

Preliminary Syllabus



Love Conquers All?: Reading Desire in Ancient Roman Literature

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Over two thousand years ago, the Roman poet Vergil wrote “love conquers all” (*omnia uincit amor*, Vergil *Eclogues* 10.69), an expression frequently (mis)interpreted as a testament to the grace and glory of love. But Vergil’s words, when read in their original context, encapsulate his vision of desire as a brutal force with the potential to overwhelm, subdue, and destroy. In this course, we will explore the ancient Roman conception of desire (*amor*) as a problematic and perilous emotion. An examination of fascinating philosophical and poetic literary sources will introduce us to a range of important Roman authors and their unique perspectives. We will also consider the cultural and historical factors that shaped each author’s approach to the subject of desire. The rich and complex evidence we encounter will also invite us to contemplate our own ideas about desire and our enduring connection to the ancient world.

INSTRUCTOR

In her research and teaching, Professor Sarah McCallum focuses on ancient Greek and Latin languages and literature, particularly epic, elegiac, and pastoral poetry. She is especially interested in the complex negotiation between tradition and innovation that characterizes the development of Roman poetry in the first century BCE. In her recently published book, *Elegiac Love and Death in Vergil’s Aeneid* (OUP, 2023), she poses new questions about Vergil’s pervasive engagement with elegy, both amatory and funerary, throughout his final epic endeavor. In 2024, she was honored for her exceptional teaching with the Provost Award for Innovation in Teaching and the College of Humanities Distinguished Teaching Award.

COURSE OUTLINE AND SAMPLE READINGS

WEEK 1 Delving into Roman Desire

HOUR 1	An Introduction to Ancient Roman Literature and Culture
HOUR 2	The Discombobulation of Desire in Catullus (selections from Catullus)

WEEK 2 Philosophical Contemplations of Desire

HOUR 1	Constructive and Destructive Venus in Lucretius (<i>De Rerum Natura</i> 1 and 4)
HOUR 2	Desire and the Disordered Soul in Cicero (<i>Tusculan Disputations</i> , Book 4)

WEEK 3 Desire as the Subject of Personal Poetry

HOUR 1	Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered Elegiac Lovers (selections from Propertius, Tibullus, and/or Ovid)
HOUR 2	Grappling with Desire in Horace's <i>Odes</i> (selections from <i>Odes</i> 1-4)

WEEK 4 Desire and Death in Vergilian Epic

HOUR 1	Visions of Perilous Desire in the <i>Eclogues</i> and <i>Georgics</i> (<i>Eclogues</i> 2 and 10, <i>Georgics</i> 4)
HOUR 2	Dido's Destructive Passion in the <i>Aeneid</i> (<i>Aeneid</i> , Books 1, 4, 6)

No textbook is required. Selections from the Roman authors listed above will be provided electronically.