

# CLAS 170: Classical Mythology

## Course Syllabus

Brandeis University, Spring 2008

This course meets in Block L, Monday and Wednesday, 3:40 - 5:00 in Lown 2. It satisfies the distribution requirement for the Humanities.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see one of the teachers in this course as soon as possible.

Instructor: Professor Leonard Muellner

Contributors: Professors Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow and Cheryl L. Walker

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### Contact Information:

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A Word about translations: None of the primary sources for this course were originally created in English, so all of the books below are translations. Translation from one language to another is not a science but an art that does not know perfection. Our understanding on all levels of all the sources in this course is an ongoing process without definitive answers. So we have tried to pick the best translations, and we will be reading parts or all of them with great care, and we will also be correcting them when they err or when we choose to differ with the translator's understanding. If you do not have the same translations as we do, you will get lost when we read these texts closely, and the errors in your versions will be different, and the whole process of communicating between and among us about them will get royally messed up. So please read these particular translations, and bring your copies of them to class on the days when they are being discussed.

## Required Texts (in the order in which they will be read):

Hesiod, *Theogony; Works and Days*, trans. S. Lombardo. Hackett, ISBN 087220-179-1

Homer, *Iliad*, trans. S. Lombardo, Hackett, ISBN 0-87220-352-2

Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. S. Lombardo, Hackett, ISBN 0-87220-484-7

Homer, *The Homeric Hymns*, trans. T. Sargent WW Norton ISBN 0-39300-788-X

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. S. Berg and D. Clay, ISBN 9780195054934

Euripides, *The Phoenician Women*, trans. P. Burian and B. Swann, ISBN 9780195077087

Euripides, *Bakhai*, trans. R. Gibbons and C. Segal, Oxford UP, ISBN 0-19512598-3

Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. A. de Selincourt, Penguin ISBN 0-14044-809-8

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. C. Martin, WW Norton ISBN 0-393-32642-X

## Recommended:

Woodford, Susan, *Images of Myths*, Cambridge UP, ISBN 0521788099

## Class participation and papers:

During class sessions set aside for analysis of a text (or texts), you are expected to participate with informed observations, reactions, questions, and answers as often as possible in a class of this size. Two short papers (3-4 typed, double-spaced pages each) and a longer final paper are required. There will be no final exam. (Details will follow for the first paper assignment and subsequent assignments.) The papers are due on the following dates:

Paper #1—	Wed., Feb. 6
Paper #2—	Wed., March 19
Final Paper Prospectus—	Wed., April 9
Final Paper—	Mon., April 28

These dates are marked with asterisks (\*) below on the syllabus. Pace yourselves carefully. A writing assignment that is well-done takes time.

For every day that a paper is late you will lose one grade step from whatever grade you would have received had the paper been on time (A to A- to B+ to B to B- etc.). This system seems to assure fairness to all concerned. A validated medical excuse or certain extraordinary circumstances explained to your professors might exempt you from this penalty.

## ROUGH COURSE GRADE DETERMINATION:

Class Participation:	10%
Papers 1 and 2	45%
Prospectus:	10%
Final Paper:	35%

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Brandeis University policy on academic honesty is contained in your *Student Handbook* in section 5 under "Rights and Responsibilities." Instances of cheating, plagiarism, or other alleged dishonesty will be reported to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. The adjudication process is also outlined in your *Handbook*. Potential consequences of academic dishonesty include (in addition to an "E" on the assignment) failure in the course, disciplinary probation, and suspension from the University. A record of any offense will remain in a student's disciplinary file in the Office of Student Affairs throughout his or her career at Brandeis. Please know that we take this code very seriously. If you are not clear about our expectations, please ask us before you turn in questionable work.

There may be additional readings added to the syllabus (and placed on electronic reserve) from time to time.

Initials of participants:

C.W. Cheryl Walker, Dept. of Classical Studies  
 AOK-O Ann O. Koloski-Ostrow, Dept. of Classical Studies  
 L.M. Lenny Muellner, Dept. of Classical Studies  
 C.F. Claudia Filos, TA, Dept. of Classical Studies

DATE:                      READINGS & TOPICS OF LECTURE/DISCUSSION

January 16, Wed.      L.M. & AOK-O. What is this course about? Why? What is a myth? What's the problem with myths? Some basic difficulties, some basic principles, and some basic questions. Analyzing a sample myth: a fable by Aesop. Is this really a myth? What is it about? How can you tell?

end week 1

21 Mon. NO CLASS, MLK Day

23 Wed. (B. Monday) Reading for Jan. 23-Jan. 30: Hesiod, *Theogony*; H. and H.A. Frankfort, "Myth and Reality," in *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*; C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Chapter 1, "The Science of the Concrete"; Hesiod, *Works and Days*

L.M. Your myths, their myths: Whose belief system is 'logical'? Mythical vs. scientific thought. 'Mythopoeic' categories of thought and perception: time, space, place, people vs. things, abstract vs. concrete. The "realism" of myth. A polytheistic religious system and how it works in comparison to a monotheistic system. The notion of the 'primitive' thinker and of the

progression or evolution of societies. Introduction to the mythical medium and content of Hesiod's *Theogony*.

end week 2

28 Mon. L.M. Lecture and discussion of *Theogony*. Analysis of structure and meaning of Succession Myth in *Theogony*. Catalogs as structures and ideas; first try at understanding the way stories are built and have meaning.

30 Wed. L. M. Lecture and discussion of *Works and Days*. The Myth of the Ages (Golden, Silver, etc.). Fables; the *Days* part of the *Works and Days* The relationship between *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.

end week 3

February 4 Mon. C.W. Who are the Greeks? History, geography, social structures AOK-O. Mythology in the decorative arts of the Greeks and how they contribute to the study of myth.  
*Iliad* 1 and A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Chapter Two, "Singers: Performance and Training," and M. Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls, pp. 1-18

L.M. Introduction to Indo-Europeans and the mythological analyses of Georges Dumézil. The myth of the Judgment of Paris. Introduction to the *Iliad*. Traditional societies and the function of performing myths in them. The concept of exchange and the opening episodes of the *Iliad*.

\*6 Wed. *Iliad* 6, 9, 16; excerpts from B. Malinowski, "The Role of Magic and Religion," in W. A. Lessa and E. Vogt, *Reader in Comparative Religion*

L. M. Functional anthropology's approach to myth and the function of epic poetry in Greece. Epic heroes and their social function: Achilles as the hero of *biê* 'physical force' and his social function.

\*Short Paper #1 due on passage from *Iliad* 9

end week 4

11 Mon. *Iliad* 18, 22, 23

AOK-O. How to "picture" the shield of Achilles, heroes, and gods.

13 Wed. L.M. *Iliad* 18, 22, 23 Achilles' mythical history outside the *Iliad* and the significance of his shield within the poem. Epic battle, sports ritual, funerals, and the world as it might be but isn't.

end week 5

18 Mon. and 20 Wed. NO CLASS

end week 6

25 Mon. *Iliad* 24

L.M. The ransom of Hector and the relationship of the *Iliad* to its social context; the *Iliad* as a sequel to the *Theogony*.

27 Wed. *Homeric Hymn to Hermes. Odyssey 1-4*

L. M. The god Hermes and his sphere. Hermes and Athena and their roles in the *Odyssey*. The story of a hero of *mêtis*, 'cunning,' and his social function. Another beginning: the son of the hero, his story, and the function of myth in Epic and of Epic.

end week 7

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March 3 Mon. *Odyssey 5, 6*

L.M. Myth and symbolism of transition between worlds: from Calypso's island to the land of the Phaeacians.

5 Wed. *Odyssey 8, 9*

L.M. and AOK-O. Lecture/Discussion of film, *Chunhyang* (available for video streaming to a computer near you from the course's LATTE website).

L.M. Discussion of *Odyssey 8, 9*. Performance of myths, vs. reading of myths.

end week 8

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10 Mon. *Odyssey 10, 11, 12* and "The Slippers of Abu Kassem" in *The King and the Corpse*, by Heinrich Zimmer (with visual additions by AOK-O); Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale* (selection)

L.M. Jungian approach to myth analysis; the contrasting principle of Propp's analysis of a corpus of folktales. Psychological and social interpretations of the adventures of Odysseus.

12 Wed. *Odyssey 13, 19, 20*. Readings from D. Frame, *The Myth of Return in Greek Epic*, and G. Nagy, *Poetry as Performance*.

L.M. The theme of homecoming in its historical and mythical dimensions. The lament of the nightingale and the notion of multiformity in myth and performance.

end week 9

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17 Mon. *Odyssey 21, 24*.

L.M. More on variation, and *Iliad* vs. *Odyssey*.

The funeral of Achilles at the end of the *Odyssey* and other rituals in Epic and Ancient India; an interpretation of the massacre of the suitors.

- \*19 Wed. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Clyde Kluckhohn, "Myths and Rituals: A General Theory"
- L.M. Relation of myth and ritual. Analysis of the story of Persephone and Demeter and the Eleusinian 'Mysteries.' What an adolescent's sexual initiation has to do with immortality for all Greek men and women.
- \*Paper #2 due on a myth in the *Odyssey* end week 10
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- 24 Mon. Readings from M. M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece: An Introduction*
- C.W. Athenian Democracy and Social Structure  
L.M. Introduction to tragedy and tragic heroes/heroines vs. epic heroes and heroines. Moralizing and the understanding of tragic transformation of myths.
- 26 Wed. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*. Selections from S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*; "The Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales," and "The Theme of the Three Caskets," from S. Freud, *On Creativity and the Unconscious*
- L. M. Psychoanalytic approaches to the Oedipus myth and to myths in general. end week 11
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- 31 Mon. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, cont'd. C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth", in *Structural Anthropology*
- L.M. Psychoanalytic vs. structuralist approaches to the Oedipus myth. A look back at the *Theogony* in psychoanalytic and structuralist terms.
- April 2 Wed. Euripides, *Phoenician Women*.
- L.M. Multiforms of tragic myth and how the meaning of a myth can be transformed within the same social/cultural setting. end week 12
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- 7 Mon. *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*. Euripides, *Bakhai*.
- L. M. with visual additions by AOK-O. Dionysiac ritual and myth and the ritual aspects of Athenian tragedy.
- \*9 Wed. Livy, *Early History of Rome*
- C.W. Historical/Social Overview of Ancient Rome.

L.M. Introduction to Indo-Europeans: “real” Roman mythology and what happened to it.

\*Prospectus of Final Paper due.

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end week 13

14 Mon. AOK-O Livy, Forum of Augustus, and the cult of Aeneas in early Italy and of Julius Caesar and Augustus in the Imperial period.

16 Wed. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*  
L.M. Introduction to Ovid and to Hellenistic collections of myths and their interpretation. The story of Mentha and myths about spices and herbs: the altered social context of Ovidian myth

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end week 14

21 Mon. and 23 Wed. NO CLASSES

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end week 15

\*28 Mon. L.M. Ovid (with visual additions by AOK-O) The apotheosis of Roman emperors and the goal of the *Metamorphoses*; how Ovid and Livy use myth in an imperial state.

\*Final paper due

30 Wed. Selection from R. Barthes, *Mythologies*.

L. M. Concluding thoughts on methods of myth interpretation and mythology in our world

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end week 16