

Classical Mythology
English 118
Spring 2013
Wednesdays 7-10
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Office hours: Wednesdays 3-5

Why did the Greeks and Romans remain fascinated with the same stories of gods and demigods for more than a thousand years? On the other hand, how did they adapt those stories to fit new times and places? Starting with the earliest Greek poems and advancing through classical Athens, Hellenistic Alexandria, and Augustan Rome, we consider the history of writing poetry as a history of reading the past. Brilliant these poets undoubtedly were – but to aim at originality, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' sense, would have struck them as tasteless, ill-educated, and beside the point. As Callimachus, the poet and librarian of Alexandria, is supposed to have claimed, "I sing nothing unattested."

There are two kinds of requirements for joining this course. First, a 1-page written problem is due by email each week before class; I ask a question about the reading, you answer it. These are evaluated and handed back the following week. Then, during finals week, a 5- to 6-page final paper is due. Second, you must come to class with the correct editions of our readings – that is, the editions I've chosen for you – which include the correct translations, editors' notes, page numbers, line numbers, and so on. (See the [list of required books](#), which are available through the Caltech bookstore.) I am aware that dozens of other Homers, Ovids, and so on exist, including in the Caltech library, but none of these is acceptable unless it is exactly the same as the one assigned for the class. E-books that have different translations – that is, essentially all of them – are also unacceptable. I have the right to ask you to leave if you don't bring the correct book to class. The reason why I am so serious about this matter is that both written work and class discussion are very hard if you are not using the book that the class is using, and you will deprive yourself of helpful prefaces, indexes, and glossaries as well; I will illustrate the great differences between translations in the first class session. You may be surprised.

We'll split the 3-hour class session into discussing the day's reading and homework, activities in small groups, and a lecture, with a break in the middle. I will hold open office hours for two hours per week, and I'm available by appointment at other times. Especially because this is only the second time I'm teaching this class, I'll be relying on questions and comments from students to get a finer sense of what is interesting and new to you, so speak up, both in and out of class.

Reading schedule

April 3
First class

April 10
Homer, *Odyssey* (9th-8th centuries BCE), books 5-13
Due: Problem 1 (by email at 6 p.m.)

April 17
Hesiod, *Theogony* (around 700 BCE) and Pindar, odes (5th century BCE): photocopy will be distributed
Due: Problem 2

April 24
Aeschylus, *Oresteia* trilogy (458 BCE)
Due: Problem 3

May 1
Euripides, *Electra* (about 418 BCE), *Phoenician Women* (409 BCE), and *Bacchae* (about 406 BCE)
Due: Problem 4

May 8
Readings on the ancient interpretation of Homer: photocopy will be distributed
No written homework

May 15
Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautika* (3rd century BCE)
Due: Problem 5

May 22
Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (about 8 CE), books 1-7: we will definitely discuss parts of book 3 (Bacchus) and book 7 (Medea)
Due: Problem 6

May 29 (last class for seniors)
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, books 8-15
Due: Problem 7, except for seniors, for whom an outline of the final paper is due instead

June 5 (last class for everyone else)
Seneca, *Medea* (1st century CE)
Due: outline of your final paper (guidelines will be posted here)

A 5- to 6-page final paper is due by email at 11:59 p.m. on Monday of your finals week: that's June 3 for seniors and June 10 for everyone else.