

ANT2700/4700 “Ancient Literature in Translation”
Spring Semester 2017
Periodisk evalueringsrapport

Type of course and target audience

This course was freshly designed and taught for the first time in spring 2016; in spring 2017 I taught it for the second time. The course is now part of a new one-year study programme called *Antikkens Kultur*, which was taught in autumn 2016 / spring 2017 for the first time. In addition to this, like last time the course was open to students from all subjects and all faculties (also *enkeltemnestudent*).

Goals of the course

Like last time, the main goal of the course was that students should read some of the most important and most influential classics from Greek and Roman literature in translation. In this context, they should also get a broader insight into Greek and Roman literature as well as some of the most important methodological tools with which ancient literary texts can be analysed and understood.

Syllabus

Based on the overall positive feedback and positive outcome of the course in spring 2016, I chose the same classics for the syllabus again:

- Homer: *The Odyssey*. Transl. Robert Fagles. 1996.
- Sophocles: *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*. Transl. Robert Fagles. 1982 (paperback 1984).
- Plato: *The Symposium*. Transl. M.C. Howatson & Frisbee C.C. Sheffield. 2008.
- Virgil: *Aeneid*. Transl. Stanley Lombardo. 2005.
- Ovid: *Metamorphoses*. Transl. Rolfe Humphries. 1955 (repr. 1983).

Structure of the course programme

Based on the overall positive feedback and positive outcome of the course in spring 2016, I chose to structure the course programme along the same lines as last time:

- Session 1 Organisation; general introduction
- Session 2 Overview of Greek literary history
- Session 3+4 Homer, *Odyssey*
- Session 5+6 Sophocles: *Antigone; Oedipus the King; Oedipus at Colonus*
- Session 7+8 Plato, *Symposium*
- Session 9 The ancient love novel (guest lecture)
- Session 10 Overview of Roman literary history
- Session 11+12 Virgil, *Aeneid*
- Session 13+14 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (guest lectures)

For two sessions, I invited three guest lecturers from abroad. In session 9 Prof. Ingela Nilsson (Uppsala [and currently Visiting Professor in Oslo]) gave a guest lecture entitled “From Love and Adventure to Cannibals and Human Sacrifice: The Ancient Novel in Context”. In session 14 Valentina Zanusso (Rome) and Nicoletta Canzio (Cassino) gave a guest lecture each, entitled “Folkloric Motives and Literary References in Ovid’s Birth of Heracles” (Zanusso) and “‘Tis the Daughter of Priam and not a Captive Who Asks it’: Polyxena’s Episode in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*” (Canzio). One main objective with these guest lectures was to better combine research and teaching, and to give the students a better idea of what academic research is and how teaching can benefit from research (→ so-called ‘research-based teaching and learning’).

Teaching format

Based on the overall positive feedback and positive outcome of the course in spring 2016, I chose to use the same teaching format again. The course was taught in lecture format, with occasional discussions and time for questions etc. in between. I used powerpoint presentations and podcasted all lectures, which then were made available on Fronter. The teaching language was English.

Compulsory activities and final examination

I used the same formats for the compulsory activity and the final examination as last time. For the compulsory activity during the semester, the students had to hand in a short essay (3–4 pages); they could choose between three topics which I assigned to them at the beginning of the semester (on either Homer, Sophocles, or Plato). Everyone received written feedback on their essay. The final examination consisted of a written exam (four hours). I divided the final exam into three parts: Part I: knowledge test (multiple choice) – Part II: essay – Part III: essay (for the two essays, the students could choose from three topics/questions).

Based on the feedback from spring 2016, I scheduled the deadline for the mid-term essay a little later (so that the students could follow more lectures before they had to decide on their preferred essay topic), and I provided more detailed information on the structure and content of the final examination at the beginning of the semester.

Optional activities

Like last time, I provided the students with three knowledge tests incl. keys so that they could test their knowledge about the syllabus and the content of the lectures. Again, I also regularly uploaded non-compulsory (but recommended) further reading (such as chapters from handbooks and companions).

Student numbers

According to Fronter, roughly 100 students were enrolled in the course (all on BA level, none on MA level). During the lectures, ca. 20–30 were present in average (as I podcasted the lecture, I did not make attendance a compulsory requirement). 35 submitted their compulsory mid-term essay; 30 of them were finally accepted and allowed to take the final examination. 26 sat and passed the exam (final characters ranged between A and D).

- Remark 1: The discrepancy between the large number of enrolled students and the fact that fewer than half of them handed in their mid-term essay is, in my view, to be explained by the fact that many students may have been enrolled for the course, but then did not actually follow it at all. I would not count this as *fräfall* in the actual sense of the word.
- Remark 2: I note with pleasure that the number of participants has increased considerably as compared to last year.

Results of the course evaluation (excerpt/summary)

For the course evaluation, I used the faculty's *Student evaluation questionnaire for courses offered at the Faculty of Arts*, with some modifications and some extra questions that specifically concerned my course. 20 students filled in and returned the evaluation form.

Like last year, the overall result of the evaluation was pleasingly positive. In what follows, I present some excerpts from the results: 19/20 students thought that the teaching was engaging, well structured, clear and comprehensible. 18/20 stated that reading the syllabus was demanding, but exciting; 14/20 thought the same about writing the mid-term essay. 18/20 agreed that the course taught them facts, ideas and methods. When asked for the reason(s) why they chose this course, a majority answered that they took it because they were interested in the topic (16/20); other reasons for their choice were: because it was a requirement in their study programme (7/20), because it suited their schedule (6/20), because they wanted to take a course with me (4/20). Regarding the lecture style, 15/20 were very satisfied, 5/20 satisfied; with the course as a whole, 15/20 were very satisfied, 4/20 satisfied, and 1/20 neither satisfied

nor unsatisfied. As far as the syllabus is concerned, Homer and Ovid were most popular; Sophocles, Plato and Vergil were a little less popular. Finally, concerning the mid-term essay, 13/20 said they liked the essay topics, 6/20 liked it in parts; 18/20 were satisfied with my supervision and feedback offered, 1/20 was only partly satisfied.

In the week after the last teaching hour, I scheduled an informal debriefing where I presented the results of the evaluation to the students in detail and discussed certain points and aspects. 9 students attended the debriefing. Inter alia, they emphasised that they liked the guest lectures and that they got a better insight into academic research and how teaching can benefit from research through these lectures.

- Remark 1: I note with satisfaction that my goal to implement research-based teaching and learning in this course seems to have been achieved.
- Remark 2: A full overview of all the results of the course evaluation is available upon request.

Conclusion

I am of the opinion that the course, like last year, was, overall, a success, both with regard to its content and its format/lecture style etc. I will teach the course again in spring 2018, using the same teaching style, with minor modifications and improvements. I will slightly alter (and expand) the syllabus: owing to the popularity of Ingela Nilsson's guest lecture on the ancient love novel, I will add Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Cleitophon* to the syllabus. In addition to this, I will exchange Plato's *Symposium* with Plato's *Phaedrus* (inter alia because Plato's *Phaedrus* is an important intertext to Achilles Tatius' novel). I will again invite guest lecturers to some of the sessions and I will continue to put emphasis on the concept of research-based teaching and learning.

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