

“*Corpora Mutata*: Modifications and Transformations of the Body in Classical Antiquity”

22nd Annual Graduate Student Colloquium

University of Virginia

April 28, 2018

Keynote Speaker: Brooke Holmes

Conceptions of the body feature prominently in many aspects of Greco-Roman antiquity. Body transformations, purposeful and unintentional, visible and invisible, play a major role in the Greek and Roman understanding of themselves and their societies.

Within the realm of literature, the centrality the body and its transformation to conceptions of the individual is on display in the opening lines of and throughout Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as well as in the work of Apuleius. Body modification is linked to identity in depictions of the other in ethnographic accounts, such as that of Egyptians and Persians in Herodotus’ *Histories*, or Caesar’s descriptions of Gauls and Britons in the *Bellum Gallicum*. Transformations of the body are prominent in Greek drama, from Oedipus’ injured feet and self-inflicted blindness in Sophocles’ tragedies, to the transformation of Pentheus’ physical appearance in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, to the comical disguising of Dionysus in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*.

Beyond the literary sphere, war-wounds, corporal punishment of slaves and criminals, and disease affected daily life both for the victims and those around them. Offerings and prayers were made to the gods in response to sickness and injury, and Cos and Epidaurus enjoyed positions of prominence as both sanctuaries and centers of healing. Magic was employed to transform bodies, both for good or for ill, as seen in curse tablets and magical papyri. The pollution and purification of the body play a significant role in Greek religion and determined access to sacred spaces; among early Christians, the traditional Jewish practice of circumcision became one of the first controversies in discussions of inclusion and exclusion within the Christian community. Questions about the relative stability and permanence of body and soul are explored by philosophers, while the development of medicine and its occasionally controversial practices demonstrates changing conceptions of the physical body.

We are interested in receiving papers that will explore aspects of the imagery and symbolism relating to bodies in Greco-Roman culture and its reception, for example in art, literature, religion, philosophy, science, and history. We welcome submissions from Classics, Art & Archaeology, Women & Gender studies, History, Religious studies, Philosophy, Anthropology, Medieval & Renaissance studies, the History of Science and Medicine, and other related disciplines. Possible topics could include, but are not limited to:

- literary and artistic representations of bodily transformations (e.g. metamorphosis, intentional modification, and punishment)
- scientific, medical, and magical understandings of bodily changes, both natural and corrective (e.g., drugs, amputations)
- the history of forced or punitive body modification
- the relation of ancient conceptions of body modifications to conceptions of ethnic and religious identity (e.g. circumcision, body painting, hair styles, tattoos, piercings)
- philosophical and theological conceptions of bodily permanence and impermanence
- the gendering of body transformation

- the reception of classical motifs of body transformation from the medieval through modern periods
- the use of body transformation as metaphor
- concepts of the authorial “corpus” and its modification over time

Papers should be 15-20 minutes in length. Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words (not counting bibliography) to Jovan Cyjetiĉanin (jc3ev@virginia.edu) by no later than February 9th, 2018. Any questions may be addressed to colloquium organizers Sarah Teets (sct4ze@virginia.edu) and Matt Pincus (mbp3cf@virginia.edu).