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## ***Latin 214***

### **Ancient Biography: Roman Lives Spring 2010**

*“The transgressive nature of biography is rarely acknowledged but it is the only explanation for biography’s status as a popular genre. The reader’s amazing tolerance (which he would extend to no novel written half as badly as most biographies) makes sense only when seen as a kind of collusion between him and the biographer in an excitingly forbidden undertaking: tiptoeing down the corridor together, to stand in front of the bedroom door and try to peep through the keyhole.”*

Janet Malcolm, “Annals of Biography: The Silent Woman”  
*The New Yorker*, August 23 & 30, 1993

This seminar is an introduction to the literary art and politics of writing lives (*bios* in Greek, *vita* in Latin) in ancient Rome. Its focus will be Suetonius, the ‘transgressive’ biographer of the early second-century C.E., who peeped through the imperial keyhole of the first twelve Roman emperors in his famous *Lives of the Caesars*. The course will be structured as a chronological survey of the genre of biography in the larger context of Roman literature and political history. The earliest kinds of biographical writing in Rome may be found in funeral speeches and burial inscriptions; political pamphlets, war correspondence (*commentarii*) and memoirs; and antiquarian studies on the history of noble families, cities, and customs. We will begin with the biographical impulses found in Sallust’s character sketch of the conspirator Lucius Sergius Catilina and Cornelius Nepos’ extraordinary life of Rome’s most successful nonpartisan, Titus Pomponius Atticus. Following this introduction, I have selected four lives of Suetonius (Julius Caesar, Galba, Nero, Domitian) for reading and close analysis. In tandem with these lives of emperors, we will read other biographical narratives found in Greek biography (Plutarch), Roman history (Tacitus) and poetry (Lucan, Statius and Martial). We will assess how biography emerges as expressions of imperial panegyric or rebuke, essays on moral virtues and vices, and exposés of popular gossip and scandal. The survey will conclude with the biography of Gnaeus Iulius Agricola, the literary eulogy by the historian Tacitus, and the fourth-century C.E. lives of the emperor Hadrian, including the abbreviated chronicles of Sextus Aurelius Victor and Eutropius. The final week will be devoted to conclusions and abstract reports.

The seminar is open to all graduate students with some knowledge of classical Latin. Only selections of each life will be read in the original text. The format of the seminar will consist of weekly close readings and analysis of passages, discussion of pertinent recent scholarship and class reports on larger topics of study. The readings and topics are open to recommendations depending upon student interest and class size. Like all Classics graduate seminars, this course may be taken for 2 units (S/U grading only) or 4 units (letter grade).

All seminar participants will be asked to lead class discussion in three ways: (1) an analysis of a passage of Roman biography; (2) a review of an article or book; and (3) a longer presentation of a selected topic. Students who take the course for 4 units will also take two translation exams on prepared materials. The seminar's aim will be a one-page abstract of a talk that may be submitted for a conference. The seminar paper (8-10 pages) will constitute a rough draft of this proposed talk.

**Course Assignments and Grading:**

Class Participation (10%) and Oral Reports (20%)	30%
Translation Quizzes (2)	20%
One-Page Abstract (ca. 850 words)	10%
Seminar Paper (8-10 pages)	40%

**Required Texts:**

Cornelius Nepos. *On Great Generals. On Great Historians.*

Loeb Classical Library no. 467. Harvard University Press, 1927.

Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars.* vols. 1 and 2. Loeb Classical Library nos. 31 and 32. Harvard University Press, 1914.

Tacitus, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogus.* Revised ed. Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press, 1970.

Additional readings will be available on the Moodle Course Website (CW) under heading Course Materials.

*syllabus*

**Week 1**

APR 1            **Introduction**  
**Biography in Rome**

**Readings:** Virginia Woolf. "The Art of Biography" and "The New Biography."  
Arnaldo Momigliano. *The Development of Greek Biography* 1-22.  
Stanley Fish. "Just Published: Minutiae without Meaning."  
Harry Watson. "Lies and Times: The Changing Genre of Biography."

*Republican preliminaries*

**Week 2**

APR 8            **Sallust: Catiline**

**Text(s):** Sallust. *Bellum Catilinae* 1-8; 14-17; 20; 31; 53-54; 58; 61.

**Readings:** Ann Thomas Wilkins. *Villain or Hero: Sallust's Portrayal of Catiline.* New York, 1994.  
Victoria Pagán. *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. Chapter 1. Sallust. *The Catilinarian Conspiracy*, pp. 27-49.

**Week 3**

APR 15

**Cornelius Nepos: Titus Pomponius Atticus**

**Text(s):** Cornelius Nepos. *Life of Atticus*.

**Readings:** Fergus Millar. "Cornelius Nepos, 'Atticus' and the Roman Revolution." *Greece & Rome* 35 (1988): 40-55.  
Frances Titchener. "Cornelius Nepos and the Biographical Tradition." *Greece & Rome* 50 (2003): 85-99.  
Rex Stem. "Shared Virtues and the Limits of Relativism in Nepos' Epaminondas and Atticus." *Classical Journal* 105.2 (2009/10): 123-36.  
Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. *Suetonius*. 2nd ed. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995. Chapter 3: The Scholarly Biographer, 50-72.

*Suetonius and the Lives of the Caesars*

**Week 4**

APR 22

**Suetonius: Julius Caesar**

**Text(s):** Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars: Julius Caesar* (chapters 1-13; 81-89).  
Plutarch. *Julius Caesar*.  
selections from Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

**Readings:** Christopher B. R. Pelling. "Breaking the Bounds: Writing on Julius Caesar." In *The Limits of Ancient Biography*, eds. Brian McGing and Judith Mossman, 255-79. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006.  
Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. *Suetonius*. 2nd ed. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995. Chapter 3: The Scholarly Biographer, 50-72.  
Maria Wyke. *Caesar. A Life in Western Culture*. London: Granta Books, 2006.

**Week 5**

APR 29

**Suetonius: Nero**

**Text(s):** Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars: Nero* (chapters 1-9; 34-35; 47-55)

**Readings:** Tamsyn Barton. "The *inventio* of Nero: Suetonius." In *Reflections of Nero. culture, history & representation*, eds. Jás Elsner and Jamie Masters, 48-66. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.  
Edward Champlin. "Nero, Apollo, and the Poets." *Phoenix* 57 (2003): 276-83.  
Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. *Suetonius*. 2nd ed. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995. Chapter 7: Virtues and Vices, 142-74.

**Week 6**

MAY 6

**Suetonius: Galba**

**Text(s):** Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars: Galba*.  
Plutarch. *Galba* and Tacitus, *Histories* 1.1-50.

- Readings:** D. Thomas Benediktson. "Structure and Fate in Suetonius' *Life of Galba*." *Classical Journal* 92 (1996-97): 167-73.  
Tristan J. Power. "Priam and Pompey in Suetonius' *Galba*." *Classical Quarterly* (2007): 792-96.  
Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. *Suetonius*. 2nd ed. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995.  
Chapter 3: The Scholarly Biographer, 50-72.

**Week 7**

MAY 13

**Suetonius: Domitian**

**Text(s):** Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars: Domitian*.  
selections from Martial's *Epigrams* and Statius' *Silvae*.

- Readings:** K.H. Waters. "The Character of Domitian." *Phoenix* 18 (1964): 49-77.  
Brian Jones. *The Emperor Domitian*. New York and London:  
Routledge Press, 1992.

*Tacitus and Fourth-Century C.E. Biographers*

**Week 8**

MAY 20

**Tacitus: Agricola**

**Text(s):** Tacitus. *Agricola*.

- Readings:** Dylan Sailor. "Becoming Tacitus: Significance and Inconsequentiality in the Prologue of *Agricola*." *Classical Antiquity* (2004): 139-77.  
Tim Whitmarsh. "'This in-between book': language, politics and genre in the *Agricola*." In *The Limits of Ancient Biography*, eds. Brian McGing and Judith Mossman, 305-34. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006.

**Week 9**

MAY 27

**Later Lives: The Emperor Hadrian**

**Text(s):** Sextus Aurelius Victor. *On the Caesars* 14. *Epitome On the Caesars* 14.  
Eutropius. *Breviarium ab urbe condita* 6-7.  
*Scriptores Historiae Augustae. The Life of Hadrian*.  
Dio Cassius. *History of Rome*. Epitome Book 69.

- Readings:** H.W. Bird. *Liber de Caesaribus of Sextus Aurelius Victor*. Liverpool University Press, 1994: pages 1-54.

**Week 10**

JUN 3

**Final Thoughts**

