Course Description: The epics of Homer (Iliad and Odyssey) and Vergil (Aeneid) are key foundational texts of the West. But they also represent competing narratives of what it means to be human, particularly with regard to the individual’s role in society. Moreover, not only do these texts offer starkly different paradigms, but they are also acutely aware of their differences and subtly engage with one another. Thus, the Odyssey questions the heroic assumptions underlying the Iliad, and the Aeneid imitates Homer while, at the same time, drastically reworking the Greek myth to explore contemporary Roman concerns. This course will read these texts with particular attention to changing concepts of the individual (a/k/a “hero”)—e.g., the Greek warrior Achilles, who is alienated from his society not only by pride in his military prowess, but also because he makes moral demands out of step with the prevailing values of his society; his comrade Odysseus, more cunning than brave, whose difficult homecoming represents the recovery of a self defined by the domestic joys of family and friends; and, finally, the Trojan Aeneas who also wanders after the war, but does so as a refugee, for his home has been destroyed, and whose piety (rather than bravery or cunning) compels him to lead his people to a new promised land which, like Moses, he will not live to see. The catastrophic losses suffered by both sides in war, the mass migration and displacement of peoples, the tension between political expediency and ethical choice, and the achievement of public good at great personal cost—these themes are as relevant today as they were in Greece of the 8th century BCE or the Rome of the emperor Augustus. No prior knowledge of these texts or of the ancient world will be assumed. Students who have never read these “great books” will delight in encountering them in the company of other smart readers; and those who are familiar with the works will deepen their understanding of their richness and enduring relevance.

Grading: In-class writing and discussion: 10%
Midterm exam: 15%
Final exam: 20%
Paper #1: 15%
Paper #2: 15%
Paper #3: 25%
Attendance is required. This is a small, discussion-based seminar and meets only once a week. Thus, missing even one class session deprives oneself and one’s fellow students of the opportunity to learn from multiple perspectives. For this reason, all anticipated absences must be cleared with me in advance and, in the event of unanticipated sickness or serious emergency, official documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note) must be submitted. Unexcused absences will result in a reduction in your grade.

Academic Integrity is a paramount value in our academic community. Students should familiarize themselves with NYU’s published guidelines and policies in this area and carefully abide by them. Any questions should be referred to the instructor. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in a grade of F for an assignment or even for the entire course, depending on the nature of the infraction. Cases will also be reported to the Office of the Dean, which may impose more severe sanctions in certain circumstances.

Assignments: The chief work of this seminar is the close reading and analysis of the epics of Homer and Vergil. Readings average 100 pages a week, and it is very important not to fall behind, since it will be very difficult to catch up. To help promote and focus discussion, each class session will begin with a 5-minute ungraded writing assignment in response to a prompt that the instructor will provide. There will also be two examinations: a short midterm and a final examination. In addition, students will write three papers: the first will be a short (4-5 page) analysis of a passage in the Iliad; the second (6-8 pages) will be a discussion of a topic or theme that runs through the Odyssey; and the third (8-10 pages) will be comparative, focusing on how a topic or theme is developed differently in Homer and Vergil. The instructor will share possible paper topics with the class, and will also work individually with students who wish to come up with a different topic.

Texts: The following translations will be available at the NYU Bookstore. You may, however, use another translation, though you should be aware that class discussions will refer to specific pages in these recommended texts:
- Richmond Lattimore (translator), The Iliad of Homer (U.Chicago)
- Richmond Lattimore (translator), The Odyssey of Homer (Harper)
- Allen Mandelbaum (translator), The Aeneid of Virgil (Bantam)

Secondary Reading: Since the purpose of this course is to engage in close reading of the primary texts, there are no required secondary (scholarly) readings. But a list of recommended books and articles will be made available in class; also, specific readings will be suggested for those students who might find them helpful as they write their papers.

Provisional Schedule of Classes:

9/4   Introductory class: no reading assignment
      Course overview, logistics, expectations
      Historical and literary background—e.g., Homeric Greece and Augustan Rome; orality and literacy; mythology and history; epics
as foundational narratives of individual and group identity
Close in-class reading and discussion of *Iliad* 1.1-7 (proem)

9/11  *Iliad*, Books 1-4

9/18  *Iliad*, Books 7-12

9/25  *Iliad*, Books 13-18
      PAPER #1 IS DUE

10/2  *Iliad*, Books 19-24

10/9  NO CLASS: LEGISLATIVE DAY (on which Monday classes meet and Tuesday classes are cancelled)

10/16 *Odyssey*, Books 1-6
       MIDTERM EXAMINATION

10/23 *Odyssey*, Books 7-12

10/30 *Odyssey*, Books 13-18
       PAPER #2 IS DUE

11/6  *Odyssey*, Books 19-24

11/13 *Aeneid*, Books 1-3

11/20 *Aeneid*, Books 4-6

11/27 *Aeneid*, Books 7-9

12/4  *Aeneid*, Books 10-12

12/11 Catch up and review
       PAPER #3 IS DUE

12/18 FINAL EXAMINATION