

HSS 404.022 SPRING 2025

LIT SEM: HSS HOW LEGENDS BECOME MYTHS: A JOURNEY THROUGH CLASSIC GREEK LITERATURE

Professor John Egan Office: Cullimore 424

M W 1:00 - 2:20 Classroom: FMH 110

(O) 973-596-6305 jegan@njit.edu

OFFICE HOURS Spring 2025

Mon 10:00- 11:00 Tues 11:35-12:35 Wed 2:35 – 3:35 Th 11:35-12:35

and by appointment; contact me face to face or by email to set up an appointment.

HSS 404 Prerequisites: Registration requires senior standing, as well as ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite.

Course description How legends become myths: a journey through classic Greek literature, is a foray into Classic Greek literature of the Classic period, roughly 750 BCE to 300 BCE. We'll read and discuss the Greek literature of the period, and how the heroes went from doers of big deeds to mythic status so that even today their names are still known and their deeds mined by modern day creators.

We'll start from the creation myths to the age of heroes, then the Iliad and Odyssey, some Greek poets, the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides, and some plays. We'll also touch on some of the works of the philosophers that have stood the test of time and still have relevance for us today. We'll also try to get your views in too, so be prepared to speak your view of some of the people we come across, since a course like this opens minds into a world partly familiar to us but in many ways quite different.

Along the way, we will need some historical context, so there will have to be some background into the Greek geographical world of the day, then relying chiefly on Plutarch for biographies of the famous ones both legend and historical, and the history of the period including contrasting Sparta and Athens, the Persian Wars, the Peloponnesian War, and the status of women.

Required book: *Classical Myth*, 9th edition, by Barry Powell ISBN: 9780197527986

You can get the e-book, or print edition, new or used. You can use this as a reference book for all the names we'll encounter throughout the course in the mythology and drama part of the course.

Don't be deterred by the length of the list below. Much is available online, and as long as you have read enough to take part in a discussion, the format is less important. Herodotus became the Father of History by telling excellent stories about his events, as well as being the father of travel writers. Thucydides is interesting for historians and social psychologists for how stress brings out the less good qualities in humans, and explains why later Greek and Roman philosophers became so concerned with imparting good moral standards to young people in order to prevent a democracy or republic from evolving into autocracies and sliding into brutalities.

Other books we'll use in the course that you can purchase or find online.

- ◉ Hesiod, *Theogony* and *Works and Days* These give the origins of the gods and some legends. Most of what we'll go over is on PDFs that will be posted.
 - ◉ The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. I use the Robert Fagles translations, but you can look at other translations; the comparisons are interesting. Most that we'll go over is on PDFs that will be posted, but try to read at least one of them.
 - ◉ Barbara Fowles *Archaic Poetry* We'll use some PDF pages.
 - ◉ Herodotus, *The Histories*. There are several well done translations; I use a Penguin one, and there is one by Tom Holland which is a bit livelier.
 - ◉ Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War* I use the Penguin Rex Warner translation
 - ◉ However, there is one large book *The Greek Histories* edited by Mary Lefkowitz and James Ronn, with the big three of the Greek historians. We'll use selections from this book because it is convenient, but all is online.
 - ◉ Greek dramas. The short list is *Medea*, *Lysistrata*, *Oedipus*, *Antigone*, *the Oresteia*.
 - ◉ There is one large book *The Greek Plays*, also edited by Mary Lefkowitz and James Ronn, with the big plays of the Greek dramatists. We'll use selections from this book because it is convenient, but all is online.
- We can't do all but we'll do what we can. You can find any number of translations in print and online. Most of what we'll do is on PDFs.

Learning and outcomes

From the readings and by doing some research, you will know many of the famous names of legend, get the references to, and have the original story of the selected Greek authors and their major works. From discussions, you will see the Greek notion that human character doesn't change although circumstances do, and apply the Greek thought where relevant to our situations today.

Course Requirements

- Keeping up with the readings
- Participating in discussions
- Blogs or responses on the readings every 2 or 3 weeks
- A presentation, around 1/3 of the way through the semester, perhaps in lieu of the research paper, on a chapter of the Powell book.
- One research paper, at least 9 pages.
- One presentation on your research project, 7-10 minutes

There will be periodic quizzes, a midterm and a final exam on the last day of classes

- Participation 15%
- Blogs/responses 20%
- Quizzes 20%
- Presentation 17.5%
- Research Paper 17.5%

Attendance Policy

Students are allowed 4 unexcused absences. Excused absences follow the standard Humanities policy for religious observances, illness and so on, with a note from the Dean of Students Office. More than 4 may result in a lowered grade.

Schedule

For now, this is the basic schedule. There will be modifications, and more details as we get closer to the date.

1. Background: the Mediterranean world. Greek myths: what is myth, what function do they serve?
2. The epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey Quiz
3. The epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey
4. The civic literature of Solon, Lycurgus, Hesiod. Some poetry: Sappho, Archilochus Quiz
5. Herodotus, the travelogue and the Persian Wars
6. Presentations on the chapters and what interests you.
7. Presentations on the chapters and what interests you.
8. Presentations on the chapters and what interests you. **Midterm** which will include questions from the student presentations.

Spring Break

9. Thucydides, including Pericles Funeral Oration, excerpts from The Peloponnesian War
10. Thucydides continued. Start Greek plays: Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides
Aristophanes
10. Continue Greek plays **Quiz**
11. The philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others
12. After the Greek Golden Age. Greek stories influence over the centuries
13. Presentations. Papers on your presentations due
14. Presentations. **Final Exam** which will include questions from student presentations.