowledge of your use of AI bias my grading.

Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <https://www.uwo.ca/health/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accommodation Policy

Staying healthy – physically and mentally – is an essential part of achieving your academic goals. There are many resources on campus available to help you maintain your health and wellness <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>. Please contact the Graduate Chair if you have any concerns about health or wellness interfering with your studies.

If academic consideration should become necessary at any point, students should contact their course instructor(s) and/or supervisor, as appropriate. Students should also contact the Graduate Chair in most cases, and especially if accommodation is needed for:

- more than one course
- more than one week
- any tests, exams, and/or assignments worth 10% or more of a final grade
- any program milestone (comprehensive exams, thesis, etc.)

In these cases, the Graduate Chair may request that a student work with Accessible Education to arrange a plan for accommodation (see SGPS Regulation 14: http://www.grad.uwo.ca/current_students/regulations/14.html).

Accessible Education

Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Accessible Education arranges academic accommodation for classes, exams, internships and other course or program activities. Accessible Education also provides digital and Braille textbooks, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction for students with learning disabilities, access to computer labs that are equipped with assistive technology, referrals for assessments and other services, and bursaries for students who meet OSAP's eligibility criteria. You may wish to contact Accessible Education at 519 661-2111 x 82147 or visit their website: http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentssupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.