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## SYLLABUS ARCHIVE

### Course and Instructor Information:

#### **Roman History in Literature and Film**

Prof. Ryan Abrecht

University of San Diego, History Department

### Helpful Context:

Course first designed in Fall 2017.

Average enrollment: 35

This is an undergraduate course primarily intended for non-majors.

It is taught completely in-person.

It fulfills a Core Curriculum "Historical Inquiry" requirement.

### Reflections of the Instructor:

*Q: What do you consider to be particular strengths of this course?*

*A: Increasing student engagement; practicing multiple critical approaches.*

# HIST 155: ROMAN HISTORY IN LITERATURE AND FILM

TR 5:30-6:50

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to History 155! In this class, we'll study Roman history by analyzing novels, film, and television set in ancient Rome. As we do so, we'll ask ourselves what separates history from fiction and what we mean when we argue about "accurate" representations of the past. We'll assess the conventions of literary works and visual media to think about how a good (or not so good) piece of historical fiction is crafted, as well as how different creative processes produce different understandings of the history behind the drama. Finally, we'll discuss whether Roman history has been used or abused, and decide whether historical fiction enhances or distorts our understanding of the past.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Professor:	Dr. Ryan Abrecht
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Office:	XXX
Office Hours:	XXX

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the relationship between history and fiction? Are they totally separate things, or different points on a shared spectrum?
- How should we compare different types of fictional media such as novels and films? What are the conventions of different literary and cinematic genres, and their respective audiences?
- What key figures and events shaped Roman history in the Republic and early Empire?
- What does ancient Rome signify in our popular culture? How do fictionalized portrayals of antiquity shape our understanding of our own times?
- Do works historical fiction chiefly expand, or distort, our understanding of the past? Can fiction be dangerous?

## HISTORICAL INQUIRY LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, you will be able to: (1) formulate and investigate historical questions about Rome and its legacy (2) assess a range of media about ancient Rome while demonstrating understanding of their historical contexts and referencing them to support your analysis; (3) engage with contemporary scholarship in history, literary theory, and film and media studies; (4) effectively communicate your understanding of Roman history in conversation and writing; (5) use sources ethically to formulate and answer significant historical questions.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

- David M. Gwynn, *The Roman Republic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2012)
- Ursula K. Le Guin, *Lavinia* (Mariner Books, 2009)
- Howard Fast, *Spartacus* (North Castle, 1996)
- Lindsey Davis, *The Silver Pigs* (Minotaur Books, 1989).
- Course Reader (selections marked “Reader” below). Available for purchase at King’s Printing, 1133 West Morena Blvd., (619) 297-6000, [www.kingsprinting.com](http://www.kingsprinting.com).

## **GRADING STANDARDS**

Class participation	10%
Response papers (4)	60% (15% each)
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%

## **ATTENDANCE**

You should be present at every class, mentally and physically. This is especially true on days when we analyze film or TV clips (marked “Watch” below), as they will not be made available outside class. I understand that extenuating circumstances sometimes arise; if this is the case, please let me know why you cannot attend. If circumstances make you miss more than three classes, you may have overextended yourself and should consider dropping the course.

## **PARTICIPATION**

We’ll spend a lot of time talking to each other in this class; you should strive to take an active role in all discussions. I’m eager to hear your comments, thoughts, questions, and opinions. I appreciate that people learn in different ways and that some are more verbal than others, but also believe that engaging with one’s peers is one of the best ways to master challenging material and acquire new skills. Plus, it makes class more fun!

## **PREPARATION**

Staying on top of the readings is crucial. Above all, it is important that you finish each book on time, since its due date will coincide with a response paper and a discussion of the work as a whole. My lectures will provide historical context for major characters, events, and concepts. As we work through the three novels. Just don’t use these days as an excuse to slide on the reading! You won’t be able to cram an entire book into your head the night before it’s due.

## **EXAMS**

Two in-class examinations will assess your knowledge of the major historical figures and events we’ll study this semester. Chronologically, this will cover both Roman history from roughly the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE *and* some figures and events from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century America. There will be a study guide for each exam, and I will provide more detailed information about them as the course progresses.

## **RESPONSE PAPERS**

Four papers (approximately 4 pages each) will ask you to respond to the readings and engage with issues such as: the relationship between history and fiction, how the creative process of authors and filmmakers shapes the ways we remember the past, what role historical research plays in the creation of works of historical fiction, or the relationship between representations of the past and the concerns of the present. Prompts for each paper assignment will be forthcoming; their due dates are listed in **red** below.

## **LATE WORK**

Illnesses, death in the family, and other traumatic events are unfortunately part of life. If you contact me within 24 hours and provide documentation, I do my best to accommodate your situation. Otherwise, late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for each calendar day they are overdue.

## **PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately passes off another's words or ideas without acknowledging their source. If you plagiarize in this class, you will fail the assignment on which you are working and your case may be passed on for additional disciplinary action as a violation of the university's Academic Integrity Policy. I will issue guidelines about how to cite sources properly in advance of the first writing assignment, and am always available for consultation if you are uncertain about tackling this task.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)**

<b>7 September (R)</b>	<b>Course Introduction</b>
<b>12 September (T)</b>	<b>History and Fiction</b> Read: Southgate, <i>History Meets Fiction</i> (chs. 1-2) [Reader]
<b>14 September (R)</b>	<b>Historical Fiction: Uses and Abuses</b> Read: Pouncy, "History, Real and Invented" [Reader] Bartel, "The Puzzle of Historical Criticism" [Reader]
<b>19 September (T)</b>	<b>Archaic Italy and Rome's Earliest Beginnings</b> Read: Gwinn, ch. 1 <i>Lavinia</i> (first third)
<b>21 September (R)</b>	<b>Early Roman Society, Religion, and Values</b> Read: <i>Lavinia</i> (second third)
<b>25 September (T)</b>	<b>The Roman Kingdom and Early Republic</b> Read: Gwinn, ch. 2-3 <i>Lavinia</i> (to end)
<b>28 September (R)</b>	<b>Discussion: <i>Lavinia</i> and Historical Fiction</b> <b>RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE</b>
<b>3 October (T)</b>	<b>The Punic Wars</b> Read: Gwynn ch. 4
<b>5 October (R)</b>	<b>Hannibal in "Docudrama"</b> Read: Nichols, <i>Introduction to Documentary</i> (ch. 1 excerpts) [Reader] Watch: <i>Hannibal: Rome's Worst Nightmare</i> (2013)
<b>10 October (T)</b>	<b>Rome's Conquest of the East</b> Read: Gwynn, ch. 5
<b>12 October (R)</b>	<b>Imperialism's Effects on Roman Society</b>

- Read: *Spartacus* (first third)
- 17 October (T)**                      **Slavery and Inequality in the Late Republic**  
Read: *Spartacus* (second third)
- 19 October (R)**                      **Silver Screen Spartacus**  
Read: *Spartacus* (to end); Cyrino, *Big Screen Rome* (ch. 4)  
Watch: *Spartacus* (1960)
- 24 October (T)**                      **NO CLASS MEETING**
- 26 October (R)**                      **NO CLASS MEETING**  
**(Online Lecture: The Breakdown of the System)**  
**RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE**  
Read: Gwynn, ch. 6-8
- 31 October (T)**                      **The Most Famous Romans**  
Read: Gwynn, ch. 9  
Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (ch. 1) [Reader]
- 2 November (R)**                      **The End of the Republic**  
Watch: *Julius Caesar* (1953)
- 7 November (T)**                      **MIDTERM EXAM**
- 9 November (R)**                      **The Age of the Caesars**  
Read: *Tactius on Augustus* [Reader]  
Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (ch. 6) [Reader]
- 14 November (T)**                      **Roman Film Stereotype #1: Corrupting Decadence**  
Read: Blanchard and Shahbudin, *Classics on Screen* (ch. 1) [Reader]  
Watch: *Cleopatra* (1934)
- 16 November (R)**                      **Roman Film Stereotype #2: Christians to the Lions!**  
Read: Cyrino, *Big Screen Rome* (ch. 1) [Reader]  
Watch: *Quo Vadis* (1951)
- 21 November (T)**                      **Roman Film Stereotype #3: Swords and Sandals**  
Read: Cyrino, *Big Screen Rome* (ch. 3) [Reader]  
Watch: *Ben-Hur* (1959)
- 23 November (R)**                      **THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- 28 November (T)**                      **Roman Film Stereotype #4: Imperial Intrigue**  
Read: Joshel et al., *Imperial Projections* (ch. 4) [Reader]  
Watch: *I, Claudius* (1977)
- 30 November (R)**                      **Discussion: Viewing Rome**  
**RESPONSE PAPER #3 DUE**
- 5 December (T)**                      **The Flavian Dynasty**

Read: *The Silver Pigs* (first third)

**7 December (R)**

**Life on the Margins: Britannia**  
Read: *The Silver Pigs* (second third)

**12 December (T)**

**Life at the Center: Rome**  
Read: *The Silver Pigs* (to end)

**14 December (R)**

***Silver Pigs* Discussion and Closing Thoughts**  
**RESPONSE PAPER #4 DUE**

**FINAL EXAM:**

**Tuesday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 - 7:00 PM**