Classics 2604 001-LEC
Greek Mythology
Winter Term 2015 (January 2-17, 2016)

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Note: Email is far and away the best way to reach me.

Course description:

3 credits. This course will serve as an introduction to the variety of ancient Greek mythological traditions. We will survey the major Greek myths, with emphasis on the content and significance of the myths in Mediterranean society, including the place of myth in Greek life and consciousness; the factors and influences involved in the creation of myths; and the use of myths for our understanding of Greek literature, religion, and moral and political concepts. Topics include the twelve Olympian gods; Hesiod and the creation of the world; Homer and the Trojan Cycle of myths; mythical epics and traditions about Thebes, Argos, Athens, and other parts of the Greek world; and, in particular, the relationship between Greek tragedy and myth. The class focuses primarily on the ancient material, but with many parallels, adaptations, and retellings taken from modern times. All readings are in English.

Course objectives:

By the end of the course students should have:

1. A good general knowledge of the principal Greek myths,
2. An understanding of how a number of those mythical traditions relate to each other,
3. A sense of the many uses and views of mythology within the ancient Greek world, and
4. The ability to recognize references to Greek mythology and their symbolism in modern media (e.g. literature, art, commercial media, in museums, etc.).

Course format:

The class will consist of a series of lecture videos, lots of film and documentary clips, and Powerpoint presentations, accompanied by my voice, that students will view online. There will also be substantial outside reading.

With a few exceptions, the film and documentary clips are professional-grade productions. I have made extensive use of two documentary series about Greek mythology, including one for the History Channel for which I was an on-screen commentator. In both series the commentators are professional classicists working in some of the finest universities in the US and England. In short, these are top-notch productions, and a lot more exciting than the usual Powerpoint classroom slide show. Other clips are from recent productions or classic film versions of Greek tragedy. I have selected them to help bring the words on the page to life. Still others are cartoons. This may sound unserious but before dismissing it, reflect that cartoons are—perhaps paradoxically—one of the most effective ways to represent Greek myths in modern society. Finally, I have chosen a smaller number of clips to help you summarize the main points, make connections across myths, to spark or challenge your thinking, or (in the case of The
Simpsons parody), just for fun. You should make a point of watching them all and making notes as you go.

Our primary texts are the finest masterpieces of Greek literature – Homer’s epic Odyssey, Hesiod’s Theogony, and a selection of Greek tragedies from each of the three canonical Greek tragedians—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. I have also included two lighthearted takes on Greek myth: Euripides’ Cyclops (a satyr play) and Aristophanes’ Frogs, a Greek comedy.

Although students can work largely at their own rate, the pace of reading is designed to cover one tragedy or its equivalent per day and shorter supplementary readings from Ovid’s Metamorphoses and other texts (e.g. the Bible’s account of creation or the serpent in the Garden of Eden). I suggest you work at the rate of one module per day. You can work faster or slower than that, but the dates of the two exams are inflexible:

• The midterm exam must be taken on Friday, January 8.
• The final exam must be taken between Friday, January 15 and the end of Sunday, January 17.

These two exams comprise the bulk of your grade, but because I also want to create some kind of intellectual community, no matter how small or artificial, a portion of your grade will also come from your participation in Blackboard’s discussion board feature.

**Required books (available from Amazon.com or other online retailers)**

*Note: You can find free translations of all these works online but because translations are not created equal, the books listed below are required for this course. My lectures and exam questions are based on them.*


Most of these books include spectacularly helpful introductions to what we’re reading, and some have lists or glossaries of characters at the back. You don’t have to read them, and you may not have time to. But if you do, I strongly encourage you to explore these materials.

Other reading materials, clips, and the like will be available on the Blackboard course website. Please enroll in it as soon as you have signed up for the class.

**Grades** will be determined in the following way:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation (discussion boards)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 midterm exam</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 final exam</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
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Each exam will consist of 50 multiple-choice questions covering names, a few dates, and terms for identification. Each question will have six possible answers and many of the questions will be analytical. This means that students will be required to identify features that characters from different texts have in common—for example, you might be asked to identify examples of characters that transform themselves or others into other shapes. (One right answer might be Circe and Proteus, both characters you’ll meet in the *Odyssey*).

The midterm exam will cover modules 1-6 (Hesiod, Homer’s *Odyssey*, Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, and Euripides’ *Cyclops*).

The final exam will be cumulative, covering modules 1-14.

Like all courses at Cornell University, Classics 2604 adheres to the *Code of Academic Integrity and Acknowledging the Work of Others*. This document is available for you read in the *Policy Notebook for the Cornell Community* and also on the web at [http://www.cornell.edu/UniversityFaculty/docs/main.html](http://www.cornell.edu/UniversityFaculty/docs/main.html). Please note that each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student’s own work.