

## English 204: World Mythology

Winter 2017 TuTh 1-2:15 Lake Huron Hall 161 Section 08

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### Why Mythology?

Reading and comparing the myths of cultures from around the world is among the most interesting and fulfilling of courses we undertake in literature and humanities courses... in part, because these ancient stories provide us with larger-than-life heroes and heroines, epic monster battles, magical journeys to heaven, hell, and other worlds beyond our own, and “hidden” truths about the origins and meanings of life... and of death. Perhaps more importantly, these old stories have influenced our modern culture in ways that we do not even realize -- mythic structures, characters, and elements reappear in contemporary pop culture and our most cherished stories and sagas, as well as in fields beyond literature (think philosophy, history, psychology, astronomy, etc.). I hope that this course will be enlightening as well as entertaining, and will deepen your understanding of how *and why* we tell stories, how we create history, how we navigate life, and how we come to deal with death -- and whatever may lie beyond.

### In this course, we will:

- Carefully and critically read and discuss mythological and heroic texts (in translation) from ancient and medieval global cultures, understanding that these forms and stories form the foundation for much of the literature of Western, British, and American canons;
- Define common structural and substantive elements in mythologies across cultures and discuss how these elements reflect and influence the cultures from which they spring;
- Investigate the ways in which mythology reflects concepts of gender and sexuality and reflects or establishes gender roles and conventions;
- Contextualize mythological, heroic, and legendary texts historically and culturally, using archaeological and artistic pieces for comparison.

This course is part of GVSU’s **General Education Program**. The goal of the program is to prepare you for intelligent participation in public dialogues that consider the issues of humane living and responsible action in local, national, and global communities. Please see our Blackboard site for further information about how Eng 204 fits into the General Education Program, as well as the general objectives and skills goals associated with this course.

### Required Texts:

*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Benjamin Foster (Norton Critical Ed.), ISBN: 978-0393975161  
*The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (Penguin Classics), ISBN-10: 0143039954  
*The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood (Canongate Myths), ISBN: 978-1841957982  
*The Saga of the Volsungs*, trans. Jesse Byock (Penguin Books), ISBN: 978-0140447385  
*The Mabinogion*, trans. Jeffrey Gantz (Penguin Classics), ISBN-10: 0140443223  
 Assorted readings and handouts (available via Blackboard)

## Coursework:

**Reading, participation, and class activities:** Our class will be discussion-based and fairly light on lecture. You will be expected to complete the reading assignments prior to each class meeting, to attend class regularly, and to contribute to class discussion often. **I will post “directed reading” questions to our Blackboard site that will give you an idea of the topics and themes you should consider while reading each text.** You are not required to write out responses to these questions, but they will better prepare you to participate in class discussion. Your comments and questions to some extent determine the shape and direction of the course -- your active engagement will help me to make this class a productive, positive experience for all of us! I will keep track of the quantity and quality of your contributions to discussion, so be sure to *think* and *speak up* often. In-class writing assignments and your contributions to group-work assignments will also count toward the “participation” portion of your grade.

**Daily classwork points:** For each class meeting, you can earn a possible 5 points for participation. I will award points thus:

- 0 points -- absence OR student is disengaged with class, unprepared (no textbook), or using phone or laptop for activities unrelated to class.
- 3 points -- student is present, brings book or reading, at times attentive in class.
- 4 points -- student is present, with text book, attentive, taking notes, perhaps volunteers once in discussion; if working in groups, student contributes to group efforts.
- 5 points -- student is fully prepared, actively engaged in the class, taking notes and actively participating in discussion; if working in groups, student is actively engaged in group.

### **Writing prompts:**

From time to time I will assign writing prompts to lead us into discussion. I will not always collect these for grading. Those that I collect will be scored thusly:

- (minus): Unsatisfactory. Student has put little effort into the response or obviously has not completed the reading or answered the question. Earns 1 point.
- √ (check mark): Satisfactory. Student has made a good effort to answer the question, has shown that s/he has completed the reading. Earns 4 points.
- + (plus): Exemplary. Student has answered the question thoroughly, has referred to specific moments or details in the text to support her / his answer, and prompt is well-written. Earns 5 points.

**Reading Quizzes:** Over the course of the semester, you will complete six reading quizzes. These will measure whether you are keeping up with the assigned reading and how well you are comprehending the material. Quizzes will be given at the start of class. Quiz questions will be in short-answer format; expect 5 questions per quiz with an expectation of 1-2 sentences needed to answer each question. You CANNOT make up a quiz in case of absence or lateness, HOWEVER I will drop your lowest quiz grade.

### **Mythology Reinvention Paper:**

You will write a critical analysis focusing on the reinvention/reimagining of myth in contemporary culture and media. You may analyze how a contemporary “text” (book, TV show, graphic novel, movie, etc.) has invented its own new mythology, OR you may analyze how a contemporary work has adapted, retold, or reimagined an extant mythology (i.e. Atwood’s *Penelopiad*). Papers should follow MLA format and specifications, and will be 5-7 pages in length, with double-spaced text. Please talk to me early and often about your ideas and questions concerning the paper, and remember that I am available to look at drafts and give you feedback. I will provide a detailed handout once the semester is underway. If you have trouble finding a modernized version of one of our myths, please let me know and I’ll be happy to make suggestions. You must also upload your paper to Turnitin.com before you submit it to me, and I will provide instructions as to how to do this.

**Midterm Exam:** Held on Tuesday, February 21, during class. Expect exam to include some identification, definition, multiple choice, and short answer questions.

**Final Exam:** Held on Monday, April 24, 12:00 pm - 1:50 pm. Exam will include some identifications, short answer questions, and essay questions.

**Grading Breakdown by Assignment:**

Participation / daily writing assignments / group work: 30%

Reading quizzes: 15% (3% each)

Reinvention paper: 15%

Midterm exam: 20%

Final exam: 20%

A = 94-100	A- = 90-93	B+ = 87-89	B = 84-86	B- = 80-83	C+ = 77-79
C = 74-76	C- = 70-73	D+ = 67-69	D = 64-66	F = 0-63	

**Communication and Blackboard:**

Any updates and notices (change of venue, change in assignment, instructor absence, etc.) will go out over email and will be posted on the Blackboard site. PLEASE CHECK EMAIL AND BLACKBOARD REGULARLY! I promise to make my best attempt to get this information to you as soon as possible.

**Other Policies...**

**Respect:** The classroom (this includes our online class space!) is a place of respect, civilized discussion, and open-mindedness. We will likely disagree with each other from time to time about literary interpretations (among other things), but we will learn to do so respectfully and sensitively. Please be aware your tone online and in person.

**Attendance:** is expected. I will take attendance at the start of each class. Arriving more than 10 minutes late (or leaving more than 10 minutes early) will result in a penalty of your classwork points for the day. Arriving more than 20 minutes late will be counted as an absence. **\*\*EVERY** component of your grade draws upon the material we explore in class discussion and in lecture, so be here!\*\* If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to find out what content you missed, preferably by first asking your classmates. Any absences beyond three will result in a deduction of 3% from your final grade, *per day*. I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences... if you run into a situation where you must miss multiple classes, talk to me.

**Computers and cell phones:** **You may use a laptop to take notes**, read the handouts posted on Blackboard, and find information relevant to our discussion. You may NOT use your laptop for Facebooking, watching cat videos, or otherwise wasting time or distracting yourself during class. **No cell phones out during class.** Lectures and class discussions **may not be** recorded in any fashion by students.

**Late work:** Assignments are due at the start of class on the due date OR when indicated on Blackboard. One letter grade will be lost for every calendar day that an assignment is late. Class activities and quizzes cannot be made up at a later date.

**FERPA:** Because of FERPA regulations, I cannot discuss your grade via phone or email. If you would like to discuss your academic standing and progress in this class, I am happy to meet with you during my office hours.

Plagiarism: I am happy to discuss what constitutes plagiarism and how to ensure that your work is your own creation. If you have any questions or uncertainty about the issue, PLEASE ASK ME. If you plagiarize in this class, you will face academic sanctions including possible failure of this course and a letter sent to the appropriate campus offices.

Students with Disabilities:

If you need academic accommodations because of a learning, physical, or other disability, please contact Disability Support Resources at 331-2490. Furthermore, if you have a physical disability and think you will need assistance evacuating this classroom and/or building in an emergency situation, please make me aware so I can develop a plan to assist you.

## Course Schedule

**\*\*PLEASE REGARD THIS SCHEDULE AS SOMEWHAT FLUID. I may move some readings and assignments around if we fall behind, or due to weather\*\***

Tu, Jan 10 -- Introductions, course expectations, close reading activity

Th, Jan 12 – GVSU CLOSED DUE TO WEATHER.

Tu, Jan 17 -- Tales of Creation -- Genesis, Hopi myth, Maori myth (Blackboard)

Th, Jan 19 -- Davis, “All Men Have Need of the Gods”; Powell, “The Nature of Myth” (available on Blackboard)

Tu, Jan 24 -- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, tablets I-II (Optional: Davis, “By the Rivers of Babylon”)

Th, Jan 26 -- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, tablets III-VIII **QUIZ**

Tu, Jan 31 -- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, tablets IX-XI

Th, Feb 2 -- Stories of the Flood (Blackboard)

Tu, Feb 7 – CLASS CANCELLED

Th, Feb 9 -- Davis, “The Greek Miracle: The Myths of Greece and Rome” (Blackboard)

Tu, Feb 14 -- Creation of Prometheus, Pandora, and humankind (Blackboard) **QUIZ**

Th, Feb 16 – Selections from Ovid (Blackboard)

Tu, Feb 21 -- **MIDTERM: Covers creation stories, Mesopotamian myth / *Gilgamesh*, Greek / Roman myth**

Th, Feb 23 – Powell, *The Odyssey* and Odysseus the Trickster (Blackboard)

Tu, Feb 28 – selections from *The Odyssey* **QUIZ**

Th, Mar 2 – selections from *The Odyssey*

Tu, Mar 7 – SPRING BREAK

Th, Mar 9 – SPRING BREAK

*Fri, Mar 10 – Last day to drop with a “W”*

Tu, Mar 14 – Atwood, *The Penelopiad* **QUIZ**

Th, Mar 16 – Atwood, *The Penelopiad*

Tu, Mar 21 – Intro to Norse myth (reading TBD), “The Prophecy of the Seeress” (Blackboard)

Th, Mar 23 – “Thrym’s Poem,” “The List of Rig” (Blackboard)

Tu, Mar 28 – *The Saga of the Volsungs* **QUIZ**

Th, Mar 30 – *The Saga of the Volsungs*

Tu, April 4 – Introduction to Celtic Myth (reading TBD) (Blackboard)

Th, April 6 – *The Mabinogion*, branches 1&2 **QUIZ**

Tu, April 11 – *The Mabinogion*, branches 3&4

Th, April 13 – CLASS WILL NOT MEET. Complete online lesson.

**Fri, April 14 – PAPER DUE to me via email / Blackboard at 5pm.**

Tu, April 18 – Rollo May, selections from “The Cry for Myth” (Blackboard)

Th, April 20 -- review and summation

**FINAL EXAM: Held Monday, April 24, 12:00 pm - 1:50 pm, in our usual classroom.** Exam will primarily cover material from the second half of the course, but may ask you to make connections to earlier myths as well.