Eng 501: Greek and Roman Mythology

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Eng 501 Brink 229

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“It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth” (Campbell 3).



Introduction

Ancient mythological characters and stories permeate our culture. According to comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell (quoted above), our need for myth hasn’t waned with the development of civilization. It might be even greater now that we no longer have the cultural glue of religion to guide us through life and explain the mysteries of the universe. In fact, George Lucas created the *Star Wars* franchise to provide what he considers a myth for our age.

The source material for myth is vast, especially considering all of the different myths that have developed all over the world, so this course is focused specifically on core myths of Greek and Roman society in order to understand the impact of these texts on Western culture. We are going to start with the Greek version of creation and the Olympian pantheon through Hesiod and *The Homeric Hymns*. We will continue to explore the epic events of the Trojan War, the return of some of the heroes, and the founding of Rome in Homer and Virgil. We will wrap up with the stories of two cursed families through Greek drama. Throughout, we will be making connections to uses of these myths in literature and pop culture.

As we read this material, we will be asking questions like “What is myth?” “What social and cultural purposes do myths serve?” and “Why do myths still engage and entertain us in our post-modern, scientific world?” This approach will also provide a basis for students’ further study of other mythologies.

This course is available in two tracks: degree credit and professional development. Students taking the course for degree credit will earn a letter grade, while students taking the course for professional development will be assessed in terms of pass/fail.

Learning Objectives

* Analyze mythological texts from Ancient Greece and Rome, as well as modern re-tellings of mythological material, with attention to how they communicate and confer culture.
* Participate effectively in oral discussions of writings and other cultural materials, making well-supported claims about ideas, issues, and problems.
* Frame a thesis about a text(s) and argue it in writing, using relevant supporting evidence.
* Become familiar with some of the literary scholarship pertaining to the study of myth.
* Develop a framework for understanding myths that can be applied to various culture’s mythological texts.

Required Texts

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

Hesiod, *Theogony* (easily available online)

*The Homeric Hymns* (easily available online)

Homer, *Odyssey* (I suggest Robert Fagles’ translation)

Virgil, *Aeneid* (I suggest Robert Fitzgerald’s translation)

Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays* (I suggest Robert Fagles’ translation)

Aeschylus, *Oresteia* (I suggest Robert Fagles’ translation)

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Requirements and Grading

**For Degree Credit (Letter Grade):**

Participation (20%)

Response Papers (25%)

Conference Style Presentation (15%)

Critical Essay (40%)

**For Professional Development (P/F):**

Participation (20%)

Response Papers (25%)

Presentation or Class Lesson (15%)

Class Syllabus (or other pedagogical apparatus) (40%)

**Participation (20%)**

In a graduate seminar, we are all responsible for the group learning experience. Therefore, each student is expected to actively participate in each class by coming prepared with reading notes and at least one discussion question for the class. In order to create an effective learning community we all must listen to each other carefully, respect other’s perspectives, and engage productively with other’s ideas in order to move the conversation forward. This does not mean superficial politeness; I expect that we will respond critically, and civilly, to the texts and each other’s ideas focusing on developing our understanding of the course content.

In addition to participating in each class session, each student will also be responsible for chairing one class session during our two-week semester. If we have more than 10 students, you may share chairing duties with a classmate. The chair manages discussion and makes connections between our primary mythological texts, critical articles, and contemporary re-tellings of myths. Above all, the chair is the master of time management. The chair prepares discussion questions on assigned readings and calls on people; s/he may make use of the response papers in class. Be creative and try alternative formats, such as small group discussion, in-class exercises, debates, etc. *The goal is to make sure that our treatment of the text(s) stays focused, insightful, and worthwhile, and that stimulating questions are raised and discussed*. Give the class a fifteen-minute break sometime between 12:30 and 1:00 pm. Depending on the reading, I may ask for time set aside for additional discussions/activities.

**Response Papers (25%)**

Response papers are due each day and should respond to the reading assigned that day. These daily exercises are a means of digesting and remembering the reading; they also lay the groundwork for fruitful class discussions (and conference presentations and critical essays for degree credit students). You must hand in five response papers over the course of the class. If you hand in more than five, I will only count your five highest grades. For all response papers, read, mark and think about the assigned readings and come to class eager and prepared to make contributions to class discussion.

I am more concerned with quality of ideas than quantity in your response papers. That said, I would worry if your response paper is significantly shorter than three double-spaced pages. Do not confuse this assignment with a formal essay. While they must be legible and at least somewhat coherent, response papers do not need to state and develop a thesis, nor have a narrative thread running through all sections. Feel free to work through one or several ideas/questions in these response papers and use headings to denote abrupt transitions between ideas and/or employ bullet points. As we progress through the course, I encourage you to think about texts in light of theoretical ideas, compare and contrast texts with what we have read earlier, and think of your response papers as a way to run ideas for your class lesson and syllabus or conference paper and critical essay by me. I will do my best to provide ample feedback on those ideas I think are worthy of further exploration in these projects.

Here are some approaches to kick-start your thinking when writing response papers:

* Explore your personal, spontaneous response to the text via free writing. Use this exercise to loosen up and generate ideas in an uninhabited manner. What questions are offered up by this free writing? How would you go about answering those questions?
* Identify how a particular mythological story illustrates (or undermines) Joseph Campbell’s theory of myth.
* Perform close readings by focusing on one key passage to analyse literary and formal elements such as style, tone, point of view, figurative language, diction, etc. In your close reading explain why this passage is important to your interpretation of the work as a whole.
* Explore ideas about how this text might be taught in a middle/high school setting.
* Explore how a particular mythological story has been re-told over time. Why might a later artist choose to use material from this myth? How does the artist re-work (change) the material to relate to his or her culture and time?

In addition to these prompts, each response paper must include at least two questions that are raised by your reading that you would like to address in class. Feel free to use these questions to frame your response paper or feature these questions at the end of the assignment.

Response papers are due in class on the day we discuss the reading; I will not accept late papers. Each response paper must provide an MLA citation for all texts that you discuss in the assignment. I will grade response papers as follows:

90-100%: strong work; accurate bibliographic citation; insightful and illuminating ideas; you teach us something new about the text(s); all portions of the response indicate strong and clear thinking

80-90%: good work; there may be a mistake or two in the bibliographic citation; fine start on ideas but could use more development; some portion of the response seems a bit weak

70-80%: satisfactory work; some noticeable mistakes; seems like response was written without much reflection; hazy grasp of the text(s), its arguments and components; not all portions are addressed in a satisfactory manner

60-70%: weak work; major mistakes in bibliography or absent altogether; poor understanding of text(s) and its significance; most portions of response weak

0%: not submitted

**Conference Presentation and Critical Essay** (for degree credit-seeking student)

The bulk of the grade for degree credit-seeking students in this course stems from skills that professional literary critics must hone: giving a conference paper and developing it into a formal essay for potential publication. In the penultimate session of this course, we’ll hold a final project workshop, in which you can share your ideas for your conference presentation and critical essay with the class and benefit from their feedback. In the final session of this course, we’ll hold our very own conference in which you will have the chance to present and discuss your ideas with your classmates. Each degree credit-seeking student will give a 15-minute conference paper and have the chance to field questions from the audience.

Your critical essay (4500-7500 words) should look to expand and improve upon your conference paper. To help you do this, I will organize students into working groups. You are responsible for reading the work of each student in your working group and working with that group to improve and expand upon conference papers after we break as a class. Immediately following the conference students must submit versions of their conference paper and/or essay drafts to their working group. Of course, I will also be free for consultation during this time and I urge everyone to meet with me in addition to their working group as they transform their conference presentation into their critical essay. After we break as a class, I will also be available to consult with you about your critical essay via telephone, email, Skype, or in-person chat. Indeed, the structure of this class demands that we remain in touch during this time so that I can advise you on your progress. Your critical essay is due on Monday, August 1.

**Presentation or Class Lesson and Class Syllabus** (or other significant pedagogical apparatus)

(for professional development students)

The bulk of the grade for professional development students is based on projects pertinent to teaching about mythology. In the penultimate session of this course, we’ll hold a final project workshop, in which you can share your ideas for your presentation/class lesson and class syllabus appropriate to a particular grade with the class and benefit from their feedback. In the final session of this course, (after the conference) you will have the chance to present or teach us your lesson and discuss your pedagogical approach with your classmates. Each professional development students will have 15 minutes to present or teach and have the chance to field questions from the audience.

Your class syllabus can include your presentation/class lesson. It should include all materials needed to teach a significant unit on mythology appropriate to a particular grade. To help you do this, I will organize students into working groups. You are responsible for reading the work of each student in your working group and working with that group to improve and expand upon teaching ideas after we break as a class. After the last day we meet, students must submit working versions of their syllabus or lesson plans. Of course, I will also be free for consultation during this time and I urge everyone to meet with me in addition to their working group as they build their syllabus. After we break as a class, I will also be available to consult with you about your syllabus via telephone, email, Skype, or in-person chat. Indeed, the structure of this class demands that we remain in touch during this time so that I can advise you on your progress. Your critical essay is due on Monday, August 1.

Course Policies

Plagiarism

I will not tolerate plagiarism in this course—no exceptions. If I discover plagiarism, I will give you a failing grade for the course and refer you to the Dean of Students.

According to university and departmental policy, plagiarism is claiming someone else’s work (either ideas or words) as your own. Plagiarism includes:

* Copying, quoting or paraphrasing documents of any kind without proper and explicit citation of sources.
* Use of another person’s words or ideas with attribution and explicit citation.
* Submitting another person’s work as your own.
* Cowriting work with another scholar and claiming it as solely yours.
* Submitting work for this course that you have previously submitted for a different course, in part or in full.

If you have any questions about what I consider plagiarism, how to cite your work, or university and department policies on plagiarism, please see me.

Accommodations  
Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have documented temporary or permanent disabilities. All accommodations must be approved through Disability Support Services located in the Bruce M. Pitman Center, Suite 127, in order to notify your instructor(s) as soon as possible regarding accommodation(s) needed for the course. Contact info for DSS: 885-6307 / [cdar@uidaho.edu](mailto:cdar@uidaho.edu). Website: [www.uidaho.edu/current-students/cdar](https://uidaho.us6.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e8b26a2bfdf3335ca7d0c9eef&id=01e33d905d&e=fcd30d1e0e).

Eng 501: Greek and Roman Mythology Class Schedule

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| Monday, 6/17 | Hesiod, *Theogony*  *The Homeric Hymns* |
| Tuesday, 6/18 | *The Odyssey*, Books 1 - 12 |
| Wednesday, 6/19 | *The Odyssey*, Books 13 - 24 |
| Thursday, 6/20 | *The Oresteia* |
| Friday, 6/21 | *The Aeneid* |
| Monday, 6/24 | *Three Theban Plays* |
| Tuesday, 6/25 | Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* |
| Wednesday, 6/26 | Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* |
| Thursday, 6/27 | Workshop |
| Friday, 6/28 | Conference and Teaching Presentations |