

Dangerous Books of Greece and Rome

Summer 2023 • Emma Dyson • TR 5:15-7:15

All books, even those regarded by some as "classics," are potentially dangerous. This course will survey a selection of ancient books that got their authors in trouble, were censored, inspired rebellion, or enabled social (and antisocial) movements, down to the present moment. Most of the books read will come from ancient Greece or Rome, but some will come from other ancient cultures, such as Egypt, the Near East, and China. Issues involved will include atheism, race and ethnicity, sex and gender, nationalism, magic, and mysticism. The course will involve brief student presentations, instructor lectures, and seminar-style discussion. All readings will be available on Canvas.

Evaluation requirements:

Attendance and participation in discussions: 50%

One 15-minute report on assigned reading: 20%

One two-page outline of final paper: 5%

One twelve- to fifteen-page final paper: 25%

Schedule (subject to minor change before course start date):

Unit 1: Greece		
TUES MAY 23	Aristophanes, <i>Clouds</i> Plato, <i>Protagoras</i> (Selections)	Who are the sophists? What kinds of things can or should be taught and studied—and is virtue one of them? Implications for a democracy of the notion that virtue is teachable.
THURS MAY 25	Plato, <i>Apology</i>	What are the charges against Socrates? Is Socrates guilty as charged? Traditional Greek religion vs. Socratic moral philosophy.
TUES MAY 30	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i> Secondary: Strauss, "Persecution and the Art of Writing"	Why is writing dangerous? How does the dialogue form circumvent these dangers? Does Plato have a doctrine? Structure of the Socratic elenchus.

THURS MAY 1	Plato, <i>Symposium</i>	Greek norms of sexuality. Are Plato and Socrates within these norms? What is the Platonic theory of Forms? What does love have to do with the Forms?
Unit two: Rome		
TUES JUNE 6	Ovid, <i>Ars Amatoria</i> (Books 1 and 3) Secondary: Zuckerberg, <i>Not All Dead White Men</i> (selections)	Background outline of Roman transition from republican to imperial power. Roman norms of sexuality and Roman women. What is the relationship between the writer and the emperor? How is Ovid dangerous today?
THURS JUNE 8	Tacitus, <i>Agricola</i> Secondary: Cramer, "Bookburning and Censorship"	What are the possibilities for speech, thought, and action under autocracy? What are the mechanisms by which autocracy attempts to suppress speech?
TUES JUNE 13	Seneca, <i>On Benefits</i> (Selections) Epictetus, <i>Discourses</i> (Selections) Secondary: Starr, "Epictetus and the Tyrant"	Does philosophy provide a legitimate matrix for opposing power? What happens when tyranny becomes a metaphor? Stoicism among the aristocracy. Relationship between philosophers and emperors. How do Stoics discuss enslavement—and how does that map onto the material conditions of enslavement in Rome?
THURS JUNE 15	Apuleius, <i>Apologia</i> (Selections) Gager, <i>Curse Tablets and Binding Spells</i> , Introduction and selections Secondary: Graf, <i>Magic in the Ancient World</i> Introduction	What is magic, and how is it different from religion or philosophy? Who decides what is "magic," and who practices it? What is the relationship between magic and institutional power?
Unit 3: Egyptian, Babylonian, and Judeo-Christian Literature		

TUES JUNE 20	Diogenes Laertius 1.1-10 Numenius fr. 1a Plotinus <i>Ennead</i> 5.8.6 Porphyry <i>Letter to Anebo</i> (selections on Egyptian philosophy) <i>Chaldaean Oracles</i> , ed. Majercik (selections) Secondary: Burns, “Ancient Esoteric Traditions”	What is esotericism? How does Platonic esotericism position itself in relation to the traditions of Egyptian and Babylonian literature? What practices are associated with esotericism, and how do these practices align with the dominant religious practices of the time?
THURS JUNE 22	New Testament Book of Revelation Secondary: Baynes, “Revelation” Searle and Newport, “Forms of Futuristic Interpretation”	How does eschatological and apocalyptic literature resist political power? What new social order does it present? To whom is it addressed?
THURS JUNE 27	Student reports	

Policy on absence and participation: Students are expected attend each class on time and having read the assigned texts. Participation in discussions is a requirement to receive the full participation score. After the first absence, there will be a 10% deduction from the participation score for each class missed. After the first late arrival, there will be a 1% deduction from the participation score for every 10 minutes of class that the student is late.

Policy on late work: This course involves only two written assignments: an essay outline, and an essay. It is expected that students turn in both of these assignments by their due dates. Late work for either assignment will result in a 10% deduction for each day that the assignment is late.

Bibliography of Secondary Material

- Baynes, Leslie. 2021. "Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to the New Testament*, pp. 313–30.
- Burns, Dylan. 2014. "Ancient Esoteric Traditions: Mystery, Revelation, Gnosis." In *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge, pp. 17-32.
- Cramer, F. H. 1945. "Bookburning and Censorship in Ancient Rome: A Chapter from the History of Freedom of Speech." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6.2, 157–96.
- Gager, John. 1992. *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*.
- Graf, Fritz. 1995. *Magic in the Ancient World*. Introduction, pp. 1–19.
- Searle, Joshua T. and Kenneth G. C. Newport. 2020. "Forms of Futuristic Interpretation of Revelation in the Modern Period," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester, 448–59.
- Starr, Chester G. "Epictetus and the Tyrant." *Classical Philology* 44.1, 20-29.
- Strauss, Leo. 1952. "Persecution and the Art of Writing," in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, pp. 22-37.
- Zuckerberg, Donna. 2018. *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age*.