

## Guilty Pleasures? Indulgence and propriety in post-Augustan Latin literature

A guilty pleasure is defined as “something pleasurable that induces a usually minor feeling of guilt.” Having first emerged in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, ‘guilty pleasure’ is a modern term that cannot be found as an exact translation in Latin or Ancient Greek. This may be part of the reason why ‘guilty pleasure’ has not been explored by scholars in the context of classical antiquity yet. This paper explores if the ancient Romans, too, experienced a conflict between enjoyment and societal norms similarly to how we experience guilty pleasures nowadays.

Drawing on models proposed in Campeggiani/Konstan (2024) and using Robert Kaster’s (2005) model of the emotional script, a model that considers an emotional experience based on context rather than merely based on the naming of the emotion in question, this paper aims to unearth the historical roots of the guilty pleasure within the ancient Roman world. This paper focuses on literature from Julio-Claudian and Flavian authors, who, as Berno (2023) shows, wrote during a time when indulgence in worldly pleasures like games, banquets, and other forms of entertainment was at an all-time-high. I will discuss select epigrams by Martial, passages from Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales* and *Trojan Women*, and Tacitus’ *Annals* in order to scrutinize expressions of indulgence and pleasure and how they carried undertones of guilt or societal taboo. Drawing from satirical poetry, epistolography, tragedy, and historiography, this paper aims to track different modes of presenting emotions across genres. As a result of this discussion, this paper argues that, even though the term ‘guilty pleasure’ did not exist in ancient Rome, the emotional concept did very well exist.

In conclusion, this paper by closely examining Julio-Claudian and Flavian texts with the help of the lens of the emotional script, sheds new light on an analogy between modern and ancient sentiments towards indulgence and propriety.

### Select Bibliography

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