

General Education Course Information Sheet
Please submit this sheet for each proposed course

Department & Course Number Classics 98T
Course Title Defining the Bad Emperor: Ancient and Modern Depictions of Caligula, Nero, and Commodus

1 Check the recommended GE foundation area(s) and subgroups(s) for this course

- | | |
|---|----------|
| Foundations of the Arts and Humanities | X |
| • Literary and Cultural Analysis | <u>X</u> |
| • Philosophic and Linguistic Analysis | _____ |
| • Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice | _____ |
|
Foundations of Society and Culture | |
| • Historical Analysis | _____ |
| • Social Analysis | _____ |
|
Foundations of Scientific Inquiry | |
| • Physical Science | _____ |
| <i>With Laboratory or Demonstration Component must be 5 units (or more)</i> | _____ |
| • Life Science | _____ |
| <i>With Laboratory or Demonstration Component must be 5 units (or more)</i> | _____ |

2. Briefly describe the rationale for assignment to foundation area(s) and subgroup(s) chosen.

Ancient Roman literature, history, and culture will provide the basis for this seminar.

3. List faculty member(s) and teaching fellow who will serve as instructor (give academic rank):

Robert Gurval (Associate Professor), Katharine Piller

4. Indicate what quarter you plan to teach this course:

2012-2013 Winter X Spring _____

5. GE Course units 5

6. Please present concise arguments for the GE principles applicable to this course.

General Knowledge

This course will provide students with a strong background in Roman history and literature, as well as an introduction to the theoretical frameworks with which we study and understand the past and its relationship with the present. Students will also practice analyzing textual evidence, and use it to form arguments. Both of these concepts can be applied in a wide variety of disciplines.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| □ Integrative Learning | The students in this class will be expected to read ancient texts against modern film and use their understanding of ancient history and literature to isolate different views of Roman culture in current times. They will also be expected to analyze how modern views of ancient culture can create a biased view of ancient history. |
| □ Ethical Implications | We will analyze how different historical events and personae are used to express particular views in the modern world. Specifically, we will study how films of the 20 th century use figures from ancient Rome to express cultural fears or political concerns. |
| □ Cultural Diversity | The bad emperor is a figure who is vilified in a variety of ways. In reading accounts of these ancient leaders, we will analyze strategies used by historians or orators to discredit individuals or groups of people. Gender will also be of particular interest in this class, as the female associates of these emperors were often blamed for their moral failings. |
| □ Critical Thinking | Students will be encouraged to make their own interpretations of both texts and films. This will be exercised on a weekly basis, both on the discussion boards for the class and in discussion. |
| □ Rhetorical Effectiveness | Weekly discussion board posts will require students to present an argument based on observations from texts or films. These arguments will be further analyzed in discussion, with students encouraged to develop their ideas. In addition, the final paper will require students to present an argument and demonstrate its effectiveness with research and citations from the texts read in class. |
| □ Problem-solving | Each week, I will pose questions to focus on. We will then discuss different conclusions in class, and how each conclusion addresses the problem posed. Students will be expected to demonstrate their ability to acquire information and complete a project in the requirements to write an abstract and resulting paper. |
| □ Library & Information Literacy | Students are each required to submit one historical report during the quarter, for which they will need to display an understanding of available ancient and modern sources. We will also read and discuss peer-reviewed articles throughout the course so that students can observe examples of research by experienced scholars. |

(A) STUDENT CONTACT PER WEEK		
1. Seminar:	3	(hours)
(A) TOTAL student contact per week	3	(HOURS)

(B) OUT-OF-CLASS HOURS PER WEEK (if not applicable write N/A)		
1. General Review & Preparation:	2	(hours)
2. Reading	6	(hours)

3. Group Projects:	<u>N/A</u>	(hours)
4. Preparation for Quizzes & Exams:	<u>N/A</u>	(hours)
5. Information Literacy Exercises:	<u>1</u>	(hours)
6. Written Assignments:	<u>2</u>	(hours)
7. Research Activity:	<u>1</u>	(hours)

(B) TOTAL Out-of-class time per week

12 (HOURS)

GRAND TOTAL (A) + (B) must equal 15 hours/week

Defining the Bad Emperor: Ancient and Modern Depictions of Caligula, Nero, and Commodus



Katharine Piller
kpiller@ucla.edu

Course Description

The corrupt emperor is an essential figure in movies about Rome. But does he have a historical basis, or is he simply a flamboyant character type? In this course, we will analyze three of the most notorious emperors in 20th century cinema, Caligula, Nero, and Commodus. Starting with a general history of Rome to build an understanding of the culture and history of that civilization, we will analyze the lives of these “bad” emperors in ancient sources. By looking at a variety of histories and biographies from the ancient world, we will judge how opinions of these emperors changed throughout history, and how these sources came to shape the versions of Caligula, Nero, and Commodus we see on screen today. We will also investigate Roman attitudes towards Christianity, particularly the extent to which Christian beliefs were actually in conflict with the Roman state. Why did so many filmmakers of cinema’s Golden Age choose to put a villainous emperor at odds with a Christian protagonist? Besides this, what other similarities link the characterization of the bad emperor in ancient cinema? Are there similar links in the ancient sources? How did Commodus, a relatively insignificant emperor in the span of history, become such a prolific cinematic villain? Questions like these will allow us to gauge how depictions of evil emperors, both in ancient sources and in modern cinema, shape conceptions of the Roman empire as a whole in modern society.

Required Texts

Course Reader, available for purchase at X
 Graves, Robert (translator); Suetonius. 2007. *The Twelve Caesars*. London: Penguin Classics.

Seminar Objectives

1. To gain an in-depth familiarity with the literature of the Roman principate and its historical context.
2. To practice engaging with texts while forming unique questions and criticisms during the reading process.
3. To read films as texts alongside the ancient works that influenced them.
4. To gain an awareness of the reader’s complicity in the meaning of a given text or film, and consider how a reader’s own background affects interpretation.
5. To use theory mindfully, allowing it to guide (but not control) the formation of ideas and arguments.
6. To apply concepts learned from ancient literature, politics, and society to current literature, politics, and society.

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Students in this seminar will be expected to:

1. **Be an active participant in weekly discussions.** Students are encouraged to formulate and express their own opinions and questions about the material covered in the course. Remember: when it comes to interpretation, there is no right or wrong answer! You, as a reader (or viewer), bring your own unique background to a text or film, and are an active participant in its meaning.
2. **Be respectful of the opinions of others.** This class should provide a safe environment that encourages students to voice their own ideas. This also means that you may disagree with someone else's opinion. Being critical helps you be a good participant in discussion. Express your contrasting views, but do so in a thoughtful and respectful manner.
3. **Complete all assigned reading and view all assigned films before each class.** Although passages will be referenced and clips will be shown in class to facilitate discussion, students will be expected to have read or viewed any material assigned before class starts. Movies will be available for viewing on the course website.
4. **Post to the online discussion board at least 24 hours before each class.** Each post should be at least 500 words, and should contain thoughtful discussion of a certain aspect of one of the week's readings or films. Make an argument surrounding the primary reading, secondary scholarship, or historical background and support it with textual evidence. In addition, include at least one question to discuss in class.
5. **Complete one 15-minute oral report on an event or person from Rome's history.** This event or person will help provide a better understanding of the emperors we analyze in the context of Roman history and culture. It will be your job to provide the class with a mini-lesson that covers the facts as well as the lasting repercussions of this person or event for the later Romans.
6. **Complete one 10-minute report on a secondary biography.** Each student will be assigned one biography from the 20th or 21st century. Students are not required to read the entire biography, but must read the introduction, conclusion, and a sample chapter to get a good idea of the biographer's view on one of the emperors. Students are not only expected to briefly summarize the arguments presented by the biographer, but must critique the biographer's approach and arguments with regard to the emperor in question.
7. **Complete a 15-18 page research paper.** Each paper should address a significant figure in Roman history and the effect that person has on modern society's views of the Romans themselves. *Papers should include at least two primary sources from the ancient world*, as well as a detailed analysis of those sources and their influence. A variety of possible topics will be provided, but with instructor approval, students may also write a paper on a subject of their own choosing. Having met with the instructor about a proposed topic by week 3, students will be expected to turn in an abstract and initial bibliography in week 4. Students then have until week 8 to turn in an initial draft of the paper for comments from the instructor. A second draft is not required, but is encouraged. The final version of the paper will be due during finals week.

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Grade Breakdown	Participation	20%
	Discussion Board Posts	15%
	Biography Report	10%
	Historical Report	15%
	Abstract	5%
	Final Paper	35%

Required Texts

Course Reader, available for purchase at X

Graves, Robert (translator); Suetonius. 2007. *The Twelve Caesars*. London: Penguin Classics.

Films (listed in the order viewed in class)

I, Claudius (television mini-series). 1976.

- Episode 9: "Zeus, by Jove!"
- Episode 10: "Hail Who?"

Henry Koster (dir.). *The Robe*. 1953.

Delmer Daves (dir.). *Demetrius and the Gladiators*. 1954.

Cecil B. DeMille (dir.). *The Sign of the Cross*. 1932.

Mervyn LeRoy (dir.). *Quo Vadis?* 1951.

Julie Taymor (dir.). *Titus*. 1999.

Anthony Mann (dir.). *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. 1964.

Ridley Scott (dir.). *Gladiator*. 2000.

Terry Jones (dir.). *Life of Brian*. 1979.

Weekly Schedule



Week 1. Introducing the Romans

Assigned Readings:

Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, book 1

Reports:

- Julius Caesar (Piller)

Questions to consider: What is your impression of Rome after reading the first book of Livy? Did it cause you to change your opinion of Rome? Why or why not? Judging by modern film, how do we think of Rome in the present? How do you think the Romans saw themselves?

Week 2. Caligula in *The Robe*

Assigned readings and viewings:

Suetonius, *Life of Caligula*

The Gospel According to Mark, selections

Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew. 1983. "The Man and the Style." From Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars*, p. 1-25. London: Duckworth.

The Robe

Reports:

- Octavian (until the Battle of Actium)
- Augustus (post Actium)
- Mark Antony

What are some of the characteristics of Suetonius' style as a biographer? Do you get the sense that he is a trustworthy source? Why or why not? How does he portray Caligula? Is there anything particularly villainous about his character? Are there any redeeming qualities? Consider Suetonius' biography and the selections from the Gospel of Mark. How do the ancient accounts of the events and people described compare to the portrayal given by the movie? How is Caligula established as a bad leader? What are the intentions of the filmmaker in portraying Caligula, and the Roman Empire as a whole, in this way?

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Week 3. The Death of Caligula in *Demetrius and the Gladiators*

Assigned readings and viewings:

Dio Cassius, *Roman History* book LIX

Wyke, Maria. 1997. "Projecting Ancient Rome." In Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History*, p. 14-33. New York: Routledge.

Demetrius and the Gladiators

Reports:

- Tiberius
- Claudius

What are the main differences between Dio's style and Suetonius'? What are the disadvantages of Dio's history? Is he useful as a historian? What picture does he present of Caligula? How complete is our knowledge of Caligula as a historical figure? Has the character of Caligula changed in *Demetrius and the Gladiators*? Has his role in the narrative changed?

Week 4. Caligula in *I, Claudius*: an expert's narrative

ABSTRACT AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE TODAY AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Assigned readings and viewings:

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 19.1-2

Barrett, Anthony A. 2008. "Caligula." In Anthony A. Barrett (ed), *The Lives of the Caesars*, p. 61-83. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

I, Claudius (television mini-series). 1976.

- Episode 9: "Zeus, by Jove!"
- Episode 10: "Hail Who?"

Reports: None this week; students are expected to work on their abstracts and bibliographies.

I, Claudius, based on a book written by classicist Robert Graves, is a more secular view of Caligula as a Roman emperor. What are the differences in the portrayal of that emperor in *I, Claudius* and the two previous movies we have viewed in this course? Are there any similarities? What do these similarities and differences mean? How and why is the intent of *I, Claudius* different? What is your view of Josephus as a historian? Is he more reliable than Suetonius and Dio? Why or why not? In many ways, Barrett seems to rehabilitate Caligula in his article. Do you agree with his stance, based on the primary texts and modern biographies you have read or heard about from biography reports?

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Week 5. Introducing the Antichrist: *The Sign of the Cross*

Assigned readings and viewings

Suetonius, *The Life of Nero*

Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, epitomes of books LXII and LXIII (selections)

Barton, Tamsyn. 1994. "The *inventio* of Nero: Suetonius." In Jas Elsner and Jamie Masters, *Reflections of Nero*, p. 30-48. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

The Sign of the Cross

Reports

- Agrippina
- Seneca

How does Suetonius' account of Nero compare with his account of Caligula? Do you find one emperor more sympathetic than the other? Is Nero a better leader? Do you think that Barton makes a convincing argument in his article on Suetonius' tactics? Could his argument also fit in with the *Life of Caligula*? How is Nero presented in *The Sign of the Cross*? How would you compare his portrayal in this movie with the portrayal of Caligula in *The Robe* and *Demetrius and the Gladiators*? To what extent has Cecil B. DeMille influenced our view of Rome today?

Week 6. *Quo Vadis?*: Nero and his associates

Assigned readings and viewings

Tacitus, *Annals* books 14-16 (selections)

Wyke, Maria. 1997. "Nero: Spectacles of Persecution and Excess." In Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History*, p. 110-146. New York: Routledge.

Quo Vadis?

Reports

- Petronius
- The Great Fire of Rome and Nero's building program
- The Year of Four Emperors

How does Tacitus compare to the other historians we've read in this seminar? Is he more or less effective? What tone does he adopt? To what extent would we have a more accurate history of Caligula or the death of Nero if more of his *Annals* had survived? How do you think *Quo Vadis?* has influenced modern society's perception of Nero? Do you agree with Wyke's idea that Nero has become the image of any enemy of America? Why or why not?

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Week 7. *Octavia*, *Titus Andronicus*, and other echoes of Nero

Assigned readings and viewings

Seneca, *Thyestes*

Pseudo-Seneca, *Octavia*

Martindale, Charles. 1993. "Five concepts in search of an author: suite." From Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception*, p. 1-34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Titus

Reports

- Vespasian
- Domitian

In the plays of Seneca we've read this week, we see that the character of the bad emperor emerged in ancient Rome itself. Why is the *Octavia* such an important play in studying the reception of Nero? How did it and *Thyestes* influence Shakespeare in his presentation of the character of the villainous leader? Do you think that director Julie Taymor was influenced by any of the films we have seen so far? Which ones, and how? Consider Martindale and his use of the theory of reception. How can we apply this to the material we have read today?

Week 8. *The Fall of the Roman Empire*: a contrast of emperors

FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Assigned readings and viewings

Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, epitome of book LXXIII

Solomon, Jon. 2001. *The Ancient World and the Cinema: Revised and Expanded Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Pages 83-87 (the section on *Fall of the Roman Empire*).

The Fall of the Roman Empire

Reports: None. There are no reports and fewer readings so that students may concentrate on their papers.

Compared to Nero and Caligula, Commodus is a rather minor emperor from a historical standpoint. Why do you think the filmmaker chose to focus on his reign? What makes him an effective villain? Why is the presence of his father, Marcus Aurelius, important? How does the Commodus in *The Fall of the Roman Empire* compare to the Commodus presented by Cassius Dio? Why wasn't *The Fall of the Roman Empire* a successful movie? Why might movies about Rome have had less interest for audiences in the late 20th century?

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Week 9. *Gladiator* and the rebirth of the Roman epic

Assigned readings and viewings

Historia Augusta: *The Life of Commodus*

Winkler, Martin M. (ed.) 2004. *Gladiator: Film and History*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

- Martin Winkler, “*Gladiator* and the Colosseum: Ambiguities of Spectacle.” Pages 87-110.
- Arthur Pomeroy, “The Vision of a Facist Rome in *Gladiator*.” Pages. 111-124.

Gladiator

Reports

- Trajan
- Hadrian
- Marcus Aurelius

Why is *Gladiator* so much more effective than *The Fall of the Roman Empire*? What are the similarities between the two films, particularly with regard to the portrayal of Commodus? What are the differences? Is Commodus here more historically accurate? Is he a distinctive character, or does he share some similarities with the previous emperors discussed in this course? The articles by Winkler and Pomeroy revisit some of the themes discussed before in this course. Do you see the same political and cultural commentary in *Gladiator* as you did in movies such as *Quo Vadis* or *The Robe*? Are there changes? What do the changes (or lack thereof) mean for our modern society?

Week 10. Looking on the bright side of life: *Life of Brian* and a parody of convention

Assigned readings and viewings

Coleman, Kathleen. 2004. “The Pedant Goes to Hollywood: The Role of the Academic Consultant.” From Martin Winkler, *Gladiator: Film and History*, p. 45-52. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Brooks, Peter. 1984. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. (brief selections)

Life of Brian

Reports: Everyone! Please be prepared to give a 5-10 minute report on your research paper findings.

You’ve now seen several examples of Hollywood’s portrayal of a character type in ancient history: the villainous emperor. How important is accuracy in the cinema, especially regarding a historical subject? After reading about Coleman’s experiences, do you agree with her view? To what extent can the villainous emperor be accurate? What does the parody *Life of Brian* show us about attitudes towards the “epic” Roman films of the mid-20th century? What does it tell us about the figure of the bad emperor? Applying the ideas of Peter Brooks, what role does the bad emperor play in the plot? Why is he important?



New Course Proposal

Classics 98T

Defining Bad Emperors: Ancient and Modern Depictions of Caligula, Nero, and Commodus

[Course Number](#) Classics 98T

[Title](#) Defining Bad Emperors: Ancient and Modern Depictions of Caligula, Nero, and Commodus

[Short Title](#) CALIGULA&NERO&COMDS

[Units](#) Fixed: 5

[Grading Basis](#) Letter grade only

[Instructional Format](#) Seminar - 3 hours per week

[TIE Code](#) SEMT - Seminar (Topical) [T]

[GE Requirement](#) Yes

[Major or Minor Requirement](#) No

[Requisites](#) Satisfaction of entry-level Writing requirement. Freshmen and sophomores preferred.

[Course Description](#) Seminar, three hours. Enforced requisite: satisfaction of Entry-Level Writing requirement. Freshmen/sophomores preferred. Corrupt emperor is essential figure in many movies about Rome. Analysis of Caligula, Nero, and Commodus as primary examples of this character type, investigating original Roman texts alongside these emperors' modern representations in film. Letter grading.

[Justification](#) Part of the series of seminars offered through the Collegium of University Teaching Fellows.

[Syllabus](#) File [Classics 98T syllabus.pdf](#) was previously uploaded. You may view the file by clicking on the file name.

[Supplemental Information](#) Robert Gurval is the faculty mentor for this seminar.

[Grading Structure](#) participation - 20%
discussion board posts - 15%
biography report - 10%
historical report - 15%
abstract - 5%
final paper - 35%

[Effective Date](#) Winter 2013

[Discontinue Date](#) Summer 1 2013

Instructor	Name	Title
	Katharine Piller	Teaching Fellow
Quarters Taught	<input type="checkbox"/> Fall <input type="checkbox"/> Winter <input type="checkbox"/> Spring <input type="checkbox"/> Summer	
Department	Classics	
Contact	Name	E-mail
Routing Help	CATHERINE GENTILE	cgentile@oid.ucla.edu

ROUTING STATUS

Role:	Registrar's Office
Status:	Processing Completed
Role:	Registrar's Publications Office - Hennig, Leann Jean (lhennig@registrar.ucla.edu) - 56704
Status:	Added to SRS on 7/22/2012 1:39:01 PM
Changes:	Title, Description
Comments:	Edited course description into official version; corrected title.
Role:	Registrar's Scheduling Office - Thomson, Douglas N (dthomson@registrar.ucla.edu) - 51441
Status:	Added to SRS on 7/13/2012 4:11:02 PM
Changes:	Title, Short Title
Comments:	No Comments
Role:	FEC School Coordinator - Castillo, Myrna Dee Figurac (mcastillo@college.ucla.edu) - 45040
Status:	Returned for Additional Info on 7/13/2012 3:44:14 PM
Changes:	No Changes Made
Comments:	Routing to Doug Thomson in the Registrar's Office
Role:	FEC Chair or Designee - Meranze, Michael (meranze@history.ucla.edu) - 52671
Status:	Approved on 6/26/2012 4:26:12 PM
Changes:	No Changes Made
Comments:	No Comments
Role:	Fiat Lux Coordinator - Castillo, Myrna Dee Figurac (mcastillo@college.ucla.edu) - 45040
Status:	Returned for Additional Info on 6/26/2012 11:00:04 AM
Changes:	No Changes Made
Comments:	Routing to Michael Meranze for FEC approval

Role: FEC Chair or Designee - Meranze, Michael (meranze@history.ucla.edu) - 52671
 Status: Returned for Additional Info on 6/22/2012 1:18:25 PM
 Changes: No Changes Made
 Comments: Myrna Dee, before I handle these 98s I am very confused about the way that they are setting up credits. They seem to vary a lot depending on who is the instructor but I can't really tell why. Are there any rules?

Role: FEC School Coordinator - Castillo, Myrna Dee Figurac (mcastillo@college.ucla.edu) - 45040
 Status: Returned for Additional Info on 6/14/2012 1:50:04 PM
 Changes: Units
 Comments: Revised units, per Cathie Gentile. Routing to Michael Meranze for FEC approval.

Role: FEC Chair or Designee - Meranze, Michael (meranze@history.ucla.edu) - 52671
 Status: Returned for Additional Info on 6/14/2012 10:36:25 AM
 Changes: No Changes Made
 Comments: Why is this only 3 credits? It seems worth more than that to me in terms of work.

Role: L&S FEC Coordinator - Castillo, Myrna Dee Figurac (mcastillo@college.ucla.edu) - 45040
 Status: Returned for Additional Info on 6/7/2012 11:45:37 AM
 Changes: Grading Structure
 Comments: Routing to Michael Meranze for FEC approval

Role: CUTF Coordinator - Gentile, Catherine (cgentile@oid.ucla.edu) - 68998
 Status: Approved on 5/23/2012 9:05:06 AM
 Changes: No Changes Made
 Comments: approved by Professor Kathleen Komar, chair, CUTF Program

Role: Initiator/Submitter - Gentile, Catherine (cgentile@oid.ucla.edu) - 68998
 Status: Submitted on 5/23/2012 9:04:16 AM
 Comments: Initiated a New Course Proposal

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Comments or questions? Contact the Registrar's Office at
cims@registrar.ucla.edu or (310) 206-7045