Obscenity in Greece and Rome

**16:190:507 Spring 2014**

**Friday 1:00-3:40 pm**

**Ruth Adams Building 003, D/C**

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#### Course Description

What is obscenity? Is it a relative, cultural concept or is there anything universal about what human beings deem obscene? How did the Greeks and Romans define obscenity? What aspects of Greek and Roman culture have later centuries considered obscene and how have they dealt with those obscene aspects? Are there areas of overlap between modern concepts of obscenity and ancient Greek and Roman ones? How does obscenity function in art (whether visual or verbal)? How did Greek and Roman culture contain the dispersal of obscene material? How does ours? Are there particular ancient genres or modes of art in which obscenity is permitted or “at home”? Are the artists who utilize obscenity perverted themselves or can we draw a distinction between the artist and the art? These are just a few of the many questions we will be attempting to answer this term through the examination of obscenity in ancient Greek and Roman culture. The exact topics we cover will be determined by student interest/presentations, but I include below a list of potential topics, which is roughly chronological (and by no means comprehensive):

obscenity in cults

music and obscenity

magic and obscenity

Iambic Sappho/Alcaeus

Archilochus and Hipponax

Sophron and Herodas

Aristophanes and Old Comedy

Cynics and obscenity

vase painting

Hellenistic Epigram

fescinnine verses and religious ritual

Plautus

Lucilius

Catullus and Neoterics,

Lucretius (body violation; book 4)

Laberius and mime

Cicero’s invective

Cicero’s Letter to Paetus (*ad fam* 9.22)

Horace’s Epodes and Satires

Priapea

Catalepton

Ovid’s Ars Amatoria

Ovid’s defense of his erotic poetry in his exile works

sex manuals

graffiti

erotic/obscene wall paintings from Pompeii (and other Roman art)

Petronius

Persius and Juvenal

Martial

later Greek epigram (Lucilius, Nicarchus, Strato)

Suetonius on the sex lives of the emperors

Ausonius

reception of obscene texts and art

**Course Learning Goals**

* Learn more about Greek and Roman cultural norms by examining what these cultures found repulsive and transgressive of those norms (and think about the differences from our own cultural norms)
* Learn more about the reception of Classical culture and texts
* Broaden your knowledge of Greek and Latin literature by reading texts sometimes deemed “too dirty” for the classroom
* Gain familiarity with secondary literature on the obscene
* Gain practice with research, presentation, and paper writing skills
* Learn about your fellow graduate students’ research interests

**Course Website**

The course website is accessible through the Sakai homepage. Go to https://sakai.rutgers.edu and follow the instructions for logging in as a student.

#### Texts

There are no required textbooks, and readings assigned for the course will be made available on our sakai website.

Recommended books:

Henderson, Jeffrey. 1991. *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*. 2nd ed. Oxford.

Richlin, Amy. 1983. *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*. Yale.

Richlin, Amy, ed. 1992. *Pornography and Representation in Greece & Rome.* Oxford.

Forthcoming (October 25, 2015):

Dutsch, Dorota and Ann Suter, eds. 2015. *Ancient Obscenities: Their Nature and Use in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds*. Michigan.

**Grading and Evaluation**

1. Class participation 20%

2. Presentation 30%

3. Paper 50%

**Presentation Schedule (DRAFT)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Date | Topic/Presenters | Reading |
| Week 1 | Fri Sept 4 | Introduction |  |
| Week 2 | Fri Sept 11 | \*What is Obscenity? Ancient and Modern answers (Class discussion)  \*Aaron H.: RTI photography demonstration and research in Athens | 1) Kieran, “On Obscenity: The Thrill and Repulsion of the Morally Prohibited”  2) Henderson, “Obscene Language and the Development of Attic Comedy,” from *Maculate Muse*  3) Richlin, “Roman Concepts of Obscenity,” from *The Garden of Priapus* |
| Week 3 | Fri Sept 18 | \*Dave: Iambic Sappho (and Alcaeus) |  |
| Week 4 | Fri Sept 25 | \*Scott: Archilochus and Hipponax |  |
| Week 5 | Fri Oct 2 | \*Rick: Sophron and Herodas |  |
| Week 6 | Fri Oct 9 | \*Ella: Magic and obscenity |  |
| Week 7 | Fri Oct 16 | \*Emmanuel: Greek vases  \*Aaron B.-S. |  |
| Week 8 | Fri Oct 23 | \*Alicia |  |
| Week 9 | Fri Oct 30 | \*Steve |  |
| Week 10 | Fri Nov 6 | \*Brian H.: Lucretius and the gruesome body |  |
| Week 11 | Fri Nov 13 | \*Nicole: Invective against women  \*Brian M.: Invective in Sallust |  |
| Week 12 | Fri Nov 20 | \*Isaiah: Petronius |  |
| Week 13 | Fri Dec 4 | \*Lyndy: Catalepton and Priapea |  |