

Classics 501 (14692)

Comedy, Humor, and Satire in Classical Literature



The *Lover of Laughter* is the only surviving ancient joke-book. Its jokes run by topic: stupid students, stupid prophets, 'people from Abdera do this...', newlyweds, and many others. Take for example, the following joke. A man walks up to a stupid student and says, 'The donkey you sold me died!' 'I swear,' the stupid student says, 'he *never* did that when I owned him!' Or another: A man with serious halitosis goes to the doctor and says, 'Doctor! I think my uvula has descended!' When he opens his mouth, the doctor turns away in disgust and says, 'Your uvula didn't descend; your anus *ascended*.' Also consider the stupid student who buys a baby crow to test whether crows can live two hundred years. We will discuss how the *Lover of Laughter* uses jokes to create and reinforce stereotypes about social classes, genders, and ethnic groups within the Roman empire.

This class will investigate how Greek and Roman authors construct humor, especially through their satire of serious works of literature. We will read Archilochus' invective (the only person he's meaner about than his girlfriend is himself); Aristophanes' comedy the *Lysistrata* (the women of Athens go on a sex-strike to end a war) and his *Clouds* (which exposes the crimes of that weird-o Socrates); Seneca's *The Pumpkinification of Claudius* (which mocks the recently deceased emperor Claudius); the only extant ancient joke-book, the *Lover of Laughter*; Lucian's *True History* (a fake history); and the *Timarion* (a humorous journey to the afterlife that mocks contemporary medical, judicial, and educational practices).

The readings are in translation: no prior knowledge of classical literature or languages is expected.

Fall 2022 TU: 11:30-12:45

This course fulfills Humanities—Literary/Rhetorical Arts; it fulfills K-State 8 Aesthetic Interpretation or Historical Perspectives; it is an approved course of the Primary Text Certificate. This class may be taken with an Honors Contract for Honors Credit. This class is repeatable.