

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

ROMAN LITERATURE

Course description

Roman Literature explores the major forms of ancient Roman literature: epic, history, drama, satire, lyric, philosophy.

About the Professor. This course was developed by Frederic Will, Ph.D., School of Advanced Studies, University of Phoenix. Professor Will has written extensively on Greco-Roman cultures.

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Week One Introduction

Purpose of present syllabus. The present syllabus aims to provide a glimpse of some of the great landmarks of the ancient Roman literary achievement. The arrangement of study here is by genre of imagination: epic, history, satire, drama, lyric, philosophy. Each of these genres was the product of a distinctive kind of imagination. By adopting this perspective we single out determining facets of the Roman literary mind: the vastness of speculative and conceptual sweep (epic); the power of analytic self-awareness (philosophy); the ability to project human interactions onto the stage (comic drama); the inclusion of feeling in self-referential language (poetry); the organization of group memory (history); the power to reflect on the whole human condition (epic). We will make appropriate efforts, as we go along, to embed these generic discussions in their chronological setting, but we will not primarily be concerned with 'filling in the time line.'

Readings and assignments. The readings for each week of the course will be in one of the most current of the many available English translations of the great texts noted below. (The readings will be listed with each week's assignment. In many cases online versions will be available and acceptable.)

The expectation, for student input, is suggested by the writing assignments:

Unit Essays: 1,000-word essays at the end of each unit

Final Essay: 5,000-word essay at the end of the course, which covers all units

You should consult these topic suggestions at the outset of the class.

The instructor will welcome imaginative ways to address the written assignments. A few collateral readings will be indicated along with the readings at the end of each week. No extensive bibliography is provided. This course promotes direct access to originals, for better or worse, endorsing Nietzsche's notion that millions of words about the classics must not be permitted to obscure the classics.

UNIT 1 ESSAY (1,000 words)

Suggested Topics:

What Stoic and Epicurean ideas did Lucretius import into his epic, *De Rerum Natura*? Are those ideas incorporated in such a way as to constitute parts of a flowing narrative? Does Lucretius manage to avoid didacticism?

Does Virgil avoid didacticism? His theme—or do you agree?—is arguably praise of Rome and Augustus. (There is much dispute about this.) If that is his theme, does he build it into a 'good story' while at the same time making his point?

Unit 2 Essay (1,000 Words)

Suggested Topics

Does Livy, as historian, at all carry out the same project as Virgil, in the *Aeneid*? Is Livy, too, concerned to 'glorify' the origins of his culture?

Tacitus declares that he writes his history 'objectively.' Do you think he is correct about that? If not, what do you see as his 'point of view'? Does he in any way write like what we today call an investigative reporter?

Unit 3 Essay (1,000 Words)

Suggested Topics

The comedies of Plautus are closely related to popular humor and daily entertainments. What larger points—views of life and mankind—do you see Plautus developing through his drama?

How does Seneca's drama reflect the tenor of the age it is written in? Is there melodrama and intensity in both the drama and the age? How do that age, and that melodrama, fit with the Stoic emphasis on calm in Seneca's own world-view?

Unit 4 Essay (1,000 Words)

Suggested Topics

What seem to you the chief differences between the satire of Petronius and that of Juvenal? Are the authors pillorying the same faults and/or the same level of social behavior?

What seems to you to generate the satirical spirit in the first century A.D.? Is it the decline in morals? Or is it the particularly rich target that sophisticated urban enclaves offer to the literary eye?

Does Juvenal offer us a true to life picture of the problems facing the city of Rome? Or does he, in the mouths of his 'characters,' work for literary effect? How would you know how to answer this question?

Unit 5 Essay (1,000 Words)

Suggested Topics

Catullus devotes much of his lyric power to love and sex. Is he 'romantically' in love with Lesbia? How does his 'love' change through the body of his poems? What kind of 'love' does he feel toward his departed brother?

How do Petronius and Juvenal differ as satirists? Do they share a single opinion about the life of Rome, or are their targets totally different from each other?

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR FINAL 5,000 WORD PAPER

- How do you view the importance of actual chronological history to the literary creations of the Romans? Is their history important to many of these writers, as they go about their creation? Explain.
- In what literary genres do you think the Romans excelled? Where, in your opinion, were they relatively limited in their contribution to world culture?
- What seem to you the deep points of difference between the writing of Saint Augustine, and that of the earlier Roman writers we have considered here? Does Marcus Aurelius seem to you a forebear of Saint Augustine, or are Marcus' affiliations almost entirely to Stoic and Epicurean traditions?
- What (in your opinion) underlies the powerful satire in Roman literature? Has it something to do with the character of Roman life and society as they were experienced by Juvenal, Petronius, and—for instance—the brilliant epigrammatist, Martial?
- Livy and Virgil give different accounts of the origins of Roman culture. Or can you see their differing accounts fitting together with one another? What was the importance, for these two epic minded writers, of retelling the founding stories of Rome?
- How do you view the Roman theatrical tradition, from what we have read? Have Plautus (and Terence) anything in common with Seneca? Why—this might cost you some research time—do you think drama was the central literary experience for the Greeks, while for the Romans it was (arguably) a minor genre?

Readings:

For this first week we will read two books: *Ancient Rome: a New History* (New York, 2009), by David Potter, and *Literature in the Roman World* (Oxford, 2001) by Oliver Taplin. Both of these books will orient us, in our reading of the weekly texts, toward the larger network of developments in which those texts take place. This is the place to mention three valuable reference books, for the wider contexts of Roman literature: *A History of Latin Literature*, by Moses Hadas (New York, 1952); *A Literary History of Rome from the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age* (London, 2013) and *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age* (London, 1960), both of which latter books are by J. Wight Duff.

Roman and Greek literatures. In this course we are going to read and discuss selections in translation from fifteen different Ancient Roman authors. The life and work spans of those writers will be considerable, from the early third century B.C. (Plautus) to the early fifth century A.D. (Saint Augustine); 700 years, during which although some kinds of continuity persisted in the Roman world, political, social, and religious developments intruded to shape and change the world of the writer. In this blend of continuity with rapid change the development of Roman literature resembles that of the Greek literature which is the backdrop and generative source of the Roman literary achievement. We will try to highlight the salient changes in the longitudinal development of Roman literature, while at the same time looking at the collateral developments making themselves felt, in that literature, at any one time. Let me explain this latter point.

Vertical and lateral literary histories. There is, in Roman (as in any) literature, a chronological development which can be read from beginning to end, and which sweeps up in its progress many and varied forms of expression—from delicate poetry to robust histories. There is also another kind of history, which we might call generic, which tracks the developments of literary expression through the different expressive forms which diversify that literary history. You will see from the table of course contents, above, that we are taking that second path, the history of literature in terms of the different forms or genres in which that literature unfolds. By the conclusion of our survey we should have focused on several expressive powers available to the makers of Ancient Roman literature.

UNIT 1: EPIC

Week 2 Lucretius (98-55 B.C.)

Roman epic and Greek culture. You will quickly see, from Potter's *Roman History*, that Roman culture is from the start deeply indebted to Greek culture, and Lucretius' epic, *De Rerum Natura; On the Nature of Things*, is just the proof we need. To write a long philosophical poem in Latin was to follow in the footsteps of early Greek literature, in which at least two major writers—Hesiod (in the *Theogony*, 8th century B.C.) and Parmenides (in *On Nature*, early fifth century B.C.)—developed their views of the world in formal epic poetry. (In so doing those Greek writers emulated the tradition, which goes far back into Middle Eastern and Indian philosophical and religious expression—*Enuma Elish* in Babylon, the *Vedas* in India—of consigning cosmological thought to poetry. To which we might add that the primal form of serious expression, throughout early cultures, is poetry, while prose is generally later to develop.)

Epicurus. Not only is Greek poetry, but also Greek thought, the founding energy for Lucretius. The third century B.C. Greek philosopher, Epicurus, was the master thinker behind Lucretius' view of the world. (Of him Lucretius writes:

*O glory of the Greeks, the first to raise
The shining light out of tremendous dark
Illumining the blessings of our life,
You are the one I follow...*

As the founder of the Epicurean school, Epicurus exercised great influence on the thought of Hellenistic Greeks and of many Romans. His dominant principle was atomism; a belief that the world is composed of atoms collocated by chance, and responsible, in their infinitely subtle interweavings, for the entirety of existence, from the infinitesimal to the cosmically vast. Lucretius develops many riffs off of this basic perception. The best known of these concern his headlong assault on the fear of death, which he sees as the supreme disturber of mortal peace and happiness.

Lucretius and the fear of death. Like Epicurus, and indeed like many Hellenistic thinkers, Lucretius thought the fear of death sufficient to destroy the pleasure of life, and overgrown with all kinds of misconceptions, principally the ignorant belief that we will have sensation, and be aware of our 'dead condition' after death. Lucretius takes special pains to argue away this ignorance, and to address also the subtler objections of those who see the world differently from him. One of those objections was that, even though we may be composed of atoms, and scatter to the winds at death, we may reassemble by accident and once again, at some time in the future, be conscious wholes again, essentially the persons we were before. To this Lucretius responds that even were this almost incalculably chance event to occur, we would be totally without memory, a new collocation entirely. So thorough does he believe the

dispersal of the person at death, and the absurdity of fearing death as though it had any connection with our conscious presence?

Venus and the swerve. The vast poem in which Lucretius embedded this argument—and which is carried out in splendid dactylic hexameters, just as did Homer in the past and as Virgil will soon do in his *Aeneid*—scrutinizes all that is, starting with the human person, with his/her weaknesses, hopes, and dreams, and then moves on to encase the human in its worldly and finally cosmic setting. After an initial exordium to the goddess of love, Venus, who brings all organic things to growth and life, Lucretius takes his reader farther out into the world of human senses and perceptions, then into the inorganic stages of development of the world around us, with a magnificent reach into the nature of human societies and their growth, and onward out into the cosmos so noble but so devoid of all those theistic god-presences on which we typically rely for comfort in our human world. At the most, we might say, the universe provides a staging ground for our human efforts at society, and in particular for our free will—which might seem to be precluded by the compulsive and random movement of atoms in the void. This free will element, which for Lucretius is the foundation of the peculiar dignity of the human, enters through a *clinamen*, or *swerving*, of the atoms in the void, a swerving which introduces chance into random necessity.

Love and spring. Even the power of love, as we see in the opening of the poem (below) is to be understood in the terms of Epicurean physics, rather, say, than in the terms of Romance. The following passage may seem to boil down to a splendid praise of spring, and to the regeneration of nature through desire, and yet as the reader pursues the passage—reminiscent, say, of Chaucer’s wonderful prologue to spring, or Wordsworth’s loving poems about spring and daffodils—we find ourselves drifting powerfully into a universe where random movements of atoms, not any benevolence in things, is the driver.

Mother of Rome, delight of Gods and men,
 Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars
 Makest to teem the many-voyaged main
 And fruitful lands--for all of living things
 Through thee alone are evermore conceived,
 Through thee are risen to visit the great sun--
 Before thee, Goddess, and thy coming on,
 Flee stormy wind and massy cloud away,
 For thee the daedal Earth bears scented flowers,
 For thee waters of the unvexed deep
 Smile, and the hollows of the serene sky
 Glow with diffused radiance for thee!
 For soon as comes the springtime face of day,
 And procreant gales blow from the West unbarred,
 First fowls of air, smit to the heart by thee,

Foretold thy approach, O thou Divine,
 And leap the wild herds round the happy fields \\\n
 Or swim the bounding torrents...

Readings:

Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, translated by R.E. Latham (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987).

Godwin, John, *Lucretius* (Bristol, 2004.)

Discussion Questions:

Why do you suppose Lucretius wrote his epic vision in poetry?

Would we write such a vision in poetry or prose today? What is the peculiar power of poetry, in rising to the height of such an argument about reality?

How do you interpret Lucretius' claim, that he composed *De Rerum Natura* in order to help free human beings from the fear of death? Does the argument he develops seem calculated to achieve that freeing? Are you afraid of death? What do you do about it?

Does Lucretius integrate the idea of the swerve into his argument, or does it seem to be an artificial ingredient, introduced in order to preserve the possibility of free will?

Week 3 Virgil (70 B.C.-19 B.C.)

The Roman historical setting. Thanks to the nature of his epic, Lucretius did not clamor for attention to the historical setting in which he was writing. Yet well he might have done. The first half of the first century B.C. was a time in which Rome, and the Italian cities which surrounded it, and which were coming increasingly under Roman domination, was being thrown into the whirlpool of intense political and cultural change. The early formative centuries—4th and 3rd B.C.—had seen the firming up of the independent free spirited senate of the still largely agricultural Roman society, the value formative struggles of a hardy people who had taken charge of the Italian peninsula, and who were building the muscle soon to be required for intense military effort, wars against the Gauls in the North, and then the three exhausting Punic Wars, fought against the Carthaginians from 264 B.C.-146 B.C. In the century following the conclusion of these Wars, in which Rome was 'victorious' and consolidated its control of Italia, tumultuous developments forced the older rural Rome into legislative reform—here and throughout the civic arena the brothers Gracchi were the powerful innovators—and generated private political forces with their own armies, like Marius (157-86 B.C.) and Sulla (138-78 B.C.) , which guaranteed a state of pressure cooker intensity to the whole peninsula. We are close to the period during which Julius Caesar and Pompey formed their first alliance—60 B.C. was the year—and with that we are stepping onto the rolling sidewalk of history along which the Roman Republic was careening toward Empire. No wonder, then, that we feel Lucretius's epic might well have clamored for attention to its historical embedding. And indeed, if we look closely enough, at Lucretius' stress on removing the fear of death, or on freeing mankind from superstition and anthropomorphic gods, we can see that in his work he *was* building himself a shelter from the chaos of his time.

The Aeneid. The same can be said, more obviously, for the work of Virgil in creating his *Aeneid*, which was written between 29 B.C. and 19 B.C., and which thus coincided with the accession to imperial power of Augustus Caesar (Emperor from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D.). Not only was Virgil a close friend of the man who was to become the greatest power figure of his age, but Virgil witnessed/heard about up close those tumultuous events—Julius Caesar's seizure of power and assassination in 44 B.C., the death of Pompey, the battle between Augustus and Antony/Cleopatra, which ended with the Battle of Actium in 34 B.C.—which were the transition of Rome into a world power, and one whose influence is profoundly culture shaping to our day. While Lucretius sought for personal quiet and speculative freedom, as a haven from the chaos of his world, Virgil took another path, letting his epic imagination expand onto a new vision of the new world Augustus was ushering in.

Virgil and Homer. Virgil's move was one of ultimate ambition, to write of world changing developments by following not only the dactylic hexameter epic tradition, inherited from the Greeks, but to create his epic directly out of the impulses of Homer's two epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which were probably composed around the beginning of the first millennium B.C., and which had served as a virtual

Bible for the Greeks—underwriting their mythical imaginations, their sense of group pride, and providing an exemplar for aesthetic taste.

The Iliad and the Odyssey. Put very roughly, the first half of Virgil's epic follows the thematic developments of Homer's *Odyssey* while the second half of the *Aeneid*—the 'poem about Aeneas'—follows the thematic of the *Iliad*. This reversal of thematics, by which Virgil handles the sequence of events of Homer's poems in reverse order, brings distinct attention to the second part of the *Aeneid*, which concerns the founding of the city of Rome by the hero, Aeneas, who has fled with his family and his family gods from the destruction of the citadel of Troy by the Greeks. While many moderns find the second half of the *Aeneid* less gripping than the first, in which Aeneas recounts the tales of his wandering after leaving Troy, and Virgil narrates Aeneas' moving love affair with the Carthaginian Queen, Dido, there seems little doubt that for Virgil the true meaning of the epic lies in the second half of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas heroically defeats the regional Italic king, Turnus, and conquers Italy for Rome, the site of a new millennial world change. To call this monumental poem praise of Virgil's friend Augustus, would be a huge understatement. The epic goes through and beyond flattery, to a level where the grandeur of the human enterprise is put out for viewing.

Invocation. In the fashion of the classical epic, Virgil opens with an invocation to the Muse, in which he sums up his whole theme. It will be up to the reader to consider the daring of emulation, and firmness of purpose, which Virgil demonstrates in opening as follows:

*I sing of arms and the man, he who, exiled by fate,
first came from the coast of Troy to Italy, and to
Lavinian shores – hurled about endlessly by land and sea,
by the will of the gods, by cruel Juno's remorseless anger,
long suffering also in war, until he founded a city
and brought his gods to Latium: from that the Latin people
came, the lords of Alba Longa, the walls of noble Rome.*

Readings: Virgil, *Aeneid*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald (New York, 1990.)

Putnam, Michael, *The Poetry of the Aeneid: Four Studies in Imaginative Unity and Design* (Cambridge, 1965).

Ross, David O., *Virgil's Aeneid: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford, 2007.)

Discussion questions:

It is customary to view the *Aeneid* as a panegyric of Augustus. Do you see another way of viewing the epic? What about the extreme brutality that marks the Romans' accession to power on the Italic peninsula? Is that brutality being justified in the poem?

Aeneas himself is called *pius*, in the *Aeneid*; a term suggesting *devout, reliable, mature*. Do you find Aeneas an engaging literary personality? Is he the stuff of a good novel?

How do you read the 'love affair' with Dido? Is there a true love exchange, or is their relationship entirely between blocks of national/ethnic groups of power? Is it hard for Aeneas to leave Dido?

UNIT 1 ESSAY (1,000 words)

Suggested Topics:

What Stoic and Epicurean ideas did Lucretius import into his epic, *De Rerum Natura*? Are those ideas incorporated in such a way as to constitute parts of a flowing narrative? Does Lucretius manage to avoid didacticism?

Does Virgil avoid didacticism? His theme—or do you agree?—is arguably praise of Rome and Augustus. (There is much dispute about this.) If that is his theme, does he build it into a 'good story' while at the same time making his point?

UNIT 2: HISTORY

Week 4 Livy (59 B.C.-17 A.D.)

Virgil and Livy. As we are working through Roman literature on the basis of types of imagination, we should note how 'history' differs from the historical epic of Virgil, which might at first glance seem also to be 'history.' In fact the *Aeneid* and the works of Livy might also seem to intersect as works of poetry, for we will find, on reading our Livy, that in his story telling mode of history writing he differs greatly from what an age like ours would consider 'scientific writing of history.'

Apart from the formal matter of prosody itself—Livy in prose, Virgil in highly self conscious dactyls, which breathe a line by line dialogue with Homer's own verses—Virgil may be said to thread his material with vision, a purposiveness centered on getting the founder of a new Rome to his destination, while Livy narrates historical material that is itself anecdotal and digressive, though like Virgil Livy too has an ultimate interest in praising aspects of his own culture, and promoting attention to them. When we come to Tacitus, the following week, we will find a more empirical historian than Livy, and have little trouble in distinguishing the historical from the epic view point. With Livy we need to make our distinctions carefully, between the two genres with which we are opening this syllabus.

Livy and the world of Augustus. Like Lucretius and Virgil, though a generation or two later, Livy was born into the turbulent world we have already met, out of which Augustus, formerly Octavian, was to emerge the victor and the first Emperor; the world in which Caesar, Antony, and Pompey had gone down to defeat before the power of historical change.

Livy's popularity. Where Livy was born was relevant to his world view. He was born and raised in the north of Italy, near the present city of Padua, a region traditionally conservative, and accustomed to praise of Old Roman Values. To that viewpoint Livy remained faithful throughout his life, though by the 30's B.C., when he moved semi-permanently to Rome, he was exposed to the intense new world forming around him, and was in fact a close friend, and distant relative, of the Emperor to be, Augustus. Though Livy's one surviving work, a *History of Rome From the Founding of the City* (753 B.C.), became a popular text, and indeed a touchstone for his compatriots, as they formulated their own history for themselves, Livy remained in favor with the new imperial culture, the tendencies of which unmistakably moved away from the 'old simplicity' and 'staunch rural values' which Livy admired in the early centuries of his culture.

Annals and Traditional History. The history Livy constructs was by his time part of ancient oral tradition, as well as of written histories by

predecessors whose works are now lost. His history opens with the founding of the city of Rome by Aeneas—the same narrative as Virgil's—and is left to us in three main sections, devoted, respectively, to the origins of Roman culture, various consulships in the sixth century B.C., and then incidents in the political history of Livy's own time. We might say, today, that the way Livy's historical mind works—a mixture of annals, which report the administrative leaders of the Republic for each year, with critical narration of traditional material—is cunning in its human perceptions but naive in its 'notion of historical method.' An example may help us nail down this point.

Roman origin tales. Origin tales are central to Livy's *History*, which begins credently with the tale of Aeneas' founding, the same launch point Virgil employed. There follows a sequence of generations, several hundred years, in which peace dominates, the new nation flourishes; but then, as with the struggle of Cain and Abel, conflict comes in, needed to generate the birth pangs of the new world. The struggle pits two brothers, both candidates for the kingship, and turns violent when the younger flouts the rule of seniority, and sets off a train of consequences—it's an intricate read, here—which eventuates in the rape of a Vestal Virgin, whose twin offspring barely escape the homicidal plans of the wronged king. At this point myth, rather than putative history, enters to divinize the lineages in store for Rome. The twin infants, as we all know, find themselves on the river bank ready to be washed away, when a she-wolf appears, on her way for a drink of the river, gives teat to the babes, saves their lives, and readies them, Romulus and Remus, for a role as the true legislative founders of the Roman State.

The voice of Livy. What is the voice of Livy, as he tells this historical tale? In many ways he delights in the telling, and gratefully plugs these hallowed events into the ongoing tale. But Livy is, remember, living more than five centuries after the origin tale, and in a culture of world sophistication, in the milieu of speakers and creators like Virgil, Cicero, and Catullus. Unable even slightly to wink at us, as he maintains the old tradition, he feels obliged to comment as follows, on the reaction of the Emperor's flock-master, to the advent of the twins in his hut:

his (the flock master's) name was Faustulus. He took the children to his hut and gave them to his wife Larentia to bring up. Some writers think that Larentia, from her unchaste life, had got the nickname of "She-wolf" amongst the shepherds, and that this was the origin of the marvellous story.

As an historian, we have said, Livy accepts a mission not wholly different from that of the poet. But he does so with a clear acknowledgement, that he knows how to undercut his tale when he needs to.

Readings: Livy, *The Early History of Rome, Books I-IV, translated by Ogilvie* (London, Penguin, 2002.) Read entire text.

Dorey, T.A., *Livy* (London, 1971.)

Discussion questions:

To what extent are Livy and Virgil similar, in their efforts to reconstruct the origins of Rome through literature? Do they both 'glorify' those origins?

What do you think of the 'historical value' of founding tales—Horace at the Bridge, Romulus and Remus—such as Livy uses to construct the early parts of his history?

Does Livy write as a friend of the new Imperial world, or as an old Roman democrat, fundamentally opposed to the new?

Week 5 Tacitus (58 A.D.-117 A.D.)

Livy and Tacitus. From our reading in Livy we note that the Romans were intensely interested in their own past, which, like all peoples, they manipulated in part for the sake of establishing their national image. This very motive, as we have seen, may parallel that of Virgil, in writing the *Aeneid*—for the Romans of the late first century B.C. were preoccupied with using the past to shape the present and gain power over the future. When we come to the historian Tacitus, however, our account must be different. Tacitus observes human affairs dispassionately, without projecting them into a future where they would acquire their meaning.

Tacitus and the imperial world. Tacitus was born well into the imperial period of Rome—Augustus Caesar died in 17 A.D.—and in his most famous works, *The Histories* and *The Annals* he writes directly of his own time, specifically of the Imperial reigns of Tiberius (42 B.C.-37 A.D.), Claudius (10 B.C.-54 A.D.), and Nero (37 A.D.-68 A.D.). His own life brought him into contact with the major players on the political/imperial scene. Born in the provinces—probably in Gallia Narbonensis—Tacitus soon entered political life in Rome, where throughout his career life he was brilliantly active as a Senator/orator, a sought after lawyer in the increasingly litigious atmosphere of imperial Rome, and a provincial governor in the East, where he gained experience and great distinction. In other words, when it came to the dense historical material of the present, Tacitus had much personal awareness to bring to bear. While he proudly commented that he wrote his histories *sine ira et studio, without anger or zeal*, they nonetheless bear the marks of the hot fire of political action. There is no mistaking, in those works, a hatred of tyranny, and a surgical scorn for the kinds of voluptuous infighting which marked the struggles, among the successors of Augustus, to occupy the center of power in Rome.

Tacitus' style as historian. The unusual mixture of personal involvement with terse and observant style, a style both intense and withdrawn, forces our attention onto the way Tacitus went about informing himself, as an historian. (We have noted that Livy turned to earlier and anecdotal Roman historians, in constructing his history.) The answer is that Tacitus is both working from his personal experience, and from a consultation of contemporary documents, to which he devotes analytical attention (*sine ira et studio*.) Among his written sources were: the *Acta*, the official records, of the actions of the Roman senate; copies of official speeches; copies of personal letters to which he had access; the *acta diurnala populi romani*, the official news of daily developments in Rome.

The Annals. In *The Annals* Tacitus plunges into the complexities of high level political struggle—for stakes richly involving love and power—the material of a sitcom like *Dallas*, but played out on the stage of Imperial rule.

His presentation of the Death of Agrippina, the mother of Nero, shows his historical hand. The years following the death of Augustus presented a bewildering tangle of personal interrelations, among ambitious, lustful, perverse, greedy competitors for imperial power, or for the voluminous perks that spilled on all sides of the royal throne. The attempts of Agrippina, to raise her son Nero to imperial status, involve her in complex machinations which, because she is trying to manipulate a nest of vipers like Nero, Sejanus, and Britannicus, leads to her brutal and brilliantly described death.

Cluvius relates that Agrippina in her eagerness to retain her influence went so far that more than once at midday, when Nero, even at that hour, was flushed with wine and feasting, she presented herself attractively attired to her half intoxicated son and offered him her person, and that when kinsfolk observed wanton kisses and caresses, portending infamy, it was Seneca who sought a female's aid against a woman's fascinations, and hurried in Acte, the freed-girl, who alarmed at her own peril and at Nero's disgrace, told him that the incest was notorious, as his mother boasted of it, and that the soldiers would never endure the rule of an impious sovereign. Fabius Rusticus tells us that it was not Agrippina, but Nero, who lusted for the crime, and that it was frustrated by the adroitness of that same freed-girl. Cluvius's account, however, is also that of all other authors, and popular belief inclines to it, whether it was that Agrippina really conceived such a monstrous wickedness in her heart, or perhaps because the thought of a strange passion seemed comparatively credible in a woman, who in her girlish years had allowed herself to be seduced by Lepidus in the hope of winning power, had stooped with a like ambition to the lust of Pallas, and had trained herself for every infamy by her marriage with her uncle.

The mind of Tacitus. A close look at the present passage lets the reader into the labyrinthine complexity of Tacitus' historical analysis. (You will want to read this historian with a fine toothed comb.) There are two interpretations of Agrippina's behavior toward her son: one of which lays the stress on the mother's lust, the other on that of the son. (The preference given to the second is backed up by other authorities, and given credence by further biographical evidence from Agrippina's youth.) Tacitus manages, in this passage, to generate subtle psychology-- *it was Seneca who sought a female's aid against a woman's fascinations*-- and to introduce the subordinate motivations of two smaller players in the paragraph's drama, Acte and Seneca. This rich crowding of perspectives is characteristic of the never simplistic texture of Tacitus' history.

Readings: Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, translated by William Brodribb (Digireads.com, 2005.)

Martin, Ronald, *Tacitus* (Berkeley, 1981).

Discussion questions:

What is Tacitus' personal attitude toward the intrigues and machinations at the imperial court? How does he view the death of Agrippina?

How does Tacitus differ from Livy as an historian? Which of the two seems more to fit the 'modern model' of the critical historian?

What evidence do you see, in Tacitus' work, of his career as a politician and orator?

Unit 2 Essay (1,000 Words)

Suggested Topics

Does Livy, as historian, at all carry out the same project as Virgil, in the *Aeneid*? Is Livy, too, concerned to 'glorify' the origins of his culture?

Tacitus declares that he writes his history 'objectively.' Do you think he is correct about that? If not, what do you see as his 'point of view'? Does he in any way write like what we today call an investigative reporter?

UNIT 3: DRAMA

Week 6 Plautus (254 B.C.-184 B.C.)

Differences among genres. We have looked at examples of epic and historical imagination in Roman literature, and found that in certain cases the two imaginations overlap, as between Virgil and Livy, both of whom are driven to sanctify the origins of the Roman State. When it comes to Roman drama, however, we tap another vein of literary expression, that of popular amusement.

Origins of Roman drama. Early Roman drama acquired its impulse from the influence of the Greek dramatist Menander (341 B.C.-290 B.C.), who was the perfect expression of the urbane creations of the Hellenistic period; if it is true that the Greeks, in being conquered by the Romans in the second century B.C., at the same time conquered the Romans—through superior creativity—then the earliest expression of that reverse conquest might be the comedies of Plautus, which take off from the Greek. It should be added, though, that there is fragmentary evidence that Roman comedy existed long before Plautus—perhaps several centuries earlier—though all we have left is references to plays; also that the ludic/often raw/often phallic quality of the comedy of Plautus belongs to a long tradition of Roman popular culture, of jongleurs in the streets, nude public dancing, flute concerts in public.

Roman drama as popular entertainment. Be that as it may, we inherit in Plautus a fully developed comic tradition which played an important role in the public entertainment of the Romans. This role unfolded regularly at the *ludi*, religious festivals honoring Jupiter, and held annually in September, starting in 366 B.C. At those *ludi*, where chariot races, boxing, and dancing were performed, plays of Plautus were regular centerpieces. Of that centrality it should be noted that these plays were performed *without a theater* until 55 B.C., so that the face to face quality of actors and spectators contributed directness. Plautus himself, born in the countryside (Umbria), and raised to a modest background, got his earliest job as a stage carpenter, which was not only the bridge to his exposure to Greek dramatic works, but his baptism of fire in the nitty gritty of stage presentation.

Plautus' opus. Of Plautus' fifty two plays there remain twenty, all comedies, and all more or less cut from the same cloth; the same stock of characters; the same plot developments; the same license—a lot of joking about the gods, which aroused criticism in many quarters, and squared off against the 'religious devotional' purpose of the *ludi*; the same referential background of cultural anxiety—the 2nd Punic War (218-201 B.C.) sustained a high anxiety level in Rome. The stockpile of familiar character types—remarkably similar to those bursting forth in Italian *commedia del'arte*, already in the Renaissance heralding developments in seventeenth European theater—shares with the sharp dialogue the joyful energy of these plays.

Stock characters in Plautus. A mild example of the repartee in these plays can be found in the brief excerpt below, from Plautus' *Captivi*. (That mini excerpt will remind

us already of the texture of those Shakespeare comedies, like *Measure for Measure*, which dazzle us still with their wordplay.) The stock characters who enact the formulae of these plays are numerous: the *adulescens*, a love struck young man; the *senex*, an old man, perhaps the father of the *adulescens*, often a competitor with his son for the love of a younger woman; the *leno*, or whoremaster, often in charge of a young lovely who is the interest of the *adulescens*; the *miles gloriosus*, or braggardly soldier, who totally lacks self-awareness; the *parasitus*, who sponges off the leading characters; and so on into minor characters like the whoremistress or the virgin, who is typically without personality, except beauty, and is the love object of the major male population. With this kind of cast—whose behavior, costuming, language are pretty consistent from one play to the next—Plautus constructs witty variations on themes of misunderstanding, happy endings for love, and cranky obstructionism—which will arouse the emotions we expect today from a good old sitcom. It will only add to the effect if we complete the description: each play has virtually the same setting, as well as characters; that setting is an urban street with an exit out onto a thoroughfare through which characters enter and depart; the trigger to action is usually an act of eavesdropping by which a generative rumor starts things going.

SCENE II. Enter, from his house, HEGIO and a SLAVE.

HEG. Now, give attention you, if you please. Those two captives whom I purchased yesterday of the Quaestors out of the spoil, put upon them chains of light weight; take off those greater ones with which they are bound. Permit them to walk, if they wish, out of doors, or if indoors, but so that they are watched with the greatest care. A captive at liberty is like a bird that's wild; if opportunity is once given for escaping, 'tis enough; after that, you can never catch him.

SLAVE. Doubtless we all are free men more willingly than we live the life of slaves.

HEG. You, indeed, don't seem to think so.

SLAVE. If I have nothing to give, should you like me to give myself to flight?

HEG. If you do so give yourself, I shall at once have something to be giving to you.

SLAVE. I'll make myself just like the wild bird you were telling of...

History and the epic are hereby left behind as private acts, consummating private visions, while the dramatic imagination, in Rome as elsewhere, is eminently public, and in comedy especially absolutely requires giving public pleasure.

Readings: *Plautus: The Comedies*, Volume I, ed. Slavitt (Baltimore, 1995).

Sharrock, Alison, *Reading Roman Comedy: Poetics and Playfulness in Plautus and Terence* (Cambridge, 2009.)

Discussion questions:

Why do Plautus' plays thrive on stock characters? Would it have something to do with his historical moment? In what ways do stock characters serve as useful vehicles of comic art?

Does Plautine comedy feature slapstick and burlesque elements? What kind of audience do you imagine for Plautus's plays?

What kind of use did Shakespeare make, of Plautus' plays? Does the comedy of errors theme seem to you to be of lasting value as a theatrical recourse?

Week 7 Seneca (4 B.C.-65 A.D.)

Seneca and Plautus. At the conclusion of this week's syllabus you will find a translation of a passage from Seneca's *Oedipus*—exact date unknown—which may at first glance make you doubt whether we are still dealing with Ancient Roman drama. We are. Though the passage yanks its original into strong contemporary diction it is nonetheless a vigorous and honest account of lines from the Roman dramatist and philosopher Seneca. We could hardly be farther in spirit from the comic world of Plautus, which we read in the previous week. We have moved two hundred years into the future, have entered the first half-century of Imperial Roman rule, and have changed genre from robust stock character drama to closet drama playing off against a sophisticated model, the *Oedipus* of the Greek dramatist Sophocles, written in the mid fifth century B.C.

Oedipus the King. Sophocles' play, as you know, concerns a proud, doomed, and irascible Ruler of Thebes, whose land has gone waste as a result—that is the rumor in the kingdom—of unholy actions somewhere in the community. The drive of the tightly compacted play is to find out the cause of the plague on the land, to track it to its individual source—the King himself—and to mete out a dreadful purging punishment to the King. The play is a perfect geometry of beginning, middle, end. Seneca's *Oedipus*, on the other hand, is baroque, digressive, highly rhetorical. Whereas the king's mother, Jocasta, is in Sophocles a cog in the wheels of destiny, who limits her commentaries, on the dreadful fate of her son, to various ways of deploring the savage ironies of life, in Seneca's play, as you see above, Jocasta deplores, in the fate of her son, the whole rotten fallenness of the human condition, and does so in extravagantly bitter and melodramatic terms. In the hands of her brilliant British adapter, Ted Hughes, her speech acquires a texture of its own, which brings to the front of the play the hyperbolic intensity of a character who, in Sophocles, is simply a stage in the development of the plot.

The tenor of Seneca's work. The tenor of Seneca's work as a dramatist is epitomized in this example: intense, hyperbolic, rhetorical, and, as we refreshingly begin to think, valuable in its own right and deeply expressive of its own age. (Think of the example of the murder of Agrippina, in Tacitus; think of the fierce personal struggles, and emotional depths, of the main figures in the fight for the succession to Augustus, at just the time of Seneca's life: doesn't the speech of Iocasta belong to the rhetorical modes of the time?)

Seneca and Nero. The dramatist behind *Oedipus*, and eight other tragedies on ancient Greek mythical themes, played a prominent role in the first half of the first century A.D. From Cordoba in Spain, Seneca went as a young man to Rome, to study Rhetoric and Philosophy—in the latter field especially to deepen his understanding of the principles of Stoicism, to which he adhered throughout his life. That Greek philosophy, with its emphasis on control of the passions, but also on the power of the emotions, lay behind the philosophical developments of Seneca's thought. His view was that the misuse of the passions is a sure key to downfall, and that man needs

calm and willed self-discipline in order to lead a satisfactory life. This larger perspective, which is deeply embedded in the values of Seneca's literary work, was hard won, for in 'real life' Seneca himself was exposed to the baroque energies of a cultural moment which would not spare the individual. As tutor and advisor to the Emperor Nero—again recall the treatment of Nero in Tacitus—Seneca tried to convince his boss of the importance of self-control, and for a time, but only for a time, succeeded.

Seneca as moralist. In the year 41 A.D. Seneca was accused of complicity in a plot to kill the Emperor, and was sent into exile. It was while in exile on the island of Corsica that Seneca turned inward and began to write seriously, leaving us in the end a remarkably rich collage of texts—one hundred twenty four letters—many of them highly refined philosophical reflection, nine tragedies, and twelve substantial philosophical essays, in which he discusses, with great finesse, issues bearing on desire, anger, and the potentials for global oneness in humanity. It is cruelly ironic that this brilliantly outreaching creator was in the end forced to commit suicide, a dreadful one as the historian Tacitus again tells us, in which repeated vein cuttings and ultimately suffocation by steam were required to do the deed.

*when I carried my sons
I carried them for death I carried them for the
Throne
I carried them for final disaster when I carried my
First son
Did I know what was coming did I know
What ropes of blood were twisting together what
Bloody footprints
Were hurrying together in my body
Did I know what past and unfinished reckonings
Were getting flesh again inside me
Did I think that the debts of the past
Were settled before I conceived
I knew the thing in my womb was going to have to
Pay for the whole past
I knew the future was waiting for him like a greedy
God a maneater in a cave
Was going to ask for everything happiness strength
And finally life
As if no other man existed I carried him for this
For pain and for fear
For hard sharp metal for the cruelty of other men
And his own cruelty
I carried him for disease
For rotteness and dropping to pieces
I carried him for death bones dust I knew*

Readings:

Seneca, *Three Tragedies (Trojan Women; Medea; Phaedra)*, translated and with an introduction by Frederick Ahl (Ithaca, 1986).

Pratt, Norman, *Seneca's Drama* (Chapel Hill, 1983).

Discussion questions:

How does Seneca's Oedipus differ from the Oedipus of Sophocles, in *Oedipus The King*?

What do you see as the connection between Seneca's ethical theory, his Stoicism, and what you are coming to know as his dramatic practice?

Seneca's drama was performed in private readings, rather than on public stages. Can you see why that was an appropriate way to showplace Seneca's work?

Unit 3 Essay (1,000 Words)

Suggested Topics

The comedies of Plautus are closely related to popular humor and daily entertainments. What larger points—views of life and mankind—do you see Plautus developing through his drama?

How does Seneca's drama reflect the tenor of the age it is written in? Is there melodrama and intensity in both the drama and the age? How do that age, and that melodrama, fit with the Stoic emphasis on calm in Seneca's own world-view?

UNIT 4: SATIRE

History of Roman Literature. Though our emphasis is falling on the development of genres, of or diverse forms of imagination, in Roman literature, we are inevitably constructing an image of the chronological *flow* of Roman literature and culture. It will have become clear, from what we have been reading to date, that the half century following the death of Augustus was fraught with social conflicts and vivid human passions. Tacitus and Seneca have made the point for us, and we will soon have lyric poetry, like that of Catullus, to amplify the point from another direction. Our attention this week will fall on a brilliant satirist of just the period we are considering.

Life of Petronius. Little is known of the life of Petronius. Like Seneca, who had only contempt for the hedonistic life-style of the first century A.D., Petronius too was implicated in the goings on of imperial society 'at the highest level.' He himself came, apparently, of a wealthy family, and moved naturally into the intense life of metropolitan Rome. We may know him best for a raucous pre novel, the *Satyricon*, but must realize that he also did responsible work as a citizen, serving as Governor of the Province of Bithynia in 62 A.D., and after that as Consul, or First Magistrate, of Rome. These posts, however, led 'yet higher' in to the inner circle of Nero's court—remember the machinations of Nero, in the account given by Tacitus—and from there to appointment as Nero's *arbiter elegantiae*, or court judge of fashion. That this post was official and recognized is a measure of the high-life level that dominated the Imperial Court.

Petronius' fate. We do know that, after having achieved significant influence over the Emperor Petronius inevitably found himself the object of jealousy. Tigellinus, commander of Nero's public guard, accused Petronius—wrongly, as we know—of conspiring to kill the Emperor, whereupon Petronius was arrested, in 65 A.D. Before the Emperor had returned from campaign, Petronius, who was to the max a hedonist and not a masochist, proceeded to commit suicide. The way he did so was as distinctive as the way he lived his life. He cut his veins, which bled only feebly, so that he temporarily postponed his death, while chatting with his friends, listening to pop music, and reclining. Only after it had become evident that he needed help, in dispatching himself, did his companions essentially suffocate him with steam from his bath. (Remember Seneca?)

Ancient satire. *The Satyricon*, the only text Petronius left us, has been a smash hit with readers from the beginning. On the surface, the explanation might seem to be the over the top luxury and eroticism climate of the text—the anal, the urinary, and the phallic competing for top role. The fact is, though, that the *Satyricon* is an exceptionally innovative form of that satirical genre which is occasionally a byproduct of conspicuously over-sophisticated societies. (We will turn, next week, to another brilliant Roman satirist, Juvenal, whose chief target, like that of Petronius, was the decadence of first century A. D. Rome. We will be asking ourselves, as we advance, why Greek society generated almost no satire—except for aspects of Aristophanes'

comic drama—while Roman was rich in the genre.) The narrator of the tale, Encolpius, recounts events as do the narrators of early English novels, like Fielding's *Tom Jones*, where the tale teller is also immersed in the events being told about. Formally, therefore, Petronius' tale makes moves toward the novel, in its earliest western form. And there is much more to say about those moves, for the world Encolpius tells us about smacks of that 'real world' so forcefully brought to the literary text by the novels of Renaissance Europe—cf. *Gil Blas* or *Don Quixote*—in which literary convention often steps aside to let the rawness of ordinary life assert itself.

The *Satyricon*. It might well be added that the narrator of the *Satyricon* travels dark paths of irony, which complement his broadly satirical view of the society he portrays. The passage below both caricatures the indifference of the 'elite' to the trashed people of their society, and leaves us gasping, as we absorb the bitter subtext of the narrator's words.

We had had enough of these novelties and started to enter the dining-room when a slave, detailed to this duty, cried out, "Right foot first." Naturally, we were afraid that some of us might break some rule of conduct and cross the threshold the wrong way; nevertheless, we started out, stepping off together with the right foot, when all of a sudden, a slave who had been stripped, threw himself at our feet, and commenced begging us to save him from punishment, as it was no serious offense for which he was in jeopardy; the steward's clothing had been stolen from him in the baths, and the whole value could scarcely amount to ten sesterces. So we drew back our right feet and intervened with the steward, who was counting gold pieces in the hall, begging him to remit the slave's punishment. Putting a haughty face on the matter, "It's not the loss I mind so much," he said, "as it is the carelessness of this worthless rascal. He lost my dinner clothes, given me on my birthday they were, by a certain client, Tyrian purple too, but it had been washed once already. But what does it amount to? I make you a present of the scoundrel!"

Readings: Petronius, *Satyricon*, trans. Arrowsmith (New York, 1983).

Courtney, Edward, *A Companion to Petronius* (Oxford, 2001.)

Sullivan, J.P., *The Satyricon of Petronius: A Literary Study* (London, 1968).

Discussion questions:

The life Petronius pillories is that of the Roman *nouveaux riches* of Nero's moment. What does Petronius think of the 'little guy'? What is his attitude toward the slaves in Trimalchio's house?

Does the *Satyricon* read like a novel to you? Do you see a plot developing, and a 'growth' in the central characters?

Do you leave Petronius' satire with the sense that he has scourged evil, or does he himself seem to delight in the fallen world he describes.

Week 9 Juvenal (55 A. D. -138 A.D.)

Life of Juvenal. As with many of the authors we have met in Ancient Rome, little is known about Juvenal. Born in the second half of the first century A.D., he lives out his life in a settling, and gradually less turbulent, phase of the imperial experience. He was born in Aquinum, scion of a wealthy freedman, studied in Rome as a pupil of the eminent orator Quintilian, and left us sixteen substantial dactylic hexameter satires.

Satire. Satire, said the Roman orator Quintilian, is the one genre the Romans can claim as their own. He had something there. We have remarked that for the Greeks—with the exception of the comic dramatic genius Aristophanes, a mime writer like Herondas, and perhaps in places a Hellenistic playwright like Menander—tragedy, riotous comedy, epic all came naturally, but, perhaps for some distinctive twist to Greek culture, the satire-breeding urban culture was not present. To the Romans, on the other hand, satire came naturally. Already in the second century B.C. Roman society had been suitably mocked by Lucilius, a model for Juvenal, while Horace (65 B.C.-8 B.C.), a close contemporary of Livy, had provided a more recent model, as had Petronius' Stoic contemporary, Persius (34 A.D.-62 A.D.).

Types of Satire. It should be said from the start that these Roman satirists are all different from one another, and that the genre in which they write is looser than it might seem. Lucilius, for instance, was a dark Stoic, imbued with severe moral precepts, and brought a heavy hammer to bear on the foibles of his society, while Horace, his contemporary, was far mellower, though at all times a *criticus*, and made sure that his ire was foremost art. The cases of Petronius and Juvenal are even harder to distinguish. There is no doubt that, plain on the face of their texts, both writers deal with life as it is, the common people, even the *bas fonds* and gross levels of social existence. This latter proclivity is especially marked in Petronius, who, while shocked at the wretched treatment of such menials as slaves and domestic servants, is in his camp, Fellini mode totally intrigued by the outrageous goings on in 'high society.' (It is as though Trimalcho is a slightly concealed portrait of Nero, though even Trimalchio is not worse than good naturedly degenerate; concerned, after all, with the will in which he is going to decree the freedom of all his slaves.)

Juvenal, by contrast with Petronius, is much less the caricaturist. While Petronius carries out a proto novel narrative in prose, Juvenal adopts the dactylic hexameter verse form, which links him to the grand tradition in poetry—though in a manner ever so slightly tongue in cheek. Juvenal is more the sociologist/satirist, with a sharp eye, as in Satire Three, for the self-inflicted plight of his beloved Rome. How does he handle this critique of his city?

The voice of satire, and society. He talks his satire to a friend who is moving out of the city to a removed and quiet spot along the coast south of Rome. And why is the friend making this move? He is sick of Rome. Juvenal embraces the chance to criticize the metropolis, in characterizing his friend's view. Rome is overcrowded and

noisy, the aristocrats are fake and pretentious, the streets are full of the seriously poor. Morals are shot and piety to family or gods is weak. He takes pleasure in detailing each of these weaknesses. He dwells, for example, on the shoddy construction of buildings, which are doomed to rapid collapse, on the bribes that are required in order to get contracts, on the sloppy indifference of the legal system. The passage below suggests the subtlety of the author's insight into the corruption that has befallen the city.

In this passage the narrator's friend speaks, throwing up his hands before the embedded corruption of his world. In order to succeed, in the literary world, one has to kiss ass, lie about the merits of so and so's work. One must entice others with prophecies of the impending death—of those whose wills will devolve on them. One must collude in fraudulent schemes, in order to get on the governor's staff:

What can I do at Rome? I cannot lie; if a book is bad, I cannot praise it, and beg for a copy; I am ignorant of the movements of the stars; I cannot, and will not, promise to a man his father's death; I have never examined the entrails of a frog; I must leave it to others to carry to a bride the presents and messages of a paramour. No man will get my help in robbery, and therefore no governor will take me on his staff: I am treated as a maimed and useless trunk that has lost the power of its hands. What man wins favour nowadays unless he be an accomplice--one whose soul seethes and burns with secrets that must never be disclosed?

Readings: Juvenal, *Sixteen Satires*, trans. Peter Green (New York, Penguin, 2004.)

Jones, Frederick, *Juvenal and the Satiric Genre* (London, 2007).

Unit 4 Essay (1,000 Words)

Suggested Topics

What seem to you the chief differences between the satire of Petronius and that of Juvenal? Are the authors pillorying the same faults and/or the same level of social behavior?

What seems to you to generate the satirical spirit in the first century A.D.? Is it the decline in morals? Or is it the particularly rich target that sophisticated urban enclaves offer to the literary eye?

Does Juvenal offer us a true to life picture of the problems facing the city of Rome? Or does he, in the mouths of his 'characters,' work for literary effect? How would you know how to answer this question?

UNIT 5: LYRIC

Week 10 Catullus (84 B.C.-54 B.C.)

Fine tuning the generic issue. Our rapid movement among the literary genres of ancient Rome has taken us through samples of epic, history, satire and drama. Would it be fair to say that the emphasis, throughout that sequence, is on public expression—that is on expressing the nature of society, social relations, large historical purviews? Of course this is a simplified view, and we have already fine tuned our response and qualifications in earlier weeks, but I think our generalization holds, and especially when we put the earlier texts of our course side by side with those that constitute the lyric, which we turn to this Week. How is lyric expression different from that of these other genres?

Lyric and personal expression. One wants to respond that the lyric is an expression of personal feeling, as distinct from critical understanding. I think this distinction will survive our encounters with four lyric poets in the present section—though Ovid will be the hardest to ‘fit in’—for indeed Catullus, Horace (Week 11) and Propertius (Week 12) surely speak to some degree from the heart. The way Catullus does this is far from an emotional spilling of his guts, which he is much too witty/urbane/blasé to indulge—although in one of his most moving poems, #101, he unfolds a moving elegy to his departed brother, in which there is nothing but metrical savvy to stand between him and raw emotion.

Who was this Catullus, famed especially for the passion and occasional viciousness of his love poetry? How does he fit into the historical framework of our course?

Life and work of Catullus. Catullus was born in 84 B.C., and lived for only some thirty years. He was born and raised in Gaul, in a prosperous equestrian family—the equestrian class was the second level of the aristocracy. (His father was sufficiently prominent that he had twice hosted Julius Caesar, during Caesar’s campaigns in the West.) Catullus was sent to Rome for his young adult years, and there, as he began making waves with his red hot poetry, he was lucky enough to spend time with Cicero, Caesar, and Pompey, all of whom appear in his poems; he was, in other words, very much a part of the high stakes socio/political world of the first century B.C., although for Catullus and his own friends poetry was always far more important than politics. That Catullus was not only admired but liked in high circles follows from an episode involving Julius Caesar himself.

Catullus and Lesbia. Catullus insulted Caesar in a poem—Catullus was a master at pretty gross invective—but though Caesar was piqued, and agreed that Catullus had a bite, Caesar turned around the next day and invited Catullus to dinner. The poetry Catullus created, in this hot cultural climate he lived, was in large part amatory, and reflected his up and down passion for the woman he called Lesbia. (This woman, we think, was the sister of a notorious urban gangster, Publius Clodius Pulcher). Their relationship, to judge from Catullus’ poems, and from nothing else, was a

battleground of on and off, climax, departure, despair, return to one another; the brilliant formulation Catullus gave, to this exhausting passion, has made him one of the most influential and frequently copied writers of antiquity.

Catullus and his Circle. The poetry of Catullus reflects a deep influence from fellow Roman poets like Ovid, Horace, and Virgil, who were all part of the milieu with which, even if briefly, Catullus intersected. But Catullus cast a wide net of reading and response. He is known, for instance, for a superb translation of Sappho's (6th century Lesbos Greek lyricist) poem to the woman she loves. This translation (poem 51) is such a perfected rendition of Greek language and metric into polished Latin, that it constitutes a truly original poem of Catullus himself. Here, as at all points, Catullus is a master of form and style, openly preferring *venustas* (*beauty*) to *virtus* (which we could translate either as *manliness* or *virtue*.) Though Catullus and his group of writers were referred to by Cicero as *neoterói*, youngsters, they included among them some of the world's most achieved lyric poets.

The small sample below is here for a reason. It is easy for us to identify with exquisitely passionate love poetry—rare though it is—but the invective, the grossness, which Catullus can blend with lust and love, is as scarce as hen's teeth in modern poetry. Check out the following and delight!

Lecherous tavern, and you its regulars,
nine pillars along from the [Twins'](#) pillars,
do you think you're the only ones with cocks,
the only ones who're allowed to trouble
young girls, and consider the rest of us goats?
Or, because a hundred or two of you sit in a row, you,
dullards, that I daren't bugger two hundred together?
Think on: I'll draw all over the front
of the tavern with your leavings.
Because my girl, who's left my arms,
whom I loved as no other girl's ever been loved,
for whom so many great battles were fought,
is there. You, all the rich and the fortunate, love her,
and, what's so shameful, it's true, all the lesser ones,
all the adulterous frequenters of by-ways:
you, above all, one of the hairy ones,
rabbit-faced offspring of Spain,
[Egnatius](#). *Whom a shadowy beard improves,*
and teeth scrubbed with Iberian piss.

Readings: *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley, 2005.)

Havelock, E.A., *The Lyric Genius of Catullus* (New York, 1967).

Martin, Charles, *Catullus* (New Haven, 1992).

Quinn, Kenneth, *The Catullan Revolution* (Melbourne, 1959).

Discussion questions:

Does Lesbia come across as a 'real person' or as a fiction of Catullus' imagination. Support your contention.

Does Catullus address the political turmoil of his time? Or does he sidestep it, in order to concentrate on 'pure poetry.'

How do you explain the blend of gross invective with erotic passion in Catullus' work? Do these two emotive states have a natural affiliation with one another?

Unit 5 Essay (1,000 Words)

Suggested Topics

Catullus devotes much of his lyric power to love and sex. Is he 'romantically' in love with Lesbia? How does his 'love' change through the body of his poems? What kind of 'love' does he feel toward his departed brother?

How do Petronius and Juvenal differ as satirists? Do they share a single opinion about the life of Rome, or are their targets totally different from each other?

Week 11 Horace (65 B.C.-8 B.C.)

Lyric poetry and convention. In introducing Catullus we were naturally drawn to the issue of self-expression, and, because that is the convenient pathway, we moved into the themes of that lusty and brilliant opus. We paid little attention to the finesse of prosody, through which Catullus, obviously, filtered his strong feelings. We did, though, remind ourselves that, though the lyric genre introduces expressive modes rare in the genres studied earlier here, the expression of self is always, especially in developed literary milieux, carried out under the banner of prevailing and available literary conventions. Horace, even more than Catullus, would enable us to value this point—which runs so sharply counter of the romantic ideas of poetic expression buoyed up bourgeois interpretations of European poetries of the early 19th century.

Horace as craftsman. To appreciate the complex relation Horace occupies, to the inheritance of Greek lyric, we need only look at the array of odes, epodes, satires, and *sermones* (stories) he draws on to develop his verbally, but not philosophically, complex response to life through poetry. This great poet, in craftsman and world view terms perhaps the greatest Rome created, was deeply immersed in the technical skills the Greek lyric poets—Sappho, Archilochos, Alcaeus—established as early as the seventh century B.C. The views of life Horace expresses through these forms—hearty patriotism, delight in rural life, sexual passion for women and young boys, despair at the loss of the old Roman virtues—these are views of far less conceptual interest than the procedure by which he thinks and sings, complexly, through these views. To the Roman orator Quintilian, these products were the finest verbal achievements of the Romans.

But where did Horace come onto the cultural background which made him privy to the artistic resources he utilizes.?

Horace and the turmoil of the times. Horace was born into the tempestuous first century B.C., which, unlike the tangled and internecine struggles of the first century A.D.—the world of Petronius, Tacitus, Juvenal—was all intra-armies struggle, factional violence, and the overwhelming need for some kind of political resolution, which, as it was, proved to be Augustus.

Horace's birthplace. Horace was born in the Samnite south of Italy, in the town of Venusia. (He was not a Roman, nor properly speaking an Italian, but a Samnite; his dialect of Latin may well have been tinged with the Samnite dialect, and even with some words of the Oscan tongue, a totally non-Italic speech form. This linguistic diversity may have played into Horace's unusual sensitivity to language tone, and, not much later, to his

skill in mastering Greek.) In school he was forced to learn 'standard Latin,' which as lifelessly taught induced in him a contempt for forced learning.

Horace's education. By great fortune, Horace was born to a father determined to provide his son with the best possible education. (Horace's father was a slave, but through hard work and superior intelligence gained his freedom in mid life, and ever after remained a beloved model for his son.) As part of that commitment, Horace's dad made it possible for his son to study in Athens, where he went at age nineteen. This was to be a decisive move for the young man. He enrolled in the Academy—the West's first University, founded by Plato in the fourth century B.C.—and began an intensive study of Greek and Greek authors. It was at this time that he read and grasped the great lyric poets of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., Sappho, Archilochus, and Simonides—and found his way into the secret of their intricate meters.

Horace in Athens. While Horace was in Athens, the political drama of Rome itself reached and surrounded Horace. Rome was at this time in turmoil between followers of old Republican ideals, like Brutus, and new social shapers, far more autocratic in temper, who after the death of Julius Caesar were competing to dominate Rome. Brutus, eager to create a strong Republican contingent around himself, came to Greece to recruit appropriate support, and there came into contact with promising young Roman/Italic scions, among whom was Horace.

Horace and Brutus. Brutus approached Horace carefully. and with care recruited him into his republican army. The relationship started well for the non-military, art-loving, Horace. The twists of fate for Horace began when the army of Brutus, which Horace was fighting with, was crushed by Octavian at the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C. Treated not as an enemy, but as a promising fellow Roman, Brutus was quickly befriended by Octavian's friend and super wealthy Roman political advisor, Maecenas. Under the umbrella of Maecenas' protection Horace was enabled to move back into distinguished society in Rome itself, and to serve as a spokesperson for the new regime. Horace made friends of the highest quality, like Virgil, who were to introduce him into Octavian/Augustus' circle, and from that arrived position, during a moderately long but highly creative life, Horace remained a fixture of Roman poetry and culture.

*What slender boy, Pyrrha, drowned in liquid perfume,
urges you on, there, among showers of roses,
deep down in some pleasant cave?
For whom did you tie up your hair,*

*with simple elegance? How often he'll cry at
the changes of faith and of gods, ah, he'll wonder,
surprised by roughening water,
surprised by the darkening storms,*

*who enjoys you now and believes you're golden,
who thinks you'll always be single and lovely,
ignoring the treacherous
breeze. Wretched are those you dazzle*

*while still untried. As for me the votive tablet
that hangs on the temple wall reveals, suspended,
my dripping clothes, for the god,
who holds power over the sea.*

Readings: Horace, *The Odes: New Translations by Contemporary Poets* (Princeton, 2002.)

MacLennan, Keith, *Horace: A Poet for a New Age* (Cambridge, 2010).
Reckford, Kenneth, *Horace* (New York, 1969).

Discussion questions:

Does Horace's 'love poetry' display what we might call romantic passion, and if not, what is the drive of his love poetry. Is it purely erotic?

What role did Athens play in Horace's creative development? What did the Greek literary example mean to him?

You will note that Horace, like most of the authors we have studied, was not from Rome. What do you think was the significance of Horace's birth in a region where languages other than Latin were spoken?

Week 12 Propertius (60 B.C.- after 16 B.C.)

Propertius and his moment. The poem you find at the end of this week's syllabus is from the first of four books of elegies, by the Roman poet Propertius. We are in the year 25 B.C., and once again, as with Virgil, Livy, and Horace we are in that zone of tremendously powerful political change which surrounded the civil struggles of the Roman Republic, in its last decades, and the accession of Octavian to the role of Caesar Augustus in 38 B.C. As you can see, Propertius—like Catullus and Horace—tended to prefer love to politics, though none of these men shunned the perks that could devolve on them from healthy relations with power.

The prosody of Propertius. Since, however, Propertius was first and foremost a lyric poet, we should pause a minute to consider his product—the brilliantly hewn *elegy* form, which is the mould of the Latin behind the above translation. Look at the first two lines of the English, then at the far more compact Latin of those lines:

Cy'nthia pri'ma suis' miserum' me ce'pit oce'llis
Con/tactum/ nullis/ ante cu'pidini'bus.

The elegy form. The interplay of these two kinds of line was from the time of the early Greek poets considered the gold standard for one kind of poetic construction. The first of the two lines of the elegiac couplet contains six stressed syllabic units, arranged (this is an average) on the basis of six succeeding dactyls—sound units consisting of a stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. The second of the two lines of the couplet consists of five stressed syllables, arranged in a such a sound pattern that the relatively brevity of the second line answers, closes off, and completes the proposition of the first line, so that the couplet is a perfect unit. Reader, forgive this foreshortened, simplistic account of a splendid, long trained verse form, and, taking the most you can get from this account, return to the first two shaggy and limping lines of our English translation. See the difference in concision?

Form and content in Propertius. The form of such poetry is not a hollow shell surrounding its content, but the content itself in action, and Propertius, on a par with the Horace who was master of Greek prosodic modes, is one of splendors of Roman literature. In a famous poem, #6 from Book I, Propertius writes to his friend Tullus that he is glad to be known as one who sang from the turmoils of love, rather than giving himself up to warfare, fighting with the Emperor. Propertius proudly proclaims, in many of his poems, that the warfare he values is with the obduracy of language.

Propertius: the biography. Which brings us to the issue of Propertius' distinctive life situation and value system. He was born in mid-first century in Assisi, in the province of Umbria. We know that Propertius' father died when his son was a young boy, and that Propertius was raised by his Mother—whose efforts had to have been

huge; the family's land had been confiscated by Augustus, as part of a large offering to Octavian's veterans after the Battle of Actium, and Propertius's mother herself paid the indirect costs of war. Somehow, fortunately, Propertius made his way to Rome, where—untouched by any direct contact with the military conflicts seething around him—he settled on the Esquiline Hill, an upscale section of Rome, and entered slowly into the circle of the powers, a circle which, as we know from the intimacy of Augustus with Virgil and Horace, was open to the arts. Of supreme importance then was Propertius' meeting with Cynthia, the woman who was to dominate his first three Books, though in the fourth Book he records their bitter break up, and at the same time announces new themes he intends to pursue in his writing. The first Book of Elegies attracted cutting edge admiration in Rome, and fortunately for Propertius Maecenas—the benefactor of Horace and Virgil—was taken with this new work, and invited Propertius into his circle of literary discussants and fellow spirits. The financial support of Maecenas, for which this benefactor wanted nothing in return except praise, bailed out a whole generation of brilliant poets at a time of struggle, conflict, and danger in Rome.

Propertius and romantic poetry. It is fascinating to observe the power of love to generate poetry, in both Greek and Roman literatures. We have mentioned the peculiarity of the lyric genre in Ancient Rome, that it is a vehicle for self-expression, but that the vehicle in question is highly disciplined and prosodically wrought. Self-expression, in ancient Roman poetry, does not mean anything like free-verse, or even like the flowing personal line of a Whitman, who sings of his own soul. Ancient prosody precluded any such 'naturalism,' and in fact the reader of Propertius will find an abundance of scholarly myth references—all impeccably integrated—which betray the almost universal stress, in ancient poetry, on the same kind of erudition we know from the epic and satiric genres. As for Propertius who can ever have exceeded him in the exquisite formulation of the wonder of spending all night touching all the parts of another person's body.

*Cynthia was the first. She caught me with her eyes, a fool
who had never before been touched by desires.
Love cast down my look of constant pride,
and he pressed on my head with his feet,
until he taught me to despise chaste girls,
perversely, and to live without plan.
Already, it's been a whole year that the frenzy hasn't stopped,
when, for all that, the gods are against me.*

Readings: Propertius, *Poems*, translated Lee and Lyne (Oxford, 1994.)

Hubbard, Margaret, *Propertius* (Bristol, 1974).

Sullivan, J.P., *Propertius: a critical introduction* (Cambridge, 1976).

13 Ovid (43 B.C.- 18 A.D.)

Distinctions within genres. We have made many distinctions within the lyric genre of Roman literature. We have found that Catullus, Horace, Propertius all 'deal with' love, but that only says so much. There are great differences among those 'dealings.' Catullus is robust and sensual, and at his most enamored ready to kiss Lesbia for an eternity. Propertius is as passionate as Catullus, but far more self-conscious about the kinds of language he is using to create himself a lover in poetry. (He is more philosophical than Catullus.) Horace is more multi-themed than Catullus or Propertius—more discursive about morals, life styles, the political world, the social world—and, especially in the material we have discussed, less furiously passionate and love conscious than the other two. (Horace is also the author of sensuous homoerotic poetry which has proven unpalatably direct to Western tastes, and which far exceeds the boldness of the other two lyricists.) It is finally worth noting, once again, the difference between the love poetries of these three men and the Romantic lyric, by which we mean the Wordsworthian tradition in post 1800 poetry, which privileges the whole hearted and innocent love of man and maid, against a background (frequently sketched, as in the poetry of Browning) against the sense of a cruel and fated world, in which the ultimate outcome of human emotions is dubious.

The works of Ovid. When we come to Ovid, a born poet, one 'born speaking in hexameters,' as he says of himself, we reach, if possible, a new level of sophistication. (When it comes to love poetry the Romans lead the pack in finesse and inventiveness.) Ovid wrote many literary works, all in highly disciplined, Greek inspired, meters, and many of those works concerned love. We will address these promptly. But who was this Ovid?

Ovid's life. Publius Ovidius Naso was born in Sulmo to an important equestrian family—equestrian, as you recall, meaning just below the highest patrician rank. He was sent to Rome for his education—as were all his peers—and studied Rhetoric, as a prelude to the study and practice of law. (This educational pathway, leading toward Law, and beyond that toward politics, was generally expected of the aspiring young gentleman learning in Rome.) For some reason, perhaps the shocking death of his brother at age twenty, Ovid decided to stick with his initial instinct, and to give himself unreservedly to poetry. At this point—and here too you see a familiar pattern—Ovid went to Athens to study, and while studying there traveled to Asia Minor and Sicily. (Are you noticing, as we move through Roman history, that privileged Roman youth traveled widely, in the eastern Mediterranean?) From 29 B.C.-25 B.C. Ovid returned to Rome to devote himself to poetry. It was at this period that he too found his patron. This time it was not Maecenas, who was to become the central figure of Augustus' literary circle, but Marcus Corvinus, who was long a defender of the Roman Republic against Augustus, but who moved toward Augustus, as the tide of history swept in that direction, and whose daughter, Julia, became a keystone of the Augustan circle. Thus Ovid too came ultimately under the supportive

umbrella of the Emperor's largesse, and left us one more instance of the way money and connections pave the way to literary success.

Ovid's exile. From this point on Ovid not only determined, but had the means to, give his life to poetry. He was in the midst of a highly popular series of works—the *Heroides*, the *Amores*, the *Ars Amatoria*, the *Metamorphoses*—when a devastating blow of fate assaulted him. In the year 8 A.D. Ovid was banished by the Emperor Augustus, and exiled to the distant city of Tomi, on the Black Sea. This was a serious exile for any Roman, let alone an urban sophisticate accustomed to the cultural interactions of the metropolis. The world at large has never known the true cause of this exile, which Ovid attributes to *carmem et error, a song and an error*, terms which have resisted any clear interpretation though Ovid's contemporaries, and later scholars, have generated theories galore about what these words mean. One major trend of explanation is that Ovid had inside information about scandalous behaviors in Augustus' court. Whatever the case there, precisely, we are sure that Augustus was outraged by the 'open immorality' Ovid had foregrounded in his long poem, the *Ars Amatoria* (21A.D.), which promoted exactly the adultery that the new Emperor, Augustus, was making an intense effort to criminalize.

The fury of Augustus. The panoply of poems Ovid created, in a fertile life, included a wide variety of tones. The early *Amores* (16/15 B.C.) include some of the world's wittiest couplets on the war (and truce) between the sexes; funny, bitter, urbane to the max. The *Ars Amatoria* (2 A.D.) is equally witty—a handbook first for guys, then for gals, on the most effective ways of seducing a married woman or man, depending; and with tons of collateral tips on, for example, detours like the lady's maid you use to get at the married lady, but who turns out to want a seduction of her own en route. (This kind of game playing was particularly odious to the Emperor Augustus.) In his last poems, written from Black Sea exile, Ovid writes *The Tristia* (9 A.D.-12 A.D.), elegant but deeply sad poems from exile, in which he laments everything lost—his beloved Rome, his beloved third wife.

Readings:

Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, Book One, trans. Hollis (Oxford, 1992).

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Raeburn (New York, 2004.)

Ovid's Poetry of Exile (translated into verse by David Slavitt) (Baltimore, 1990).

Liveley, Genevieve, *Ovid: Love Songs* (Bristol, 2005.)

UNIT 6: PHILOSOPHY

Week 14 Marcus Aurelius (121 A.D- 180 A.D.; Emperor 161 A.D. -180 A.D.)

Stoics and Epicureans. We have been advancing through Roman literature by way of genres, and come at the end to philosophy, which requires a special prologue. At its peak, *Greek* philosophy, especially in Plato and Aristotle, had tried out systematic speculation, and established a power of rigorous dialectic with imagination which has left its mark on the formal study of philosophy to this day. But there were other themes in Greek philosophy, most influentially the schools of Stoicism and Epicureanism which came to flower in the third century B.C. These two branches of thought devoted their attention to the moral life, though not without concern for the ontological background of the universe in which human behavior is framed. Both the Stoics and the Epicureans, with their emphases on self-discipline, moderation, and toleration, exercised huge influence on Roman society and culture.

The Meditations. All this by way of direct approach to Marcus Aurelius, for whom Stoicism was an inspiration and staff of support throughout a hectically busy life at the top of the social/administrative ladder. Marcus' philosophy is embedded in a single book, which he called *To Himself*, and which we call the *Meditations*, and which is a living masterpiece of Stoic—and broadly human—wisdom. We will return to the book. Who was the man?

The Life of Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius was born in Ucubi, south east of Cordoba, Spain, to a family of wealth and distinction. His great grandfather had been a Senator, while Marcus' mother had inherited great wealth from her own father. This was already the formula for success, and Marcus, following the expectations of his class and educational aspirations, moved to Rome, where he spent his formative youth years in a upscale neighborhood, the Caelian Hill. (It will have struck us all, in this class, that Rome served as the magnet for all its future luminaries, though the leaders of Roman literary culture hailed widely from distant parts of the Empire.)

Education. In Rome Marcus was home-schooled, as were all young men of his class and expectation, Attracted by the ideal of the 'philosopher,' he went through a stage of dressing in dark rough cloaks, and sleeping on the ground—occupational traits of one kind of 'ancient philosopher'—until falling under the influence of Fronto, whom the Emperor Hadrian appointed tutor to Marcus Aurelius, and who—himself a wealthy and independent scholar---remained a prudent and affectionate guide to Marcus Aurelius throughout his life. Marcus was studious as well as active, and seemed destined for a superior role in practical political administration.

Imperial succession. In 138 B.C. the Emperor Hadrian chose Antoninus Pius to succeed him—Hadrian morbidly concerned with the decline in his health. As part of the succession deal, Hadrian stipulated that Antoninus should adopt Marcus Aurelius as his son. Pursuant to that deal Antoninus, taken as all were by the abilities of Marcus Aurelius, passed a law permitting his 'son' to assume the (very important)

role of *quaestor*, before the age of twenty-four; and from there on the Emperor made all the necessary maneuvers required to prep Marcus as *his* successor. In 161 the death of Antoninus Pius opened the way for (a thoroughly reluctant) Marcus Aurelius, to become the last of the Antonine Emperors.

The worries of ruling. We are making our way back to a book, *The Meditations*, which Marcus Aurelius jotted down 'to himself' in intervals of camp and court life between 170 A.D. and 180 A.D. By the time Marcus was pushed to that brilliant literary survival tactic, his reign had become more than difficult, and more than a challenge to a man who, though a quick learner and a brilliant 'ruler,' had a strong withdrawal streak of the private intellectual in him. (Marcus' reign had started well, but already in 162 A.D. Rome had been hit by devastating floods which had killed most of the livestock in the city, destroying whole settled areas, and setting off a long lasting famine which had to be countered by opening emergency grain supplies. Not much later the frontiers of the Empire fell under attack from a wide variety of Marcomanni, Quadi, Sarmatians, and Germanic tribes avid to get their pillaged share of the Imperial fruits. The worries of ruling soon beset Marcus Aurelius, who was above all conscientious, and the literary result is a world classic of Stoic wisdom and good sense. The end of his life was essentially the conclusion of this book, which, as you will see, was essentially his life turned inside out.

Supreme self-help book. You will have little trouble following the themes of this work, which highlight the importance of self-control, self-examination, indifference to petty behaviors, a sense of our cosmic setting, a refusal to be bullied by the seeming urgency of the moment. No self-help book, on the shelves at Barnes and Noble, can light a candle to the wisdom of the *Meditations*.

Here is a passage from Book One, in which Marcus is praising his father, for the virtues he learned from him:

whensoever any business upon some necessary occasion was to be put off and omitted before it could be ended, he was ever found, when he went back to the matter again, the same man that he was before. He was accurate in examination of things and in consultations, and patient in the hearing of others. He would not hastily give over a search into any matter, as one easy to be satisfied with sudden notions and apprehensions. He was careful to preserve his friends; nor at any time would he carry himself towards them with disdainful neglect, and grow weary of them; nor yet at any time would he be madly fond of them. He had a contented mind in all things, a cheerful countenance, care to foresee things afar off, and to take order for the least, without any noise or clamour.

Readings: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Hammond (New York, 2006.)

A Companion to Marcus Aurelius, ed. Van Ackeren (New York, 2012.)

Discussion questions:

What explains the great attraction of Marcus Aurelius to Stoicism and Epicureanism? Do those philosophies contain the potential for the kinds of insight Saint Augustine (as a Christian) will instinctively work from? Does the Stoicism of Seneca—you may want to research this—resemble that of Marcus Aurelius?

In what ways is Marcus Aurelius' *To Himself* a response to the immediate pressures of his own life? What were those pressures? What finally was his attitude toward them?

Would you call Marcus Aurelius a philosopher, or a practical man of considerable wisdom? To answer this you would need to establish a working definition of 'philosopher,' which is not so easy. In Greco Roman times the philosopher was sometimes the sage, sometimes—as in Plato—the brilliant dialectician. What does 'philosopher' mean to us today?

Week 15 (Aurelius Augustinus) Saint Augustine (354 A.D.-430 A.D.)

The world of Saint Augustine. Born a century and a half after the death of Marcus Aurelius, Augustine Aurelius, later to be called Saint Augustine, represents a new world of thought and commitment, and takes us fittingly to the point where Latin literature merges into the literature and thought of the Middle Ages.

Life of Saint Augustine. Raised in Thagaste, in present day Algeria, Augustine was born of a Berber Christian mother (Monica), and a pagan father, thus grew up knowing both of these conflicting world views, which were to fight many battles inside him, up to the time of his conversion to Christianity, and his baptism in 387 A.D.. He was a speaker of Latin, and a lover of that language, which first met him in mature form in Cicero's *Hortensius*. Such details of his biography are known to us largely through his *Confessions* (A.D. 397/398), which form his autobiography and tell us of his path to Christian conviction and baptism. We search with difficulty, in earlier Latin literature, for anything like an autobiography, and will hardly get farther than to a 'confessional' poet like Propertius, who traces many dramas of his emotional life but barely gives us a sense of his stage by stage growth.

The Confessions in its historical setting. The life that Augustine traces for us in his *Confessions* is full of profound self-criticism, from his analysis of his bad character as an infant—fundamentally greedy—to his contempt for his wasted years of sensuality and vanity, to his final decision to turn to the Christian revelation, for which he is profoundly grateful, but which swamps him with a sense of wasted time. In the course of presenting this self-account, Augustine spins a development yarn of astonishing interest, full of psychological insights, portraits of daily life in the family, the street, the academy, and finally the church, which greatly enrich our understanding of a considerable area of late fourth century Roman culture.

Marcus Aurelius—though he wrote in Greek—was a profoundly acculturated part of the Roman governmental machinery—a warrior/Emperor. When we come to Augustine, almost two centuries later, the high period of Roman literature as well as administrative power, is sharply waning. There are strangers at the gate; the many tribes who beset the Eastern frontiers of Marcus Aurelius' empire have now greatly increased in number and strength, reducing the old confidence and authority of Rome. The era of the autocratic, and often depraved, Roman Emperor has had its say in various iterations, and the dignity of the old Roman world—the world Livy harked back to, and Horace and Virgil admire—is in various kinds of shambles. All of which is not to say that Augustine works outside the Roman tradition. His Latin, by general consent, is on the highest level of the language's prose. He was well trained in Latin language and literature—note his complaints about the study of Virgil, in elementary school—went off to Carthage to teach Latin, then later, when he had moved to Italy, he competed for and won a significant academic post in Milan, as a teacher of Latin literature. Augustine, even more than Marcus Aurelius, lives inside the traditions of Latin culture. But the powerful additional factor, in the making of

Augustine, is the incorporation of Christianity, which already, by Augustine's time, had become a determinant shaping force in Roman and Latin life.

Augustine's Christianity. Augustine's Christianity, which is the subject of his voluminous literary output—well over a hundred separate titles, on topics of Biblical exegesis, every aspect of theology, problems of knowing and will—is the turning move in his personal achievement, and sharply marks his literary creation off from that of any other major writer before him in Latin. We should therefore underline the cultural landmarking that Augustine carries out.

Development within Christianity. By the time of the *Confessions*, Christianity was a seasoned component of the Roman/Latinate cultural world. In the second decade of the 4th Century A.D. the Roman Emperor Constantine had privileged Christianity as the state religion, and Church councils were busy formulating basic doctrine for the remainder of the fourth century. (The Nicene Creed, which has remained a liturgical centerpiece to our day, in Western Christianity, was formulated in 325 A.D.) Paganism was still enrooted and influential—Julian the Apostate, the last pagan Emperor of Rome ruled from 361 A.D.-363 AD—but both the common people, and select wealthy Romans, were turning their influence and convictions in the direction of the new religion. Augustine, who was to go on to be elected Bishop of Hippo, in North Africa, played a persuasive role in the reshaping of Latin culture, and the new spirit he brought to that driving intention is evident in *The Confessions*.

Is Saint Augustine a philosopher? We have been concerned with the fine tuning of genre. Is Augustine a 'philosopher'? Was Marcus Aurelius a 'philosopher'? We have commented on the emphasis, within Marcus Aurelius' Stoicism, on procedures of discipline, honor, firmness in personal relations. Augustine too might be considered an ethical philosopher. As we see from the *Confessions*, he is interested in the truly good in behavior, and not in the 'socially proper.' In his larger works, like *The City of God*, written in the first decade of the fifth century A.D., Augustine presses ethical concerns onto an unusually broad tapestry. *The City of God*, the far or in side of the world we customarily inhabit, is the world where God and the divine dwell. If we add that it is our sole goal to reach that world, won't we be saying that Augustine is an exhorter as well as a describer of the ethical life?

Readings: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (New York, 1961).

C.N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York, 2003.)

Discussion questions:

Does Saint Augustine seem to you still to belong to the Roman world? Do his views of life appear to you to be embedded in the Roman styles and values that you have become acquainted with in this course?

What do you see as the chief turning points for Augustine, on his path to conversion? What were the trigger experiences that drove him upward into his decision?

Was Augustine a philosopher, a theologian, or a practical ethical person? Or do you see all these traits in him? In considering him as a 'theologian' you might want to review a few of the hundreds of sermons he left for us.

CONCLUSION

Week 16 A Review of Roman Literature

Timespan of Roman History. We have completed a brisk survey of Roman literature, taken up in terms of genres (small samples of genres.) It is to be hoped that you got some insight into the chronological development of Roman literature (even of Roman culture.) Although Roman culture has virtually a millennium long timespan, we restricted ourselves on the whole (Plautus was the big exception) to material composed between the beginning of the first century B.C., and the second century A.D., a period of three centuries. Concluding with Augustine meant adding two centuries to that timeline. Our heavy emphasis lay on the centuries before and just after the birth of Christ, for that was a period of huge literary activity in Rome, as well as of monumental and dramatic political change.

Greatnesses of Roman Literature. We found, as we had to expect from the literary culture of one of the world's most influential empires, a wide palette of generic achievements, a palette from which we might draw certain conclusions, about what the Romans did best, and not so well. (After all, we are trying to get our minds *critically* about a vast achievement.) Among the astounding riches of Roman literature is the burst of disciplined but passionate poetries that spring forth from the literary groups that gathered around the world of Augustus, if we may so call the thrilling crystallization of power under this in many ways benign and forward thinking First Emperor. The phenomenon of the Maecenas comes to full flowering among these creators—Juvenal, Horace, Virgil, Propertius, Ovid. Maecenas' closeness to Augustus, his love of patronizing the arts, his generosity to his favorites, were traits that marked the spirit of the period and materially facilitated a great literary growth-spurt. Maecenas' generosity fell on a rich soil, too, for the personal lyric or epigram—we omitted mention of other geniuses like Martial and Tibullus—was of peculiar vigor in Augustan Rome.

Roman Epic. The Roman epic was of decisive cultural influence. (We cannot speak of an epic tradition in Rome, the way we speak of the dominant Homeric tradition in Greece, a tradition which pervaded culture, law, folk tradition, principles of behavior throughout subsequent centuries; but we could align various Roman epic poets, like Ennius and Statius, who reached back into Greco Roman mythical tradition.) Virgil, though writing long after the formation of Roman culture, reached back to reconstruct an account, of the origins of that culture, which not only dignified the Augustan moment, but concentrated the account of founding into a compelling narrative lodged in Greco-Roman 'mythology.' While Virgil did not exercise the kind of Biblical force over the Romans, that Homer did over the Greeks, he continued to attract the literati throughout Roman culture, as well as to become a staple of school studies—as we saw last week with Augustine.

Roman Historians. We can safely say that the historical perspective was well developed in Roman literature. Just as Virgil constructed a past for the Romans, Livy

went in search of one, uncovering and piecing together the early tales Roman—not Greco-Roman—history was made from. (Livy played for the Romans the crucial role Herodotus did for the Greeks, legitimizing them in their own eyes.) Tacitus, from the objective standpoint which contained a critical/urbane eye, scrutinized Roman political culture of the first part of the first century, and served as one kind of conscience of the moment. Many more Roman historians could have been included in our discussion—Julius Caesar, Sallust, Josephus, Ammianus Marcellinus—which will hardly surprise us, coming as they do from a culture in which historical self-awareness played a constitutive role in every act of governing.

Roman Satire and Drama. When it comes to satire, the natural Roman fascination with character types—recall the stock characters of Plautus—and with intra-societal intrigues (Ovid's *Amores*), plays out into a fascination with the foibles, indeed with the vices, of big city politics, whether on a grand or a commoner level. Juvenal and Petronius both revel in the viciousness of Augustan Rome, but not without a reserve of severity, which gives their special stamp of attention to the notion that the satirist and the moralist are twins under the surface.

It would be pointless to note that Roman drama, even at its best, most amusing (Plautus, his contemporary Terence) and most powerful (Seneca), is far below the dramatic achievement of the Greeks, for whom both tragic and comic drama served, at least in the fifth century, as the supreme vehicle of cultural energy and daring. Plautus and Seneca were popular and influential in their time, and give delight today, but they hardly seem to push the boundaries of art, or to find new territory for the human spirit.

Romans as practical people. Have we earned the right to any general comment on the character of Roman literature? It is a cliché to say that the Romans were a preeminently practical people. They were obviously brilliant in skills required to make a coherent and liveable society. They could—depending of course on the time, and with particular stress on the high *pax Augusta* epoch, the first two or three centuries of our era—they could build roads, aqueducts, public and private buildings, sewers and toilets; they could build systems of law as reference points for civil order. None of these skills is less than hugely important, none of them is represented with equal perfection among the Greeks—unless it be in temple architecture or, in the Hellenistic period, city management.

Conclusion, with Saint Augustine. All that having been said, Roman literature at its finest—in Virgil, the poets, in Ovid; in the deathless dignity of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, in the spectacular satire of Petronius—is hard to beat. What we have seen, in our sixteen lessons, should give at least an initial impulse toward admiration. And with all of that, and of course depending on how you feel about confessing, Saint Augustine takes us through Roman culture over a high wall into new territory, new insights into the human self which no other Romans had tackled.

Discussion questions:

Have you become aware, in this course, of the pervasive influence of Greek culture throughout Roman culture and literature? What seem to be the points of sharpest influence? Drama? History? Epic?

Do you see a conflict between 'being a practical people' and 'being a creative people'? Are these distinctions meaningful, when it comes to the Greeks and Romans?

How do you explain the relatively empty spaces in the history of Roman literature? What kind of literature was being written prior to the plays of Plautus? Was there significant Roman literature in the third and fourth centuries A.D.—that is, outside of the work of Saint Augustine?

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR FINAL 5,000 WORD PAPER

- How do you view the importance of actual chronological history to the literary creations of the Romans? Is their history important to many of these writers, as they go about their creation? Explain.
- In what literary genres do you think the Romans excelled? Where, in your opinion, were they relatively limited in their contribution to world culture?
- What seem to you the deep points of difference between the writing of Saint Augustine, and that of the earlier Roman writers we have considered here? Does Marcus Aurelius seem to you a forebear of Saint Augustine, or are Marcus' affiliations almost entirely to Stoic and Epicurean traditions?
- What (in your opinion) underlies the powerful satire in Roman literature? Has it something to do with the character of Roman life and society as they were experienced by Juvenal, Petronius, and—for instance—the brilliant epigrammatist, Martial?
- Livy and Virgil give different accounts of the origins of Roman culture. Or can you see their differing accounts fitting together with one another? What was the importance, for these two epic minded writers, of retelling the founding stories of Rome?
- How do you view the Roman theatrical tradition, from what we have read? Have Plautus (and Terence) anything in common with Seneca? Why—this might cost you some research time—do you think drama was the central literary experience for the Greeks, while for the Romans it was (arguably) a minor genre?