

USEM 43 "Get the Hero"

Fall Term, 2007

Block K, Monday and Wednesday, 2:10 - 3:30 pm

Golding 103

Department of Classical Studies, MS 016

Rabb 130

Office Hours: 3:30-4:30 pm, Monday and Wednesday

muellner@brandeis.edu

781-736-2185

Description

War hero, super-hero, my hero, the anti-hero, culture hero—those are a few varieties of hero or heroine in our language and civilization, in popular and in prestige culture. The first goal of this class is to try to make unfamiliar what this word means to our world, then to talk about what a hero means to some ancient worlds, especially Greece, where the term was invented, but also Rome, Mesopotamia, the Middle East, and India, to look for shared features but also to try to understand heroic figures from within their own cultural contexts in all their diversity. This course will read, discuss, and write about epics (the *Iliad*, *Gilgamesh*, and selections from the *Mah_bh_rata* and the *Aeneid*) but also a comedy (Aristophanes' *Birds*), three tragedies (*Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles), Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, and the New Testament (*Gospel according to Matthew*).

Reading list

Four Plays by Aristophanes, (Birds, Clouds, Frogs, Lysistrata), trans. W.

Arrowsmith, R. Lattimore, and D. Parker, Plume, 1984, ISBN: 978-0452007178

Homer, *Iliad*, translated by Stanley Lombardo, Hackett Publishing, 1997, ISBN: 978-0872203525

The Epic of Gilgamesh, translated by Maureen G. Kovacs, Stanford University Press, 1989, ISBN: 978-0804717113

The Mah_bh_rata: A Play, by Jean-Claude Carrière, translated by Peter Brook, Harper/Collins reissue, 1987, ISBN: 978-0060390792 + its DVDs, published by Image Entertainment, 325 minutes, ASIN B00006LPEG, 2002

Virgil, *Aeneid*, translated by Stanley Lombardo, Hackett Publishing, 2005, ISBN: 978-0872207318

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates* (includes *Euthyphro*, *Apology of Socrates*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*), translated by H. Tredennick, Penguin Books, 1983, ISBN: 978-0140445824

The Oedipus Plays of Sophocles, trans. by Paul Roche, Plume, ISBN: 978-0452011670

The New Testament, translated by H. Wansbrough, New Jerusalem Bible (reissue), 1983, ISBN: 978-0385237062

Syllabus

Week 1, September 5 and 10: Reading: *Iliad* 1. Discussion of the term hero and its applications in modern culture and in Ancient Greece. Introduction to the *Iliad* as the product of a performance tradition. Achilles as an overarching, beloved hero for all Greeks. The ritual cult of heroes in Greece and its relationship to the heroes of Epic. Close reading and how to do it; introduction to writing about literature.

Focus paper, due on September 10: on the quarrel in *Iliad* Scroll 1 between Agamemnon and Achilles, to answer the question, "Whose side are you on and why?" Double-spaced, one to two pages.

Week 2, September 12 and 17: Reading: *Iliad* 2-6; The absence of the hero and its consequences; alternatives to Achilles: Diomedes; Hector and his value to his family; Paris and Menelaos as heroic warriors (?) at the origin of the ultimate conflict.

Week 3, September 19 and 24: Reading: *Iliad* 7-15; Meleagros as the heroic exemplar and the educational function of epic song; variations on the tale of Meleagros and on the heroic ideal; Patroklos and the notion of the hero's sidekick: what his name means, what his title (Achilles' *therap_n*) means. Other traditions of Patroklos, as Achilles' lover: Aeschylus' *Myrmidons*.

Week 4, October 1 and 3: Reading: *Iliad* 16-24; Patroklos as a metonymic substitute for Achilles, the ultimate *philos* 'dear friend'; his death and its consequences for Achilles; the hero as the figure of grief and lamentation; visualization of Patroklos as a slaughtered ram and of Achilles as the eternal mourner; what Achilles actually learns from the death of Patroklos and why he befriends (makes his *philos*) Priam. The bestiality of the hero, his ability to confront his own death and mortality, and his paradoxical higher consciousness of the human condition. The traditions of mourning for Achilles' death; the immortalization of Achilles as a hero of cult, after his death as a mortal. Achilles on the White Island.

October 4: First 6-8 page paper due, on the close reading of a passage from the *Iliad*.

Week 5, October 8 and 10: Reading: *Gilgamesh*. Cultural context; Gilgamesh and the Sumerian king list. The story of Gilgamesh as a foundational deposit; Gilgamesh and the walls of Uruk; the hero's exile, the hero's companion with whom he enables civilization and culture but who is also his double and who dies in his place. Typologies of heroes and comparison of historically unrelated 'epic' tales. Discussion of other typological parallels in other cultural contexts and their local significance. Comparison of the hero and his acceptance of his inescapable mortality in Neo-Assyrian song culture and in Ancient Greece.

Week 6, October 15 and 17: Reading and Viewing: Selections from Peter Brook's *Mah_bh_rata*. The genealogy of the Pandava and the Judgment of Paris. Comparison of historically related story cultures and what it helps us understand about both comparanda. The relationship between gods and heroes in Indic epic, as

against Greek. The ordeals of the brothers Yudishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, and the twins Nakula and Sahadeva; *dharma* and *rta* and the ideal warrior in Ancient India.

Week 7, October 22 and 24: Reading: Tragedies: *Antigone, Oedipus Tyrannus*. Reading tragedy but without the tragic flaw. Performance traditions and circumstances of Athenian tragedy. Antigone and the Greek heroic persona as a maiden. Why is a parricide who commits incest the quintessential hero of Athenian tragedy? What differentiates a hero of tragedy from a hero of epic? Ritual aspects of tragic performances in antiquity, the relation of tragic heroes to heroes of cult. Herakles and immortalization via death.

Week 8, October 29 and 31: Reading: Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*; Aristophanes, *Birds*. Oedipus' last day, his death, and his immortalization as a protector of the Athenian city-state.

Week 9: November 5 and 7; Reading: Plato, *Apology of Socrates* (with short selections from the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*). The Socratic *logos* and its relationship to the epic past: rejection of heroic narrative, yet the adoption of a heroic persona for Socrates himself. How epic fails to civilize young people and what should replace it in the ideal state. The purification of the mind of the ideal citizen, and the persona of Achilles as a man who suffered the most painful of ordeals; how Socrates confronts death.

Week 10, November 12 and 14: Reading: *Aeneid* 1-4. The identification of the Athenians with the Trojans on the acropolis in Ancient Athens: how the Romans got themselves a hero, and how Vergil systematically transformed the Homeric hero into a Roman, on the level of themes, character, 'psychology,' and the relationship of the hero of story to the hero of ancestor cult. The wrath of Aeneas in the *Iliad* and his confrontation of Achilles; Aeneas' backward look at the *Iliad* and the Epic cycle, and the systematic transformation of the contrast between Greek *mênis* and *philótēs* into a contrast between Latin *furor* and *pietas*. Why?

Week 11, November 19 and 21: Reading: *Aeneid* 6, 9, 11, 12: Alternative heroes and their relationship to Aeneas. Nisus and Euryalus; Camilla, Turnus, and the death of Pallas. The hero as the ancestor who suffers, dies, and is translated to the other world for his pains.

November 22: Second paper due, 6-8 pages on a heroic typology that crosses different cultural contexts.

Week 12, November 26, 28, 31: Reading: *Gospel According to Matthew*. Typologies of heroes in previous texts; immortalization through death and the representation of the life of Jesus. The radical revision of the law; the alienation of the hero from his own social group, and the physical and emotional ordeal of the hero; his abandonment and betrayal; his death and translation to the other world.

Week 13, December 2 and 7: Summing up and conclusions: Heroes in popular modern culture; American culture heroes and their relationship to the typologies and comparisons that we have studied. Focus paper, 1-2 pages, due December 2: Description of a modern American heroic persona of your choosing.