

Making Fun in Ancient Rome

Kenyon College, IPHS 392, Spring 2009
Wednesday/Friday 2:10-3:30, O'Connor House Seminar Room
Prof. Josh Levithan

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Office hours: M 2-4, W 1-2,
F 11-12, 1-2; or by appt.

This course will examine several different iterations of “fun” in the culture of the Roman Empire—literary humor, satire, and public entertainment will be most prominent, but we also study Roman leisure, pleasure, and mockery. The course will draw on several different academic disciplines—including archaeology, epigraphy, and art history—but it is fundamentally an exercise in cultural history, grounded in the surviving Roman literary sources. The goal of the course is, perhaps, threefold. First, to come to know Roman cultural life by surveying it from one particular perspective. Second, to read and enjoy six of the classical world’s most interesting (and, it is to be hoped, *fun*) authors: Plautus, Apuleius, Horace, Petronius, Juvenal, and Lucian. Third, to consider the relationship of the different activities and cultural forms that are gathered together under the peculiar English term “fun.” While some of the academic theories of culture and humor will sneak into the course through lectures and supplementary reading, we will generally take a simple and direct point of view on these issues: we will practice cultural history by seeking to differentiate the universal from the particular. We want to understand what the Romans did for fun, how they made fun of each other, and what they found funny: our primary analytic method will be to figure out what we share with Rome and what it is about Roman culture that we find strange, incomprehensible, or abhorrent.

Class meetings will take several different forms: most meetings will consist of an informal lecture followed by discussion. During certain weeks (usually, but not exclusively, those weeks devoted to a particular author) one class meeting—usually on Friday—will be conducted entirely as a seminar, with group discussion focusing on the readings.

Plan of the Course:

The course is organized thematically. Other than the first five meetings (three are different sorts of introductions or prologues and two are devoted to Plautus, our only major author of the Republican period) and the last two (which deal with the late Empire and the modern reception of Roman humor) the course is concerned with the early Empire. Within this time period (roughly the last few decades BCE and the first two centuries CE) we will range widely across time, space, and subject matter, covering topics high and low, elite and popular, strictly historical and highly literary. While the entire course takes the point of view of cultural history, we will also spend much of our time studying literature on its own terms, and not merely as a source for understanding Roman habits and worldviews.

Requirements:

Participation will count for 25% of the course grade. Both the quality and quantity of your participation—both during designated discussion days and ordinary class meetings—are important. Frequent unannounced quizzes—short and substantive rather than thought-provoking—will test for completion of the reading. These will generally occur on the marked “discussion” days, but may also occur during other class meetings. The results of these quizzes will form a part of the participation grade.

Attendance is a prerequisite for the class participation grade. Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of two points from the *overall* course grade—in other words, two unexcused absences will cause the course grade to go down a full letter grade. Excused absences must be granted by a dean or sought by petitioning me *in writing* before the missed class begins. Please be aware that, according to college policy, absenteeism is grounds for expulsion from a course. Tardiness, either in the form of significant lateness or a pattern of arriving during the opening minutes of class, will result in an appropriate deduction from the class participation grade.

A midterm examination will count for 12.5% of the grade. This will involve identifications of terms or concepts from reading, lecture, and class discussion, as well as the identification and discussion of passages from the reading.

Two six-to-eight page papers (12.5% each) will allow for more intense focus on particular aspects of the course. One paper will be due after week four, the other after week eleven.

An in-class presentation will comprise 12.5% of the grade. These presentations will be assigned in week two and will take place between weeks five and thirteen. After conducting independent research, each student will make a ten to fifteen minute presentation which provides background information and takes an interpretive stance on an aspect of that day's literary reading or historical subject.

A final examination will count for 25% of the grade. The final will include both identification questions and full-scale essays requiring discussion of the course's broad thematic elements.

Readings:

The main primary texts, available for purchase at the Kenyon bookstore, will be Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (trans. Graves); Petronius, *Satyricon* (Ruden); Plautus, *Four Comedies* (Segal); Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires* (Green, third edition); *Horace and Persius* (Penguin Edition, trans. Rudd); and Lucian, *Chattering Courtesans* (Sidwell). If you choose to buy the books elsewhere than the Kenyon Bookstore, do be sure to match the exact edition—working from a different translation will be problematic. Two textbooks should also be purchased: Carcopino's *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, and Potter and Mattingly's *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*. Additional readings will be available on Moodle or handed out in class.

Schedule of Meetings:

Week One: Introduction

January 14th: The course, the syllabus, literature and cultural history.

Assignment: Questionnaire in class.

January 16th: Roman life and Roman humor—time traveling and reception.

Assignment: 1) Moodle: Selection from Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods*. 2) Moodle: "The Apocolocyntosis of the Divine Claudius" (read only the first two or three pages of the introduction, then skim/skip and read the "Apocolocyntosis" itself).

Week Two: Old Rome

January 21st: The history of Rome in 80 minutes.

Assignment: 1) Carcopino, chapters I, III (if you can, read chapter II as well—it's optional, but interesting). 2) Potter and Mattingly, Introduction (pages 1-14 only); chapter three.

January 23rd: Festivals: public ritual, Saturnalian traditions and the influence of New Comedy.

Assignment: 1) Plautus, *The Braggart Soldier*. 2) Horace, *Satires* II.7.

Week Three: Lowbrow Fun

January 28th: Discussion: Plautus.

Assignment: Plautus, *The Brothers Menaechmus*.

January 30th: Popular entertainments, athletics, and gambling.

Assignment: 1) Potter and Mattingly, pages 205-224 and 256-283. 2) Carcopino, pages 248-253.

Week Four: Horace

February 4th: Patronage and Satire.

Assignment: 1) Potter and Mattingly, chapter two. 2) Carcopino, chapter VII. 3) Horace, *Satires* I.1, I.4, I.9, I.10; *Epistles* I.7, I.18.

February 6th: Discussion: Horace.

Assignment: Horace, *Satires* II.1, II.5, II.6.

First Paper due on Monday February 9th, by 4:00, in Timberlake House.

Week Five: Juvenal

February 11th: Juvenal, Satire, and the perception of Women.

Assignment: 1) Carcopino, chapter IV. 2) Potter and Mattingly, pages 19-36. 3) Juvenal, *Satires* 1, 3, 6.

February 13th: Discussion: Juvenal; the city vs. the countryside.

Assignment: 1) Juvenal, *Satires* 8, 9, 10, and 11. 2) Horace, *Satires* II.6.

Week Six: Words and Bodies

February 18th: Insult, Invective, Epigram, and Joke.

Assignment: 1) Moodle: "The Testament of the Piglet." 2) Moodle: Selections from Martial. 3) Moodle: other readings TBA.

February 20th: Roman Baths: Special Guest Appearance by Prof. Zoe Kontes, Department of Classics.

Assignment: 1) Carcopino, pages 254-263. 2) Potter and Mattingly, pages 243-255.

Week Seven: A Day at the Races

February 25th: Chariot racing in Rome and Constantinople.

Assignment: 1) Potter and Mattingly, pages 236-243 and 284-303. 2) Moodle: Primary source documents on chariot racing.

February 27th: **MIDTERM**

Week Eight: Apuleius

March 18th: Rome and its provinces; Apuleius.

Assignment: Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, pages 3-143.

March 20th: Discussion: Apuleius.

Assignment: Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, pages 144-281.

Week Nine: Eating, Drinking, Philosophizing.

March 25th: Dinner Parties.

Assignment: 1) Carcopino, pages 263-276. 2) Moodle: excerpt from Plutarch, *Quaestiones Convivales*. 3) Moodle: Seneca, *Thyestes*, lines 885-1034. 4) Ruden (your translator of the *Satyricon*), Commentary 6. 5) Juvenal, *Satire* 5. 6) Horace, *Satires*, II.4, II.8; *Epistles* I.5.

March 27th: Aristocratic amateur hour: music and philosophy.

Assignment: 1) Ruden (*Satyricon*), Commentary 10. 2) Juvenal, *Satire* 13. 3) Horace, *Satires*, II.2; *Epistles* I.6. 4) Lucian, "Demonax the Philosopher" (pages 35-47).

Week Ten: Sex...

April 1st: Sex and sexuality, theory and practice.

Assignment: 1) Moodle: selected secondary readings on the history and theory of ancient sexuality. 2) 1) Ruden, Commentary 4. 3) Juvenal, *Satire* 2. 4) Horace, *Satires*, I.2. 5) Moodle: Selections from Catullus.

April 3rd: Sex in word and image, at Pompeii and elsewhere.

Assignment: Moodle: Primary source documents and images.

Week Eleven: ...and Violence

April 8th: The history of gladiatorial games

Assignment: 1) Carcopino, chapter VIII. 2) Potter and Mattingly, pages 224-236 and 303-325. 3) Moodle: Primary source documents and images.

April 10th: Discussion: Cruelty and civilization

Assignment: Moodle: Reading TBA.

Second Paper Due on Monday April 13th, by 4:00.

Week Twelve: *Satyricon*

April 15th: Life and literature in the *Satyricon*.

Assignment: Petronius, *Satyricon* parts 1-3, Commentaries 1-3.

April 17th: Discussion: *Satyricon*.

Assignment: Petronius, *Satyricon* parts 4-6, Commentary 9.

Week Thirteen: Lucian of Samosata

April 22nd: Fantasy, Humor, and the Greek/Roman novel.

Assignment: Lucian, "So you Think I'm the Prometheus" and "Two Charges" (pages 3-30); "The Journey down to Hades" (pages 93-109).

April 24th: Discussion: Lucian.

Assignment: Lucian, "The Ship" (pages 133-152); "Chattering Courtesans" (pages 157-189); "True Histories" (pages 307-346).

Week Fourteen: Outside and Afterward

April 29th: Critics and Christians: Dissenters and the later Roman Empire.

Assignment: Moodle: Reading TBA.

May 1st: The Reception of Roman Satire and Humor.

Assignment: 1) Carcopino, introduction (by Mary Beard). 2) Moodle: "Versions" of Latin literature by Pope, Johnson, and others.

Reading Day Movie Night: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

The **final exam** will take place on May 5th at 1:30 p.m.