

Unbound Prometheus – Summer 2017

Ancient Greek Myths and Gender Constructs: From Antiquity to the Present

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Course objectives: How and why were myths created and visualized in the ancient Greek world and how have they been used ever since? We will discuss the stories, images and cultural impact of ancient Greek myths in order to explore the power of textual and visual narratives to shape social and cultural identities of "self" and "other" and to encode ideas on a wide range of subjects, from politics and religion, or the natural world and the afterlife, to interpersonal relations and family life. We will focus on the construction of gender roles (both male and female) through myths and their visual representations. Our material will be mostly sculptures and paintings of various periods, with emphasis on the ancient Greek and Roman world. We will also consider less conventional sources, such as modern films, comics, and videogames. The multiplicity of meanings myths carry in different cultural context and the subjectivity of interpretations people develop in response to them will be constantly recognized in our explorations. The ultimate purpose will be not just to learn the myths and their function, but to develop critical and interpretative skills that can enhance our understanding of human societies and their visual production, regardless of time period and culture.

Our overall goal will be threefold:

***Knowledge:** learn representative and influential ancient Greek myths and some of their most characteristic and well-known depictions.

***Critical and interpretative skills in visual literacy:** Acquire a better understanding of the power and function of images in the shaping of social and cultural identities of self and other, regardless of time-period and culture. Be aware of the subjectivity of our interpretations and appreciate the value of different approaches and the necessity of critical and creative thinking.

***Social and cultural awareness:** think about major issues that are as important today as they were in the past: explore how textual and visual narratives are used in the interaction of politics and religion and in the promotion of social status and gender ideals; be aware of the power and messages of images in our own societies, so that we can become more empowered consumers and producers of culture, able to create new stories and disrupt the unjust stereotypes promoted by old ones.

Learning Program Outcomes (PLOs):

Breadth of Cultural Knowledge: Students will be able to demonstrate an appreciation for, and foundation in, visual studies grounded in a range of historical, social, cultural, and ideological perspectives.

Critical Thinking: Students will be able to apply critical thinking skills that will enable them to analyze and solve problems through observation, experience, reflection, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and/or explanation of visual, material, and historical cultural forms and values. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills through oral and/or written communication.

Written Communication: Students will be able to present clear visual and historical analysis and interpretation in writing. Students will be able to demonstrate standard writing conventions in visual studies appropriate to purpose and context.

Class structure and grades: This course will have a lecture and a discussion component, akin to a seminar course in which students are introduced to new material, but are also expected to actively participate with questions, comments and observations. Participation is a major component of the course grade, and therefore students are required to take diligent notes, study all the readings and lecture materials and come prepared to contribute to class discussions. Quizzes and short assignments will be used throughout the two weeks of classes and two exam papers (midterm and final) will have to be submitted within two weeks from the end of class. See below for a breakdown of grades.

Class Participation: 20%

Quizzes and short assignments during the course: 30%

Midterm and exam papers (to be submitted after the course): 50%

Grades and Evaluations:

Your performance is translated into letter grades as follows:

A: Comprehensive knowledge of the material, well-presented and analyzed in a manner which demonstrates *independent, critical and original thinking*.

B: Extensive knowledge of the material, presented in a coherent and organized manner.

C: Presentation of a substantial amount of correct information, relevant to the topic.

Class etiquette: Please be respectful of others; arrive on time and do not leave before the end of class. No eating during class. **All electronic devices must be turned off.**

Class requirements:

Required textbook: R. Buxton, *The Complete World of Greek Mythology*, London 2004. Contains concise information, critical analysis and representative images of basic myths. Students **must purchase** the required textbook before coming to the course, and read the chapters assigned for each day according to the syllabus. You can find new or used copies in www.bookfinder.com.

Additional required readings: Articles made available , either through email or a shared Google folder or other format.

Personal laptop: All students interested to earn a grade must have a personal laptop and an email account to share with me. This way you can access class material (required readings in addition to the textbook, guidelines for quizzes and other assignments, class powerpoints, etc.), and also write and submit your short class assignments during the course (as word documents, sent to me as email attachments).

Notebook: All students will have to take notes manually, so make sure you bring a notebook and pen! Research shows that typing notes on your laptop is not an effective learning experience. On the contrary you process and absorb information much better when you write it down by hand. All your electronic devices must be turned off during class time, and that includes your laptop.

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is the basis of higher education and is based on five interrelated values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Both I and you owe it to ourselves and to all other participants in the course to honor these values in all the work we do and all the interactions we have. In my case this includes preparing the class material and assignments and making the whole course a fruitful learning experience for you. In your case, it includes studying and preparing for class, participating in discussions, and fulfilling all the other requirements (quizzes and assignments). Please remember that we all depend on other people's knowledge and research, and we need to acknowledge that debt by proper citations. Plagiarism in any of your written assignments will result in failure in the course. Cheating in any quizzes or assignments will have severe consequences on your grade (immediate reduction of your overall grade by one step for the first incident, failing the class if the behavior is repeated). Making this course a fruitful learning experience is our shared responsibility.

Schedule of classes

The following subjects and readings are indicative, not definitive. I might make change along the course, according to the level and response of the class and the pace that I consider more appropriate.

Week 1: Gods and goddesses: divine powers and human behaviors

Day 1: Introduction to Greek culture and the study of myth.

Required readings: Buxton, pp. 6-41, 216-25; The nature of myth (online).

Day 2: The Greek Gods.

Required readings: Buxton, pp. 42-61, 66-87, 90-91; Gods and goddesses (online pp.1-9, 13-15); The Persian wars and the sculptures of the Parthenon (online, only pp. 145-150 concerning the west pediment).

Day 3: Divine sexual behavior, human gender constructs.

Required readings: Buxton, pp.93 (Teiresias), 94-101 154-55, 170-77, 188-91, 223-24 (Ovid and Narcissus); Gods and goddesses (online pp. 9-13, immortals and mortals).

Day 4: Divine sexual behavior, human gender constructs (continued).

Danae: virtuous, voluptuous, venal woman (online); Danae: the Renaissance courtesan's alter ego (online).

Day 5: War against the "other" (Gigantomachy, Amazonomachy, Centauromachy, Geranomachy, female monsters).

Required readings: The Persian wars and the sculptures of the Parthenon (online, pp. 134-145, 150-165); The Power of Hellenistic Baroque (online).

Week 2: Heroes and heroines: human concerns and limitations.

Day 6: Herakles (Hercules), a hero for all times.

Required readings: Buxton, pp. 114-23; Herakles, passage of the hero through 1000 years of classical art (online).

Day 7: Other heroes (Theseus, Jason).

Required readings: Buxton, pp. 124-29, 108-113; Theseus, aspects of the hero in archaic Greece (online);

Day 8: Other heroes (Perseus, Meleager, Atalanta, Bellerophon).

Required readings: Buxton, pp. 104-7, 160-61; Maidens, fillies, and the death of Medusa on a 7th-c. pithos (online)

Day 9: The Trojan War. The House of Pelops.

Required readings: Buxton, pp. 130-138, 146-153; The Persian wars and the sculptures of the Parthenon (online, only pp. 165-183)

Day 10: The Odyssey. The House of Laios.

Required readings: Buxton, pp. 139-45, 162-69, 242 (Ithaca by C. P. Cavafy); To entertain an emperor: Sperlonga, Laokoon and Tiberius at the Dinner-Table (online).