

# Greek Mythology (LT260)

Seminar Leader: Dr. David Hayes

Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday 17:30-19:00

Email: d.hayes@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: By appointment

## Course Description

Mythology is the oldest literature in the world. This makes it a promising site to ask about the purpose of literature itself – and Greek mythology an especially promising site because of its continuing power to delight readers in modernity. Both playfully light (there’s a talking island in the “Hymn to Apollo”) and intensely serious (as religious texts about the ultimate powers in the world), it seems difficult to grasp what exactly Greek mythology is and how it can be read in a thoughtful way.

For this inquiry, we will discuss several of the oldest stories in Greek mythology. While most of these concern gods and heroes, we will also read the animal fables of Aesop as a “low” counterpart to this “high” mythology. In order to consider alternative mythologies, and therefore also to see the Greek vision better, we will read portions of the *Book of Genesis* and the *Mahābhārata*. Then we will trace the fate of myth in the development of Greek thought, as the Greeks themselves rejected (Thucydides), played with (Aristophanes), or conserved (Plato) mythology in new forms of thinking and writing. By tracing this development, we will be better able to consider what ancient myths could mean to us, as well as ask the fundamental question of whether we can live without myths.

## Requirements

Text: Course Reader

### Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

The use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software is not permitted in assignments for this course.

### Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. **Students should not attend class when sick with any symptoms.**

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

For each absence over 2, I will deduct from the final grade according to the following ascending scale: -.05, -.05, -.1, -.1, -.15, -.15.

I will excuse absences with a doctor's note (excused absences still count against the 30% rule) or a German bureaucratic appointment confirmation. Every other absence is simply counted as an absence. There is no need to send me any email messages if you will be absent.

### **Assessment**

This is a discussion class. You should come to class not only having done the reading, but also already having taken time to think about what you have read. The class participation grade will be based on the following criteria: consistency of participation, quality of contributions (especially of questions), and capacity for engaging in meaningful dialogue with other students.

### **Assignments**

This class has a midterm exam and a longer final paper. Final paper topics will be provided. You may use your books and hand-written notes during the exam. The use of electronic devices of all kinds is prohibited. If you have a disability accommodation that allows for extra time on exams, please be sure to inform your seminar leaders beforehand. Other short in-class or ad hoc writing assignments may be given throughout the term

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

I freely give extensions—but the request must be made at least 24 hours before the deadline. Late papers will be downgraded a third of a letter grade (e.g., from A- to B+) for every 24 hours that passes.

### **Use of Electronics**

To facilitate a focused and engaging seminar discussion, the use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. Otherwise, using electronics in class will negatively affect your seminar grade. If you have a disability accommodation, please inform me at the beginning of the semester.

### **Handies/Smartphones**

In order to facilitate an environment that is constructive for seminar discussion, please do not enter the classroom until you have put your smartphone away in a bag or backpack. This means: **do not sit at the seminar table with your phone out, even before class has begun.** Please also make sure that your ringer is turned off before you enter the room.

## **Grade Breakdown**

Seminar participation grade: 25%

Midterm exam: 35%

Final essay (2500 words): 40%

## Schedule

### Week 1

Jan 30: Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 1-506

Feb 1: Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 507-end

### Week 2

Feb 6: Glenn Most (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, University of Chicago) on the *Theogony*

Feb 8: The Song of Ares and Aphrodite from the *Odyssey*, Book 8, pgs. 291-99

### Week 3

Feb 13 The story of Bellerophon from the *Iliad*, Book 6, pgs. 271-79

Feb 15 Pindar, Olympian 13 (not in Course Reader)

### Week 4

Feb 20 The Homeric Hymn to Demeter

Feb 22 The Homeric Hymn to Apollo

### Week 5

Feb 27 Pindar, Nemean 6 (not in Course Reader)

Feb 29 Pindar, Pythian 8 (not in Course Reader)

### Week 6

Mar 5 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, lines 1-608

Mar 7 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, lines 609-end

### Week 7

Mar 12 Euripides, *Medea*, lines 1-810

Mar 14 Euripides, *Medea*, lines 811-end

### Week 8

Mar 19 Fables of Aesop, selection (not in Course Reader)

Mar 21 Midterm exam

### Spring Break

Mar 25 – April 1

### Week 9

Apr 2 Herodotus, Book 1.1-45

Apr 4 Herodotus, Book 1.46-92

### Week 10

Apr 9 Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, from Book 1

Apr 11 Aristophanes, *Birds*, 1-858

### Week 11

Apr 16 Aristophanes, *Birds*, 859-end  
Apr 18 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 227a-242a

Week 12

Apr 23 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 242b-261a  
Apr 25 Genesis, chapters 1-4

Week 13

Apr 30 Genesis, chapters 5-11  
May 2 "Nala and Damayanti," from the *Mahābhārata*, 50.1-63.1

Week 14

May 7 "Nala and Damayanti," from the *Mahābhārata*, 64.1-end  
May 9: Federal holiday

**Final paper due Friday, May 17, 23:59pm**