

CLASSICS 340/ILS 371: CONSPIRACY IN THE ANCIENT AND MODERN WORLDS

University of Wisconsin – Madison

Credits: Three (3)

Course Attributes: Intermediate, Literature, L&S

Instructional Mode: Online

Dates and Times: Online 12:00am-12:00m, Fall 2020

INSTRUCTOR:

Prof. Grant A. Nelsestuen

nelsestuen@wisc.edu

Virtual office hours: T 10-11:15, Th 3-4:15, and by appointment (via “BBCollaborate Ultra” on Canvas)

CREDIT HOURS:

This class is three credits. It runs for 15 weeks in five modules. Each week requires that students will put approximately nine (9) hours of work into the course learning activities: reading, viewing instructional materials, and writing.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Focusing particularly on the world of the ancient Romans, this course (in translation) interrogates the phenomenon and notion of “conspiracy”—as well as the related concepts of “conspiracy theory” and “conspiracism”—within the political, social, cultural, familial, and religious spheres. This course is divided into five parts. The first part offers an introduction to the course and sketches some of the basic phenomena we will be covering. In the second, we investigate some famous political conspiracies, including the so-called “Catilinarian Conspiracy” and the assassination of Julius Caesar. The third part turns to the Roman household to consider the social, familial, and gendered dimensions of domestic conspiracies, including the way that women, children, and enslaved peoples could threaten the notional “tyranny” of the *paterfamilias*. In the fourth part, we consider prominent religious movements that came into conflict with Roman authorities—especially the mystery cults surrounding Bacchus as well as sects of early Christianity—while the fifth part returns to the concepts of “conspiracy” and “conspiracy theory.” Interspersed throughout are periodic considerations of more modern phenomena, including the Salem Witch Trials, the Red Scare of the 1950s, QAnon, and even contemporary political events (read: the election), which may, or may not, admit analysis as a “conspiracy” or “conspiracy theory.” As we shall see, “conspiracy” and “conspiracy theory” are useful, yet sometimes tendentious, concepts, which often reveal more about the society and culture in which they occur (as well as those who write about them) than the actual activities they purport to denote.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of ancient Roman society and culture.
- Analyze and interpret ancient texts in translation.
- Critique ancient Roman society and culture and compare it to other societies and cultures.
- Identify, explain, and critique the concepts of “conspiracy” and “conspiracy theory.”
- Apply these concepts to the evaluation of relevant phenomena in both the ancient and modern worlds.
- Assess and critique the value of the concepts of “conspiracy” and “conspiracy theory” for understanding historical, political, social, cultural, familial, and religious phenomena.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Baker, E. W. (2015). *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Witch Trials and the American Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parenti, M. (2004). *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People's History of Ancient Rome*. New York: New Press.

Damon, C. (2009). *Tacitus. The Annals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In addition, a **Coursepack (CP)** is available on **Canvas**.

POLICIES:

Make-ups: Under normal circumstances, make-up assignments are not allowed except in the event stringent and well-documented circumstances (university-sanctioned commitment or a major medical emergency). The present semester is, however, not a “normal” one by any means. If you become ill (or need to isolate or quarantine), I ask that you reach out to me as soon as possible in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. We will consider the anticipated extent of your absence from the course and I will work with you to provide alternative ways to complete the course work *with reasonable accommodations*.

McBurney Resources: The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared instructor and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform instructors of their need for instructional accommodations as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with students or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Usage of Recorded Lectures (i.e. videos, “slidecasts,” and transcripts) Statement: Lecture materials—including videos, “slidecasts,” transcripts, and other recordings—for Classics 340/ILS 371 are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism: By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review.

Plagiarism means presenting the words or ideas of others without giving credit. You should know the principles of plagiarism and the correct rules for citing sources. In general, if your paper implies that you are the originator of words or ideas, they must in fact be your own. If you use someone else's exact words, they should be enclosed in quotation marks with the exact source listed. You may put someone else's idea in your own words as long as you indicate whose idea it was. If you are unsure about the proper ways to give credit to sources, ask your instructor or consult the Writing Center's website, "[Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources](#)."

Your instructor has extensive experience in reading undergraduate writing and will most likely be able to determine if a paper is not your own work. If *any part of a paper* is found to be plagiarized, you will need to meet with your instructor, after which you will receive a zero for that assignment and the final grade will be lowered by one letter grade in addition. A report will also be made to the Dean of Students.

One final note: our posting assignments are meant to provide you with feedback from your peers and your instructor about your own ideas as well as to expose you to the ideas and thoughts of your classmates. The *explicit* purpose, here, is to refine your own ideas and generate new ones. Because of this express purpose, submission of an assignment *presumes* that you are acknowledging the contributions of your classmates and instructor to the enrichment of your thought. Note, however, that the outright adoption of a classmate's position requires that you credit that person by name in the following example format: Smith, posting assignment #2. Under no circumstances should you use the exact words of your classmate, even in quotation marks; instead, rephrase in your own language.

Diversity and Inclusion: Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Journal	10% (10 entries; length: 50-100 words); each worth 1%)
Discussion posts	20% (16 total; length: 250 words; each worth 1.25%)
Response papers	18% (three [3] total; length: 500 words; each worth 6%)
Essays	24% (two [2] total; length: 3-4 pages; each worth 12%)
Final paper	28% (length: 8-10 pages; due on Dec. 14)

Grading Scale: 100-94, A; 93-88, AB; 87-83, B; 82-78, BC; 77-70, C; 69-60, D; 60 & below, F.

Extra credit policy: There is the chance to gain up to two extra percentage points by completing a total of 12 entries in the journal as well as a brief (150 words) reflection on the way that your understanding has changed (if at all) over the course of the semester. See instructions on "journal" for additional information.

Please note: a comprehensive list of readings, study guides, instructions, and rubrics for all writing assignments are available on Canvas.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

ASSIGNMENT(S) DUE

Module 1: On pandemics, “paranoias,” and the politics of conspiracies and belief

- Week 1 (Sept. 2-4): What is “conspiracy” and “conspiracy theory”? **Post #1**
Week 2 (Sept. 7-11): Intro to the Roman world **Posts #2 and 3**

Module 2: Cui bono? Conspiracies within the “body politic”

- Week 3 (Sept. 14-18): The “Catilinarian Conspiracy” **Posts #4 and 5**
Week 4 (Sept. 21-25): McCarthy and the “Red Menace” **Response #1**
Week 5 (Sept. 28-Oct. 2): The assassination of Julius Caesar **Posts #6 and 7**
Week 6 (Oct. 5-9): The Conspiracy of Cn. Piso Pater **Posts #8 and 9**

Module 3: “The call is coming from inside the house”: Conspiracies of the family and household

- Week 7 (Oct. 12-16): The Roman family **Essay #1 due**
Week 8 (Oct. 19-23): Claudius and Nero, Wives and Mothers **Posts #10 and 11**
Week 9 (Oct. 26-30): The murder of Regilla **Response #2**
Week 10 (Nov. 2-6): Spartacus and other “slave conspiracies” **Essay #2 due**

Module 4: Conspiracies, theologies, and religious movements

- Week 11 (Nov. 9-13): The “Bacchanalian affair” **Posts #12 and 13**
Week 12 (Nov. 16-20): The Salem Witch Trials **Response #3**
Week 13 (Nov. 23-24): Jews, Christians, and Romans **Post #14**
Week 14 (Nov. 30-Dec. 4): Gnosticism, the Da Vinci Code, and QAnon **Posts #15 and 16**

Module 5: Theorizing conspiracy

- Week 15 (Dec. 7-10): Theorizing conspiracy **None**

Journal and Final Paper Due: Monday, Dec. 14th, 9:45am