

# Framing Revolutionaries

## From Rome to Disney

### Instructor:

Yanneck Wiegers  
Department of Classics  
[yanneck.wiegers@jhu.edu](mailto:yanneck.wiegers@jhu.edu)

**Office Hours:** Monday, 12:00-2:00pm (or additional times by appointment)

**Class Hours and Room:** MWF 10am-12pm

### Course Description:

History & fiction know many “villains” who attempt to overthrow the social order. There is a certain type of antagonist that gets invoked in popular narratives everywhere from antiquity to modern Disney movies. While often dismissed as chaos agents or mad for power, a closer examination may show that there are often underlying social reforms at the heart of their agenda.

By comparative studies of various popular antagonists, we want to identify how basic patterns in villain narratives that were already formed in antiquity are still operative and powerful today.

In a second step, we want to deploy the developed template to examine reporting on and reactions to real (contemporary and historical) events and personalities. We will trace how such well-rehearsed patterns and narrative structures can be applied again and again in reactions to any change-makers who are perceived as disagreeable by some groups within society.

We want to examine various cases (fictitious & historical) from ancient Rome, American history, & contemporary movies, and ask ourselves why those who try to change society are often cast in the villain’s role, or “framed” as antagonists. For this purpose, we will study reactions to Catilina, Martin Luther King, John Brown, and modern climate activists, but also examine how, particularly right-wing, politicians started to hijack the villain position for their own purposes.

### **Class Structure:**

The class will meet three times a week (MWF) over the course of three weeks. Sessions will be split up into two sections, the first of which will be dedicated to group discussion of previous material, the second of which will be introductory in nature and prepare students for reading assignments.

### **Learning outcomes:**

In this class, students will

- critically evaluate stereotypical narratives that historically framed social reformers
- investigate the motivations behind these narratives and their societal impact
- develop an awareness of the enduring relevance of ancient narratives in contemporary society, highlighting the connections between historical narratives and present-day challenges

### **Assessment:**

This class will only be graded as pass or fail. There are two main requirements for passing the class:

1. Participation (attending classes & discussions, preparing the readings)
2. Production of a short essay (roughly one or two pages). The written form of this essay can be replaced by a presentation in class

The essay task will be discussed in the first class.

Schedule:

Class 1:	<p><u>Catilina, the Arch-Villain</u></p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Crisis of Catilina</i> (Bret Mulligan)</li> <li>• Cicero, <i>In Catilinam</i> 2.1</li> <li>• Vergil, <i>Aeneid</i>, Book 8, 666-670</li> <li>• Dante, <i>Inferno</i>, Canto 25, 10-15</li> <li>• Henrik Ibsen, <i>Catiline</i>, Act 1</li> </ul>
Class 2:	<p><u>Framing Villains:</u></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sallust, <i>Catilina</i> 4-5; 14-15; 20-22</li> <li>• Song “Poor Unfortunate Souls” (Disney’s <i>Little Mermaid</i> 1989)</li> <li>• Song “Be Prepared” (Disney’s <i>Lion King</i> 1994)</li> </ul> <p>Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparative ‘Villainology’ Chart</li> </ul>
Class 3:	<p><u>Martin Luther King</u></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A Call for Unity</i> (1963)</li> <li>• <i>An Appeal for Law &amp; Order, &amp; Common Sense</i> (1963)</li> <li>• Martin Luther King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963)</li> </ul>
Class 4:	<p><u>Lincoln-Douglas Debates:</u></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extracts from Lincoln-Douglas Debate (1858)</li> <li>• Ibram X. Kendi: “More Devoted to Order than Justice” (Atlantic June 28, 2018)</li> </ul>
Class 5:	<p><u>John Brown</u></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C.J.G. Griffin, “John Brown’s ‘Madness’” (<i>Rhetoric and Public Affairs</i>, 13: 2009)</li> <li>• Thoreau, “A Plea for Captain J. Brown” (1859)</li> </ul>
Class 6:	<p><u>Act Up Protest</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guest Speaker: Act Up Organizer Shane Butler</li> </ul>

Class 7:	<u>Climate Activism</u>  Materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Throwing Soup at Art Shifted People's Views of Climate Protests—But Maybe Not In The Right Way” (<i>Time</i>, Nov. 15. 22):</li> <li>• “I fund climate activism – and I applaud the Van Gogh protest” (<i>Guardian</i>, Oct. 22. 22)</li> </ul>
Class 8:	<u>Hijacking The Villain</u>  Did Donald Trump plagiarize a super-villain speech?  Materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donald Trump, <i>Inauguration Speech</i></li> <li>• Bane’s Speech (C. Nolan’s <i>The Dark Knight Rises</i>)</li> </ul>
Class 9:	Student Presentations

Integrity:

*The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams (quizzes and tests), plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. For more information, you may call the Office of the Dean of Students at 410-516-8208 or email at [integrity@jhu.edu](mailto:integrity@jhu.edu).*

Disabilities:

*If you require accommodation for any form of disability, including extra time on tests, please get in contact with Student Disability Services ([studentdisabilityservices@jh.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@jh.edu)).*

Mental Health:

*We in the Classics Department and the University as a whole are aware that many students experience anxiety, depression, and other emotional challenges during the course of the semester. If you are experiencing difficulties along these lines and would like to speak to a professional counselor, please visit the campus Counseling Center. More information is available on the Counseling Center’s website:*

*<https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>.*

*If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410-516-8278 and online at <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>*