

# Roman Laughter: Wit and Transgression in Roman Literature and Thought (CX 268/368)

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## **Time and place:**

Lectures: Fridays 12-2, Oculus 1.02

Latin text classes: Fridays 11-1, H3.55

## **Overview**

Can we ever get a window onto what made the Romans laugh? Is such a question naïve? Studying how the comic operates in Latin texts is a slippery exercise that seems to connect us (physically, emotionally, intellectually) with Roman experience while at the same time revealing the strangeness and unknowability of the Roman world. In this honours module, we will read a range of Latin texts that perform or have something to say about wit and humour – whether puerile, grotesque, bitter, farcical, subtle, philosophical, aggressive or abusive – and cover genres and forms from epigram to satire, theatre to oratory, from the second century BCE to the early second century CE. We will also juxtapose ancient thinking about humour with both the latest classical scholarship on Roman laughter and selected modern texts on the sociology, psychoanalysis and philosophy of joking (e.g. Freud, Bakhtin, Bergson). Investigating what and who gets laughed at (and why) in Latin literature will make us giggle, balk, and scratch our heads: it will also take us straight to the heart of questions to do with literary history, cultural identity, gender, politics and power in ancient Rome.

A wide range of texts and genres will be considered, but individual lectures and seminars will be devoted to single authors and texts, and you will be able to narrow your focus in the termly coursework. Everyone should read the full list of core texts in English as soon as possible. In preparation for this course, it would also be useful to read over the summer the relevant chapters of G.B.Conte's *Latin Literature: A History* (1994, Johns Hopkins), on the authors Terence, Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca the Younger, Petronius, Martial, Quintilian, Pliny the Elder and Suetonius.

Q800 and Latin and English students may take this module as a **Latin language option**.

The module covers 23 weeks (10+10+3). Note this includes reading weeks, although there will be no lectures and classes in the two reading weeks. In this period, there will be 21 sessions of 2 hours each (1 session per week during the first two terms and for the first three weeks of the third term). Within these sessions, approximately 36 hours will be lectures (involving some class discussion), and approximately 6 hrs will be taken up with seminars involving student preparation.

Students studying the module with texts in Latin will also attend 21 hours (9+9+3) of classes (1 hour a week), during which we will read and discuss the set texts.

## SYLLABUS

(in translation)

Terence *The Eunuch* (use Betty Radice's Penguin edition – the Loeb is a bit archaic)

Cicero, *On the Orator* 2.216-90

Virgil, *Eclogue* 4

Ovid, *The Art of Love*, selected passages

Seneca *Apocolocyntosis*

Petronius, *Satyricon* 48-65

Seneca *Letters*, 56, 57

Martial *Epigrams* Book 1, and further selected epigrams

Juvenal, *Satires* 1 and 4

Quintilian, *Handbook on Oratory* 6.3

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, selected passages

Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, selected passages

(in Latin, for those studying the module with Latin)

- Terence, *The Eunuch* (with Barsby's 1999 Green and Yellow)
- Virgil *Eclogue* 4 (with Mynors' 1994 Oxford commentary)
- Seneca *Apocolocyntosis* (with Eden's 1984 Green and Yellow)
- Seneca *Letters* 56 (with Costa's 1988 17 Letters, Liverpool Classical Press),

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### General

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- Billig, M. (2005) *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London.
- Bremmer, J. and Roodenburg, H. (eds.) (1997) *A Cultural History of Humour*. Cambridge.
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- Dominik, W. and Hall, J. (eds.) *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*. Malden, MA and Oxford.
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- **Leigh, M. (2004) *Comedy and the Rise of Rome*. Oxford.**
- Plaza, M. (2000) *Laughter and Derision in Petronius' Satyricon: A Literary Study*. Stockholm.
- **Richlin, A. (1992) *The Garden of Priapus. Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*. Oxford.**
- Ruffell, I. (2011) *Politics and Anti-Realism in Athenian Old Comedy*. Oxford.
- **Sharrock, A. (2009) *Reading Roman Comedy. Poetics and Playfulness in Plautus and Terence*. Cambridge.**
- Stallybrass, P. and White, A. (1986) *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London.

## According to author/text:

### Cicero

- Dominik, W and Hall, J. (eds.) (2007) *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*. Malden, MA and Oxford.
- Martin, J.M. (1990) 'Cicero's jokes at the court of Henry II of England.' *Modern Language Quarterly* 51: 144-66.
- Steel, C. (ed.) (2013) *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*. Cambridge.

### Juvenal

- Braund, S.M. (1996) *Juvenal Satires Book I*. Cambridge.
- Braund, S.M. (1992) *Roman Verse Satire*. Oxford.
- Braund, S.M, and W. Raschke (2002) 'Satiric grotesques in public and private: Juvenal, Dr. Frankenstein, Raymond Chandler, and Absolutely Fabulous.' *Greece and Rome* 49:62-84
- Ferguson, J. (1979) *Juvenal. The Satires*. London
- Freudenburg, K. (2001) *Satires of Rome: Threatening poses from Lucilius to Juvenal*. Cambridge. (See especially pp209-77).
- Freudenburg, K. (ed.) (2005) *The Cambridge companion to Roman satire*. Cambridge (see chapter by Rimell)
- Gowers, Emily. (1993). *The Loaded Table: Representations of food in Roman literature*. Oxford (see chapter on Sat 4)
- Griffith, J. G. (1969) 'Juvenal, Statius, and the Flavian establishment.' *Greece and Rome* 16:134-150.
- Henderson, John. (1995) 'Pump up the volume: Juvenal Satire 1.1-21.' *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 41:101-137.
- Jones, F. (2007) *Juvenal and the satiric genre*. London: Duckworth
- Keane, C. (2006) *Figuring genre in Roman satire*. New York and Oxford.
- Larmour, D. H. J. (2007) 'Holes in the body: Sites of abjection in Juvenal's Rome. In *The sites of Rome: Time, space, and memory*. Eds. D. H. J. Larmour and D. Spencer, 169-210. Oxford.
- Plaza, M. (2006) *The function of humour in Roman verse satire: Laughing and lying*. Oxford. •

Richlin, Amy. (1992) *The garden of Priapus: Sexuality and aggression in Roman humor*. New York and Oxford. (See pp.196-213 on Juvenal).

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### **Martial**

- Fitzgerald, W. (2007) *Martial: The World of the Epigram*. Chicago.
- Hinds, S. (2007) 'Martial's Ovid/Ovid's Martial.' *Journal of Roman Studies* 97:113–154.
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### **Ovid**

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- Gibson, R. (2003) *Ovid, Ars Amatoria 3*. Cambridge.
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### **Petronius**

- Smith, M.S. (1975) *Cena Trimalchionis*. Oxford.
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- Courtney, E. (2001) *A Companion to Petronius*. Oxford.
- Harrison, S. J. (Ed.) (1999) *Oxford Readings in the Roman Novel*. Oxford.
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- Prag, J. R. W. and Repath, I. (eds.) (2009) *Petronius: A handbook*. Malden, MA.
- Rimell, V. (2002) *Petronius and the Anatomy of Fiction*. Cambridge.
- Rimell, V. (2007) 'Petronius' lessons in learning - the hard way' in J.Konig and T.Whitmarsh (eds.) *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge, 108-32.
- Star, C. (2012) *The Empire of the Self*. Baltimore.

### **Pliny the Elder**

- Carey, S. (2003) *Pliny's Catalogue of Culture: Art and empire in the Natural History*. Oxford.

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- Henderson, J. (2002) 'Knowing someone through their books: Pliny on Uncle Pliny.' *Classical Philology* 97.3: 256–284.

### Quintilian

- Clarke, M. L. 1996. *Rhetoric at Rome: A historical survey*. New York.
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### Seneca The Younger (General and on The Epistles)

- Bartsch, S and Wray, D. (eds.) (2009) *Seneca and the Self*. Cambridge.
- Bartsch, S. and Schiesaro, A. (eds.) (2015) *The Cambridge Companion to Seneca*. Cambridge.
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### (On the Apocolocyntosis)

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### Suetonius

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### Terence

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- Sharrock, A. (2009) *Reading Roman Comedy*. Cambridge.
- Smith, L. P. (1994) 'Audience response to rape: Chaerea in Terence's *Eunuchus*', *Helios* 21: 21–38.

### Virgil (*Eclogue 4*)

- Bataille, G. (1997) 'Laughter' in F.Botting and S.Wilson (eds.) *The Bataille Reader*, Oxford and Malden, MA, 59-63.
- Beard, M. (2014) *Laughter in Ancient Rome*. Oakland, CA, pp81-5.
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## assessment

You are required to produce two pieces of coursework for the course, which will be assessed. Coursework will jointly contribute 50% of assessment; the remaining 50% of your work will be assessed by the two-hour examination in May/June 2018.

### Examination (50%)

**Students reading set texts in Latin** will be required to answer two questions from Section A of the paper and one question from Section C. Section A requires you to translate and comment on two passages of Latin from a selection of prepared texts. From Section C you choose one essay title from the range available. **All other students** will be required to comment on two passages in translation from Section B of the paper, and should answer two essay questions from Section C.

### Coursework (50%)

**Term 1:** 2250-2500 word essay (25%)

**Term 2:** 1800-2000 word essay (15%) plus 800-1000 word blog post (10%), submitted together, as one piece of coursework, for the same deadline. Students will be given a one-hour training session in blog post writing.

In each year, students taking the module with **texts in Latin** must write a **practical criticism** in place of the **term 2** essay. See separate **practical criticisms tab**.

The assessed essays and blog posts must be word-processed and submitted electronically on Tabula, have proper bibliographic references, and be clearly and accurately expressed (i.e. correct spelling, good grammar, and well-structured sentences). The number of words used, as close as possible to the upper word limit specified above (for including footnotes, not including bibliography), should be given on the **cover sheet**. **Note that anonymity of marking is an adopted principle of the University for both assessed coursework and examinations.**

## Deadlines

Submission deadlines must be heeded: the University has regulated that essays will attract a penalty of 5% for each day they are late. If you foresee difficulties in meeting the deadline, it is imperative that you contact the module tutor or Director of Undergraduate Studies (see below).

The deadlines for coursework submission for this course are as follows:

Coursework term 1: submit by 12pm on ... tbc

Coursework term 2: submit by 12pm on ... tbc

Please refer to the departmental handbook and the document 'Advice on writing essays' for further information about assessment criteria and marking. This is available online. **It is essential to proof-read your coursework from a printed version and not on screen.**

## Extensions to Essay Deadlines

Applications for an extension to the coursework deadlines are only allowed in exceptional circumstances – well-documented medical reasons, etc. Any such application should be made to the Director of Undergraduate Studies well before the deadline. Problems with e.g. printers, getting hold of books, bunching-up of coursework deadlines etc. are rarely considered acceptable excuses. When an extension is granted, students must ensure that the module tutor is informed and that the extension (with date limit) is recorded by the secretaries in the ledger in the Office. Only in exceptional circumstances will an extension be allowed beyond two weeks.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism, defined as 'the attempt to pass off someone else's work as one's own' is a variety of cheating or fraud. It is taken very seriously by the University and students who are caught can suffer penalties which are extremely detrimental to their career. Fortunately plagiarism has not been a problem in our Department and we fully anticipate that this situation will continue.

- To avoid any confusion however you should take special care with two things:

- 1) Cite the sources you are using.
- 2) Use quotation marks for the quotations you are including.

If any of the above is unclear, contact the Module tutor. There is more information in the Departmental Handbook.

## Term 1 essay questions: choose one from the following

- 1) Did the Romans learn how to laugh?
- 2) To what extent would it be simplistic to draw sharp contrasts between the joking cultures of Greece and Rome?
- 3) Discuss the (lack of) distinction between those who laugh and those who get laughed at in one or more Latin texts you have studied.
- 4) Explore the problems and issues involved in our modern attempts to 'access' Roman humour.

- 5) 'The *Eunuchus* is one of Terence's most adventurous pieces of writing, not just because it offends against comic convention, but more particularly because it does so by half-jokingly, half-seriously entangling the play with tragedy.' (Sharrock). Discuss this statement.
- 6) Are eunuchs inherently funny? Make Terence's *Eunuch* the focus of your response.
- 7) Is Terence's *Eunuch* a good testcase for the incongruity theory of humour?
- 8) 'Marcus Tullius Cicero – funster, punster, jokester': to what extent does this sloganising modern assessment help us to understand the cultural specificity of Roman Republican oratory?

## Schedule of lectures/seminars for term 1:

*Note:* all secondary texts for preparatory reading, noted in brief here, are to be found in your reading lists (see module booklet or the bibliography tab on the module webpage). The preparatory reading is essential, and represents the minimum recommended input. It goes without saying that I encourage you to read more if you wish!

**Week 1, Lecture 1:** *Theories, taxonomies, terminology: joking ancient and modern*

Preparatory reading: S.Critchley, *On Humour*; S.Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*.

**Latin reading class:** close reading brainstorm – what can you do with a Latin text?

**Week 2, Lecture 2:** *Introduction to ancient laughter. Or, what made the Romans LOL*

Preparatory reading: M.Beard, *Roman Laughter*; A.Richlin *The Garden of Priapus*.

**Latin reading class:** Terence, *Eunuchus* 1-80 (with Barsby's commentary, here *et passim*)

**Lecture 3:** *Comedy and the making of Greece-Rome*

Preparatory reading: Terence's *Eunuch* (use Betty Radice's Penguin translation or the Loeb) M.Leigh, *Comedy and the Rise of Rome*; D.Feeney, *Beyond Greek*, pp1-178.

**Latin reading class:** Terence, *Eunuchus* 81-206

**Lecture 4:** *Terence's Eunuch: aggression, incongruity, metatheatre*

Preparatory reading: Barsby's Green and Yellow Commentary on Terence's *Eunuchus*, introduction; J.C.B.Lowe 'The *Eunuchus*: Terence and Menander' *CQ* 33; S.Frangoulidis 'Modes of metatheatre' *LCM* 18.

**Latin reading class:** Terence, *Eunuchus* 207-291

**Lecture 5:** *Terence's Eunuch: joking (seriously) about castration*

Preparatory reading: C.S.Dessen 'The figure of the eunuch' *Helios* 22; McCasrthy 'The joker in the pack: slaves in Terence'; A.Sharrock, *Reading Roman Comedy*.

**Latin reading class:** Terence, *Eunuchus* 292-453

----- Week 6 = reading week -----

**Lecture 6:** *You cannot be serious: humour and Roman Republican oratory*

Preparatory reading: A. Corbeill *Controlling Laughter*; Rabbie 'Wit and humour in Roman rhetoric' in Dominik and Hall eds. *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, pp207-17;

**Latin reading class:** Terence, *Eunuchus* 454-614

**Lecture 7:** Cicero's *de Oratore*: performing wit.

Preparatory reading: ; Cicero *On the Orator* 2.216-90 (use Loeb edition); Duggan 'Cicero's rhetorical theory' in Steel ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, 25-40.

**Latin reading class:** Terence, *Eunuchus* 615-909

**Lecture 8:** *Ovid's lovers: learning how to laugh in Augustan Rome*

Preparatory reading: S.L. James 'Elegy and comedy'; Ovid *Ars Amatoria* book 3 (Loeb edition)

**Latin reading class:** Terence, *Eunuchus* 910-1094

**Lecture 9:** *Student seminars*

**Latin reading class:** revision and further discussion