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SYLLABUS ARCHIVE

Course and Instructor Information:

Gender and Sexuality in the Roman World

Prof. Isabel Köster

University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Classics

Helpful Context:

Course first designed in 2018 and most recently taught in 2018

Average enrollment: 32

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

The course is approved for a core curriculum/general education designations in cultural and gender diversity

Reflections of the Instructor:

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

A: The course offers a good coverage of literary genres. Especially because of the final project there is an opportunity for comparative ancient/modern work and for introducing students to reception studies.

Q: In what ways do you think the course could still use improvements/adjustments?

A: I am planning to add some readings to more explicitly introduce students to key concepts and vocabulary in gender studies (currently this work is all done in lectures). I am also thinking about replacing the 3rd short paper with a series of occasional short quizzes (because of the rewrite option, the 3rd short paper is difficult to manage schedule-wise).

Q: How generally have students responded to the course? Have there been any patterns in student feedback?

A: Students generally enjoyed the course, though there were some complaints about the length of reading assignments and the number of writing assignments. Students found the midterm quite challenging because it was the only closed books and closed notes timed assessment in the course. The novels-based final project assignment was largely very popular.

The instructor is happy to share further course materials via email.

CLAS/WMST 2110: Gender and Sexuality in the Roman World MWF 12–12:50 p.m.

Basic information

Instructor: Professor Isabel Köster (Isabel.Koster@colorado.edu)

Course description

This course uses literature, art, and archaeology to study, from a contemporary feminist point of view, the status of women and men Roman history and literature, the attitudes expressed toward them, and their daily life. Special emphasis will be placed on the representation of Roman women and their activities both historically and in modern literature.

This course requires no Greek or Latin or prior knowledge of Roman history. Approved for arts and sciences core curriculum: cultural and gender diversity.

Course goals

- To introduce students to the major sources and approaches used in the study of gender and sexuality in the Roman world and facilitate a deep engagement with such material through frequent discussion and writing exercises
- To prompt students to reflect critically on the representation of Roman women and gender stereotypes
- To introduce students to the study of modern reimaginings and recreations of the ancient world
- To introduce students to engaging with scholarly articles on Roman gender and sexuality
- To improve reading, writing, and oral communication skills

Course content advisory

This course engages with and discusses material in which topics of gender and sexuality are described and depicted in frank and explicit detail. Furthermore, several readings thematize issues of sexual assault and other non-consensual sexual encounters in ways that often strike modern readers as inappropriate and callous. A consistent engagement with such issues is a difficult but essential element of a course that explores another culture's ideas about gender and sexuality. If you have any concerns, please have a conversation with me to determine whether this class is right for you.

Required texts

- Christenson, D. 2014. *Hysterical Laughter: Four Ancient Comedies about Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (ISBN: 9780199797448; "Christenson" in schedule below)
- Ruden, S. trans. 2008. *Vergil: The Aeneid*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (ISBN: 0300151411; one copy on reserve in Norlin)
- Ruden, S., trans. 2013. *Apuleius: The Golden Ass*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (ISBN: 0300198140; e-book available through CU libraries)
- Woodman, A. J. trans. 2004. *Tacitus: The Annals*. Indianapolis: Hackett (ISBN: 0872205584)

And one of the following to use for your final project:

- Davis, L. 2009. *The Course of Honour*. Griffin. (ISBN: 0312556160)
- Evaristo, B. 2004. *The Emperor's Babe*. Penguin [exact edition insignificant] (ISBN: 0142001716; one copy ordered for reserve)
- Le Guin, U. K. 2008/2009. *Lavinia*. Houghton Mifflin [exact edition insignificant] (ISBN: 0156033682; one copy on reserve at Norlin)

Recommended resources

The study of Roman women and gender is a rich and constantly evolving field. While this course aims to touch on most of the topics and approaches that currently occupy scholars in the field, it only scratches the surface. Should you wish to read beyond the class, *The Online Companion to the Worlds of Roman Women* and especially its constantly updated [bibliography](#) is a great starting point.

Course requirements and important dates

- Attendance and participation: 10 %
- 3 short papers (2–3 pages; see below for due dates): 30% (10% each)
- Midterm exam (in class on 10/22): 15%
- Final project (5–7 pages; due 12/7): 25%
- Final take-home exam (due 12/18 at 7 p.m.): 20%

Grading scale

93–100%: A	80–82%: B–	67–69: D+
90–92%: A–	77–79%: C+	63–66: D
87–89%: B+	73–76%: C	60–62: D–
83–86%: B	70–72%: C–	Below 60: F

More on course requirements and policies

Attendance and participation (10% of your total grade)

Your attendance is crucial for your success in this class. While the PowerPoints from the lectures will be available for download on Canvas a few days after class, I do not circulate lecture notes and lectures are not recorded. You can also expect a significant discussion element in each class. If you have to miss class, you are responsible for getting notes from one of your classmates. If you have to miss a class for excusable reasons (e.g., due to religious observance, inter-collegiate sporting event, illness, a personal or family emergency...), please communicate me in advance if possible. Excessive unexcused absences will cause your grade to suffer.

You may only record classes if you have a specific accommodation from disability services on file. Please also note that PowerPoints, study guides, and handouts are provided as aids for students in this class and may not be shared with people not enrolled in the class or uploaded to any websites without my permission.

Preparation (including weekly guides)

Reading assignments should be completed before class. Every Friday afternoon a reading/study guide for the following week will be uploaded to Canvas. Please read it carefully. You will find it especially helpful for three elements:

1. It will give you a preview of what we will discuss in the coming week and will alert you to which parts of the reading you want to look at especially carefully.
2. It will include a list of people and terms that you should know by the end of the week
3. It will include some questions for you to think about and, for the first 10 weeks, suggestions for short paper topics.

3 short papers (30% of your total grade)

The first 10 weekly guides will include one or two “to think about” questions that are particularly suitable for a short paper. On three occasions you will use questions that particularly appeal to you as a basis for a short (2–3-page) paper. It is up to you which question you choose, but your first paper

must be submitted on Canvas by the end of the day on 9/17, the second on 10/8, and the third by 10/29 (aside from these deadlines I encourage you to work at a pace that works for you. If, for example, you are looking at a particularly crowded October, you may want to try to get all your papers in by the beginning of the month).

Your short papers should showcase your engagement with Roman material. They do not require any outside research. Like all academic papers, however, they should have a clear topic, a sensible organizational structure, and an argument.

You should only submit three papers, but you have the option to rewrite one of your papers and have its grade replaced by an average of the original grade and the grade for the rewrite. Rewrites are due by 11/9.

Exams (35% of your total grade)

There are two exams in this class, an in-class midterm on 10/22 and a take-home final exam to be submitted by 7 p.m. on Tuesday, 12/18 (the end of the registrar-scheduled final for this course).

The **in-class midterm** focuses on your knowledge of key facts and terms and on the identification and discussion of passages and objects relevant to the material discussed in class. Make-up exams will only be given if your absence is excused by religious observance, participation in an inter-collegiate sporting event, illness, or a personal or family emergency (and, with the final, if you have three or more exams scheduled on the same day and this is your last final). Please note that I may ask you to provide documentation of any of these excused absences and that travel and vacation plans do not constitute an emergency. If you must miss the test, please communicate with me beforehand if at all possible.

The **final exam** is **take-home** that consists of two parts:

1. you will be given a choice of 4 texts/objects that you have not seen before. You will analyze two of these in the context of what you have learned in the course.
2. you will respond to one of two essay questions that ask you to consider what you have learned in this course in a holistic way.

All in all, this exam should not take you longer than a registrar-scheduled final (2 ½ hours). It is a take-home to facilitate the use of your books and notes (you may use any books and notes that you see fit, but the document you submit must be purely your own work, so you may not discuss your exam strategy or answers with other people). Since this exam stands in for the registrar-scheduled final and is due at the same time as the official final for the course, please note that the deadline for the final is a firm cut-off: work coming in after 7 p.m. will not be graded and will receive a 0. In case of, e.g., a documented medical emergency during finals, please contact me as soon as possible to work out a solution for your individual circumstances.

Final project (25% of your total grade)

As you will realize quickly, the study of Roman women is primarily a study of representations: we have little to no writing by women or works of art made by women in the Roman world. A major goal of this class is to prompt you to reflect critically about how we can reconstruct social realities and experiences from fragmentary and diffuse evidence. To this end, the most significant piece of graded work that you will complete in the course is a final project on the representation of Roman women in contemporary (i.e., 20th/21st-century) fiction. To complete this project, you will

1. Choose one of the three novels listed under the texts above
2. Read your chosen novel and attend the discussion of it in Week 10
3. Develop a paper topic focused on the representation of one or more women in your chosen work

4. Submit a statement of your paper topic and a rough outline of your paper by 11/12 (I expect this document to be about a page long. Should you not submit this document, I will subtract 5% from your final paper grade)
5. Write a paper of 5–7 pages and submit it by the last Friday of class (12/7)

I will give you a preview of the books for this assignment and some tips to get started at the end of Week 4. I am also happy to assist at any time if you have questions about coming up with a topic (or if you cannot decide on a book)

[Institutional policies applicable to all courses omitted]

Tentative class schedule and reading assignments

Notes on reading assignments

- The reading assignments in this course quickly build up to about 150 pages a week. This is challenging but doable for a 2000-level class. An important element in making it doable are the weekly guides, which will give you explicit passages to concentrate on. In other words, even though the reading assignments are substantial, you are not responsible for all elements of them (and there is a good reason why the midterm is the only graded part of this class where you cannot use your books and notes)
- For ancient sources it is vital that you use the editions and translations specified for this course. As you will see when I occasionally ask you to compare different translations, translations can vary widely between translators, and we literally need to be on the same page to have a productive discussion.

Week 1 (8/27–8/31): Introduction to the course/ representing Roman gender

Monday: *Introduction*

Wednesday: *Encountering Roman women I: in the city*

Assignment: Livy Book 1.1–21; 1.34–47; 1.57–60; handout on gravestones (all on Canvas)

Friday: *Encountering Roman women II: at home*

Assignment: Ovid *Amores* 1.1, 1.11 and 1.12 (Canvas), Propertius *Elegies* 1.3 (Canvas), Sulpicia (Canvas); Sarah Levin-Richardson “*Fututa sum hic: Female Subjectivity and Agency in Pompeian Sexual Graffiti*” *Classical Journal* 108: 319–345 (linked on Canvas)

Week 2 (9/3–9/7): Women on the Comic Stage I

Monday: *No class (Labor Day)*

Wednesday: *Introducing Plautus’ Casina*

Assignment: Plautus *Casina* introduction and to the end of scene 12 (pp. 163–200 in Christenson)

Friday: *Plautus’ Casina* continued

Assignment: finish Plautus *Casina* (pp. 201–221 in Christenson); Monika Trümper “Gender and Space, ‘Public’ and ‘Private’” in S. James and S. Dillon (eds.) *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (Canvas)

Week 3 (9/10–9/14): Women on the Comic Stage II

Monday: *Terence's Hecyra I*

Assignment: start reading the *Hecyra* (get to at least the end of scene 6, p. 253 in Christenson)

Wednesday: *Terence's Hecyra II*

Assignment: finish the *Hecyra*

Friday: *What did Romans look like?*

Assignment: preview the medieval manuscripts of comedies linked on Canvas; and either Michael Koortbojian “The Double Identity of Roman Portrait Statues: Costumes and their Symbolism at Rome” in J. Edmonson and A. Keith (eds.) *Roman Dress and the Fabrics of Roman Culture* pp. 71–93 or Jane Fejfer “Roman Women in Public” from J. Fejfer *Roman Portraits in Context* pp. 331–372 (access either via Canvas)

Week 4 (9/17–9/21): The Republic I

Monday: *The “proper” Roman woman*

Assignment: Rebecca Langlands “Sexual Virtue on Display I: the Cults of *Pudicitia* and Honours for Women” from R. Langlands *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (linked on Canvas)

Last day to submit short paper 1

Wednesday: *The world of Catullus*

Assignment: Selection of poems on Canvas

Friday: *Clodia beyond Catullus / A preview of the final paper choices*

Assignment: Cicero *On Behalf of Caelius* selections (Canvas); Anna Jackson selections from *I, Clodia, and other portraits* (Canvas)

Week 5 (9/24–9/28): The Republic II

Monday: *Masculinity and the late Republic I*

Assignment: Sallust *The Conspiracy of Catiline* (Canvas)

Wednesday: *Masculinity and the late Republic II*

Assignment: Cicero *Philippics* II (Canvas)

Friday: *In praise of a Roman woman*

Assignment: “The Praise of Turia” (Canvas)

Week 6 (10/1–10/5): Gender in Virgil's *Aeneid* I

Monday: *Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid*

Assignment: *Aeneid* 1

Wednesday: *Leaving Troy and its women*

Assignment: *Aeneid* 2 and 3

Friday: *Dido*
Assignment: *Aeneid* 4

Week 7 (10/8–10/12): Gender in Virgil's *Aeneid* II

Monday: *Aeneas gets to Italy*
Assignment: *Aeneid* 5–7

Last day to submit short paper 2

Wednesday: *Cleopatra I: the Aeneid version*
Assignment: *Aeneid* 8

Friday: *Cleopatra II: reality*
Assignment: Judith Hallett. "Perusinae Glandes and the Changing Image of Augustus." In *American Journal of Ancient History* 2: 151-171 (Canvas) and D. Kleiner "'Queen of Kings': Cleopatra *Thea Neotera*" from D. Kleiner *Cleopatra and Rome* (Canvas)

Week 8 (10/15–10/19): Gender in Virgil's *Aeneid* III

Monday: *Aeneas in Italy I*
Assignment: *Aeneid* 9–10

Wednesday: *Aeneas in Italy II*
Assignment: *Aeneid* 11–12; Optional: Alison Keith "The Ground of Representation" from *Engendering Women: Women in Latin Epic* pp. 36–64 (linked on Canvas)

Friday: *Aeneid wrap-up/ midterm review session*

Week 9 (10/22–10/26): Midterm/ Women, Men, and Imperial Politics I

Monday: ***Midterm***

Wednesday: *Introduction to Tacitus*
Assignment: Tacitus *Annals* Books 1 and 2

Friday: *Male and female power in imperial Rome*
Assignment: Tacitus *Annals* Books 4 and 11

Week 10 (10/29–11/2): Discussion of works chosen for the final project

This week you will only have one required meeting for this class, the session devoted to the book that you have chosen for your final project. The primary purpose of this session is to answer questions that you have and to help you finalize ideas, so it is essential that you have read the book that you have chosen carefully before class.

Monday: *Discussion of Davis* The Course of Honour

Last day to submit short paper 3

Wednesday: *Discussion of Evaristo* The Emperor's Babe

Friday: Discussion of *Le Guin* Lavinia

Week 11 (11/5–11/9): Women, Men, and Imperial Politics II

Monday: *Agrippina the Younger*

Assignment: Tacitus *Annals* Books 12–14.9; either Judith Ginsburg “Agrippina and the Power of Rhetorical Stereotypes” Ch. 3 of *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire* or BBC “In Our Time” podcast on Agrippina (either linked on Canvas; assignment to be determined in consultation with the class)

Wednesday: *Nero*

Assignment: Tacitus *Annals* rest of Book 14 and Book 15

Friday: *Women and war*

Assignment: Elizabeth Greene “Identities and Social Roles of Women in Military Communities of the Roman West,” in S. Budin and J. Turfa (eds.), *Women in Antiquity: Real Women across the Ancient World* 942-953 (Canvas). Optional: selections from Dorothy Watts *Boudicca’s Heirs: Women in Early Britain* (Canvas)

Deadline for short paper rewrites

Week 12 (11/12–11/16): At home with the Romans

Monday: *Gender at a Roman banquet*

Assignment: Trimalchio’s dinner party from Petronius’ *Satyricon* (Canvas)

Final project outline due

Wednesday: *Women and education*

Assignment: Selection of readings on Canvas

Friday: *Medicine*

Assignment: Selections from Soranus’ *Gynecology* Book 1 (Canvas); Amy Richlin “Pliny’s Brassiere” pp. 241–266 in A. Richlin *Arguments with Silence: Writing the History of Roman Women* (linked on Canvas)

Week 13 (11/19–11/23): No classes. Happy Thanksgiving break!

Week 14 (11/26–11/30): Gender and the burlesque I

Monday: *Introduction to Apuleius*

Assignment: Apuleius *The Golden Ass* Books 1–3

Wednesday: *Witches*

Assignment: Texts on witchcraft in the Roman world on Canvas

Friday: *Cupid and Psyche*

Assignment: Apuleius *The Golden Ass* Books 4–6

Week 15 (12/3–12/7): Gender and the burlesque II

Monday: *The law*

Assignment: start reading Apuleius *The Golden Ass* Books 7–10

Wednesday: *Women as entertainment*

Assignment: finish reading *The Golden Ass* Books 7–10; optional: Kathleen Coleman. “*Missio* at Halicarnassus.” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 100 (2000): 487–500 (on Canvas)

Friday: *Women and Roman religion (with special attention to the cult of Isis)*

Assignment: Apuleius *The Golden Ass* Book 11

Final project due

Week 16 (12/10–12/14): Early Christianity/Wrap-up

Monday: *Female Christian martyrs in the Roman arena*

Assignment: The martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity (Canvas)

Wednesday: *Wrap-up/review*

Take-home exam due via Canvas at 7 p.m. on 12/18

Appendix: Final Project Full Assignment

Due: There are two deadlines associated with this project:

1. A **proposal** (explained below) due **Monday, 11/12** via Canvas Dropbox (this is a soft-ish deadline. I will accept work that is a day or two late for this, but keep in mind that it will be optimal for you if I can comment on your proposal before the Thanksgiving Break, so try to get as close to this as you can)
2. **The paper proper, Friday, 12/7** via the Canvas Dropbox before 11:59 p.m. Note that per university policy I cannot require work to be handed in in the last week of classes, so this is the latest due date permitted by university rules. The Dropbox will stay open until Monday (12/9) morning in case you need the weekend. Papers coming in after early Monday morning will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hours late.

How long: 5–7 pages, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman (or other reasonable font), 1-inch margins. No title pages, please. Please number your pages!

How much of my grade?: 25%

The assignment:

Many of the discussions that we have had in this class have revolved around the representation of gender and sexuality in Roman sources and around the representation of the lives of women. These topics have consistently captured the imaginations of those who engage with Roman material. In recent years several prominent authors have become especially interested in recreating the lives of Roman women in their fiction. These representations generally involve a complex blend of known fact and novelistic imagination.

For your final paper you will write a paper on one of three recent novels that feature a particularly rich engagement with issues involving gender and sexuality in the ancient world. Pick a novel that particularly grabs you and design a 5-7-page paper around it. You should adhere to the following parameters:

- Your paper must center on one of the books specified below. You may compare and contrast the book to ancient material read for this class, of course, but you must use one of the books specified below (and only one—they are extremely different and a 5–7-page paper will not accommodate two of them)
- The focus of your paper is on your engagement with the novel. This is not a research paper, but an assignment that showcases the close reading and argumentation skills that you have practiced using the short papers.
- Your paper must have a clear thesis/argument. In other words, after reading your paper your reader should be able to say “I agree with this” or “I disagree with this.” Again, think short papers
- Please give your paper a proper title to help orient your reader.

To help you with the paper there are two important preliminary steps before you hand in your paper:

1. **A session on your chosen novel** (see syllabus for schedule). In week 10 (10/29–11/2) you will only attend class one for a session on the novel that you have chosen (if you cannot decide, you are of course welcome to attend more than one session). It is best to come to the session having read the book, but you will get something out of the session even if not.

There will be plenty of opportunity to ask questions and hear about what your classmates made of the book, so bring your questions and comments. Use the time for the other two classes this week to finish reading your novel and start developing a topic.

2. To help guide you in writing this paper, I ask that by **Monday, 11/12**, you submit a brief **prospectus/proposal** on Canvas. Your proposal should consist of the following to show me what you are planning to do and how you are planning to do it:

- A provisional title
- A narrative paragraph or an outline that shows how you will go about writing the paper and gives a sense of your argument

All told your proposal will likely be half a page to a page in length.

The proposal is a done/not done in terms of grade: should you not submit a prospectus, 5% will be deducted from your final paper grade.

The novels and some advice on getting started on topics:

An early decision you need to make is whether your paper will focus only on your chosen novel or whether you want to compare and contrast it to a Roman source that you read earlier in the semester. Both are productive avenues to pursue, and the brief discussions below are just pointers. Above all, think small and focused for your topic: a specific character and/or a particular scene and/or a specific theme. 5–7 pages go fast!

As you know from Week 4, the novels are:

Lindsey Davis. 2009. *The Course of Honour*. (discussion on 10/29)

Historical fiction. Focuses on a love affair between the emperor Vespasian and a former slave. This is probably the quickest read and great if you like historical fiction. It is very atmospheric, so in addition to offering rich characterizations to work with, it also lends itself to explorations of world-building, e.g., discussions of how domestic spaces are described or considerations of dress and costume. In terms of themes, it easily lends itself to explorations of sexual morality and *pudicitia*.

Should you be interested in a comparative approach with ancient material, Catullus is an easy way in since he also discusses an illicit affair. Tacitus' *Annals*, because of their focus on life inside the palace, are also an option.

Bernardine Evaristo. 2001. *The Emperor's Babe* (discussion on 10/31)

Novel in verse. Focuses on Zuleika, an African immigrant in third century CE London. She is unhappily married to an older man, and when the emperor comes to town, new opportunities await. The style requires some getting used to (do note that portions of it are quite sexually explicit), and this is not for you if you like continuous plots, but there is a ton going on here. Zuleika is a richly developed character with an interesting interior life. The book is particularly rich in exploring issues of sexuality, including addressing Zuleika's marriage, issues of race and sexuality, and a major character with a non-binary sexual identity. So Zuleika is certainly not the only one to write about here.

Should you be interested in a comparative approach with ancient material, Catullus is an obvious point of contact. Because of the centrality of an unhappy marriage, the comedies will also give you a lot to work with. You can also productively think about going back to the graffiti to explore how women talk about their sex lives. It is also possible that you will find points of contact with Dido.

Ursula K. Le Guin. 2008. *Lavinia* (discussion on 11/2)

This novel reimagines Books 7–12 of the *Aeneid* from Lavinia’s point of view. If you liked the *Aeneid*, then this may be for you (an affection for the *Aeneid* and a solid grasp of its whole plot is required—this is a masterful adaptation that is quite subtle in parts and has a tendency to frustrate those who do not like Virgil). It makes for several good topics in his own right (for example, how Le Guin deals with religion, how she portrays female friendships, how she deals with speech and silence...) and would be a naturally excellent to compare to the *Aeneid* (in terms of Lavinia, but also, for example, to look at the characterization of Amata or Turnus)

Outside sources:

No outside sources are required or expected for this paper since the focus is on your engagement with the novel that you have chosen. Should you decide to work with secondary sources (e.g., books and articles on the novel you have chosen), please cite them appropriately. If you need help locating resources, please use library reference staff (especially the [classics research librarian](#)) or to me (rule of thumb: secondary source for the novel → library. Secondary source on something immediately classics-related → me). Chicago is the most common citation style in Classics, but other options (e.g., MLA) also work as long as you are consistent. The novels should be cited like you usually would cite a novel, i.e., by page number. A brief guide to citing Roman sources (should you decide to engage in something comparative) is found in the “papers” folder.

You are free to talk to each other about your paper, but any ideas you take from someone else have to be acknowledged. Even if you do not make use of actual ideas, a note if you discussed your paper extensively with one of your classmates is good scholarly form. The originality checker (Turnitin) is on for this assignment. For penalties for academic dishonesty, see syllabus.