

Classics 129: Greek Myths  
Spring 2011 ~ Beth Severy-Hoven

Office: 312 Old Main ~ Telephone: 651-696-6721

Office hours: Tu 2-3, F 10-11, AND BY APPOINTMENT

E-mail: [severy@macalester.edu](mailto:severy@macalester.edu)

Course Materials Available at <http://moodle.macalester.edu>

### Course Description

This course studies some of the world's great storytellers – the ancient Greeks. We will read from collections of Greek poetry to become familiar with the key figures and events in mythology, including the Olympian gods and their origins, the major heroes, and the Trojan War. At the same time, we will be investigating the ways in which moderns have interpreted these stories. We'll practice reading myths using approaches developed in psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and literary studies, as well as through postmodern lenses. In looking at these theories and the later reuse of Greek myths, we will tackle certain fundamental questions: What were the myths to the ancient Greeks? How can we interpret them? And why have so many people continued to retell Greek myths over time?

### Goals, Expectations and Evaluation

The course readings and assignments have been designed with the goal that students:

- become familiar with
  - the most popular Greek myths,
  - the cultural and historical milieu in which specific versions of them were told,
  - and some of the prominent modern (mythological) theorists and their approaches
- and develop their abilities to
  - examine texts closely and critically,
  - pose meaningful questions,
  - employ theoretical approaches in developing interpretations,
  - and communicate their conclusions effectively to others.

To these ends, the course will emphasize writing and discussion. We will use writing in part as a method to think and learn about the course material. For example, to help you read more carefully and prepare to participate in class discussion, 8 informal response papers are required over the course of the semester (5 before Spring Break). These 1-2 page musings on the day's reading – potentially including a summary, comments, critique, concerns, comparison to other readings, answers to the discussion questions or proposals for new questions – must be submitted *before* discussion for credit. You may turn these in on paper at the beginning of class, or send them in the text of an e-mail message (*not* as an attachment). Since we will be working with a great deal of creative literature, both ancient and modern, you may choose to submit a short story, poetry or other creative writing for 3 of these informal papers. For all reading assignments, questions are provided on the schedule of assignments to help direct your reading and responses, as well as our discussion. Short writing assignments in class will also help you

process the course material. A short (2-3 page) first paper is designed to demonstrate your ability to interpret a given myth using at least two different theoretical perspectives. A second formal paper will be due on the last day of class which asks you to use the interpretive techniques you've developed over the semester to analyze any 20<sup>th</sup> century retelling of a Greek myth you choose. **Late paper policy:** if a paper is not turned in by the designated time, one letter grade will be deducted from the one otherwise earned. For every additional day the paper is late (24 hrs.), another letter grade will be deducted.

A quiz will be given early in the term encouraging you to familiarize yourself with the major periods of Greek history, the forms of myth composed during each, and the artists whose work we will read. Periodic short quizzes will evaluate your developing familiarity with characters and concepts. A creative group project early in the second half of the term will allow you to explore the ways that old myths are used to express new ideas. Finally, a final exam, given during finals week, will again evaluate your familiarity with Greek stories and their interpreters, as well as encourage you to synthesize and present what you have learned about the deployment of Greek myths within specific cultural and historical settings.

Class participation includes reading the assigned material, thinking about the questions posed on the syllabus and otherwise preparing, coming to class regularly and on time, as well as *actively* participating in the group discussion. Since we are studying stories, many of which were originally delivered orally, we will occasionally have story time in class, and you may tell (not read) a favorite myth during class in place of one response paper. Please notify me at least two hours before class if you intend to tell a story. Attendance will be kept; not only will you not receive credit for participation if you are absent, after four absences your grade will suffer directly. More than six absences may cause you to fail the course.

If you have difficulties with the date of any scheduled quiz or exam, please consult with me in advance. Likewise, if your abilities necessitate special exam conditions or other considerations, I encourage you to discuss these with me as soon as possible. Also contact the Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, at 696-6220 or llandrem@macalester.edu to make an appointment. It is important to meet early in the semester to ensure your accommodations are approved and you begin the semester successfully.

Class Preparation & Participation	20%	Writing Assignments	40%
Group Performance Project	15%	Quizzes & Exam	25%

### Textbooks

The following book has been ordered and should be available at the Macalester textbook center in the Lampert Building on Snelling Avenue. Please notify the store and Professor Severy-Hoven immediately if you cannot find:

Stephen L. Harris and Gloria Platzner, *Classical Mythology, Images & Insights*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, McGraw-Hill, 2008, ISBN: 978-007353567-8.

Many readings will also be provided electronically through the course Moodle page. Please bring a hard copy of these readings with you to class, although you may share with a colleague.