

Musing on the 'malaise' and depression in Roman culture.
Some food for thought

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LECTURE SERIES

**Tuesday,
27th March
2018**

12:15 - 13:15

Campus Biotech
Room H8.01.D (144.165)
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The malaise, the pain of living, existential distress are diseases which have forcefully conquered a solid right of citizenship in contemporary societies. Not always easy to identify, only occasionally do they reveal their disturbing, ambiguous nature, often hiding behind a system of attitudes that one would not hesitate to define "normal". Over the centuries - and especially in relation to the various socio-cultural and geographical conditions - the concepts of melancholy and depression have undergone significant changes and variations. The talk investigates if and to what extent that area that today we generally link to the concept of depression actually had its roots in Roman society, and to what degree, if any, the most significant writers of Latin literature were aware of the subtle ways which cause the soul to feel sad. In ancient Roman culture, depression even had divine status. One of the "gods of the instant" was goddess Murcia, who was so called because, under her influence, man became murcidus, that is extremely lazy and idle. If Murcia prevailed over Stimula and Strenia (gods that, on the contrary, stimulated to act, and inspired courage and activities), then man fell into desidia. Paradoxically, it is from Saint Augustine (354 – 430), a fierce opponent of the religion of Rome, that we learn about this goddess. In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine mentions Murcia and her power to make men slothful, lethargic and lazy. In the course of the talk some literary texts will be examined in order to help us to redraw an emotional map of the pain of living encompassing the Ancients and us ■

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