

Sex, gender, & violence in Greek and Roman Myth

Course narrative

Greek and Roman myths are very much NSFW. These compositions are saturated with sexual content, and are notorious for their seemingly flippant treatment of sexual violence, particularly that deployed against women. What does it indicate about Greeks and Romans that stories about their gods and heroes lean so heavily on such themes? How can myths help us inquire into the nature of gender, sexuality, or desire? And what is a myth, anyway? In this course, you will read Greek and Roman myths in translation, and encounter scholarship and theory on the same. During discussion in class and through writing assignments, you'll work with these readings and your peers to think through representations of sex, gender (variance), desire, and violence, and the fraught intersections between these concepts. Prepare to read, among other texts, Sapphic lyric, Senecan tragedy, Hesiodic epic, and Platonic dialogue.



Harmonia Rosales, "White Lion."

Required texts

All texts for this class can be found in the Reading packet I have printed out for each of you.

Texts **optional** for purchase, but available as eBooks through TriPod

Hacker, Diana. *The Pocket Style Manual*.

Harvey, Gordon. *Writing with Sources*.

Course goals

By the close of this course, you will be able to: read with a critical eye; craft specific and interesting theses; organize your thoughts into coherent essays; give constructive feedback to your peers on their writing and ideas; and revise your own work thoughtfully.

Learning outcomes

Throughout this course you will: contribute to class discussion (and likely respectful disagreement!) with your peers; review your peers' essay drafts; and produce four drafts and four polished formal essays of your own.

Content note

This course involves examination of several difficult topics, including trauma and sexual violence. While we will engage critically with these topics, assigned readings should not be assumed to be endorsements of the behaviors they depict. Students are expected to treat these themes with maturity and sensitivity, and should feel welcome to speak with me, in class or one-on-one, if they struggle with any of the content, or wish not to engage with a particular reading. Such a decision by a student will not be met with any academic penalty.

Grading

30% Daily preparation This is a discussion-based course, and our group discussions can only be rich and productive if all participants have prepared the weekly readings outlined in the schedule section in advance of the meeting for which they are listed. In the event that you miss class (e.g., mental health day, family emergency, illness), you must **make the class up** in some way (e.g., send me a free-write about one or more of the readings; get coffee with a classmate and translate that day's material; drop in to my office hours and bring questions) to earn daily preparation credit for that day. I expect you to spend ~50 minutes (the length of a class) on a make-up assignment. **2 absences are excused.** All absences must be made up within a week of the missed class, barring extreme circumstances (e.g., you are hospitalized for a week).

70% Written assignments Four essays, both drafts and final versions of increasing complexity and length (a final essay without its draft can earn a maximum grade of 3.0). See Moodle for detailed due dates. I will provide topic sheets for each assignment (attached on Moodle, but you are encouraged to deviate from these (and to consult with me before and during the writing process)). You must meet with me individually to discuss your draft of each essay, except for Essay #4.

Essay #1 10%

Essay #2 15%

Essay #3 20%

Essay #4 25%

Miscellaneous notes

- This course centers discussion, whether as a class or in small groups, and productive discussion flourishes in a respectful and professional environment. I expect and encourage disagreement about our primary and secondary sources to arise over a thoughtful, equitable, and inclusive foundation. Learning is a team effort, so listen to and address your peers' concerns and ideas and those of the scholars we read.
- I take Bryn Mawr's Honor Code very seriously. As per BMC's code, "Each student is responsible for the integrity of her own academic work. Thus, it is important that each student read and understand these academic resolutions, as each student will be held responsible for them." I encourage you to review its tenets.
- In this course, **the use of generative AI tools are prohibited** in the completion of any assignment. Linguistic tools like spellcheck are permitted as are translation aids. Tools that alter the substance of your writing are not.
- **Unless we are completing an in-class assignment that requires them, laptops (i.e., devices that obscure you from others) must be stowed away. Flat technology (iPads, Kindles, etc.) are fine.**
- I encourage you to use the resources available to you!

- Your best resource is your fellow learners! Engage both in and outside the classroom, review each other's essays, and collaborate to work through tough reading assignments.
- Students who think they may need accommodations in this course due to the impact of a learning, physical, or psychological disability are encouraged to meet with me privately early in the semester to discuss their concerns. Students should also contact Deb Adler, Coordinator of Access Services (610-526-7351 or dadler@brynmawr.edu), as soon as possible, to verify their eligibility for reasonable academic accommodations. Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class first must speak with the Director of Access Services and to me, the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.
- To work more intensely on your writing, contact the writing center (writingcenter@brynmawr.edu) on the first floor of Canaday, where peer tutors read drafts, ask questions, and guide you through the process of planning, drafting, and revising your assignment at no cost to you.
- If you need an extension for an assignment, you must contact me more than 24 hours before it is due, barring exceptional circumstances. As a general rule, the further in advance you contact me, the longer the extension I might be willing to give. Late papers will be penalized unless you have obtained an extension (For each 24 hour period the paper is late, the grade will be lowered by one step [e.g., from 3.7 to 3.3]).
- This syllabus is tentative and subject to change. Changes will be announced on Moodle!

Schedule

I. *Cosmic desires*

A. *What is a myth, anyway?*

Week 1 Essay #0 due [Conference for Essay #0]

- T 9/1
- Welcome, team! There are no readings to prepare for Tuesday's class, just show up ready to introduce yourself, and to ask: What *is* a myth, anyway? And what's "desire" all about?

As soon as you are able, schedule a conference with me using [this link](#). At our first conference, we'll discuss your thesis for Essay #0 and touch base on your goals for our course.

We will be reading primarily texts from the ancient Mediterranean world. I do not expect you to "get" every reference to every figure, place, or event that our sources mention. Do, however, take it upon yourself to consult the [Oxford Classical Dictionary](#) about terms you don't recognize as you complete readings for class.

Each Essay assignment and each in-class writing activity you'll see in this syllabus corresponds to a numbered Essay assignment or a lettered activity in our Activity packet; every reading to be completed for this class can be found in our Reading packet. Find these packets on Moodle.

- Th 9/3
- For today's class, come having read the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (from line 45 to the end), a poem that dates to ca. 7th/6th century BCE. Spend some time considering the questions posed on the assignment sheet for Essay #0, and then create a **thesis** and introductory paragraph by following the instructions therein. For today's [writing activity A](#), bring two printed copies of your paragraph to class.

Week 2 Essay #1 draft (4-5 pages) due

- T 9/8
- Re-read the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* as you embark on writing your first essay. Choose 1 sentence from the *Hymn* to bring with you to class Tuesday for our class [activities](#). We shall reflect upon and discuss our personal relationships with writing ([B](#)) and practice close reading ([C](#)) and citation ([D](#)) with your selected lines. In preparation, read Harvey pages 2-5, 10-14, 15-17, & 22-26 on using sources and pages 32-37 & 44 on plagiarism. Skim chapter 4 on citation styles.

The draft of Essay #1 is due to me on Friday, 9/11 by 11:59PM. Schedule a conference with me by using the calendar link on Moodle.

- Th 9/10 *STUDENT-LED CLASS MEETING*

- Meet with your partner for peer review during our normal class session, anywhere you wish. Feel free to use our classroom! Email a copy of (what you have thus far of) your draft of Essay #1 to your partner, or exchange print versions. Fill out peer review E and hand it in to the appropriate Assignment drop-off point on Moodle.

Next week, we meet to discuss your drafting process for our first essay. Use this [link](#) to sign up.

B. *The nature of desire*

Week 3 Essay #1 due [Conference for Essay #1]

- T 9/15
 - The final version of your first essay is due Friday, 9/18 by 11:59PM, but as you read the myths for this week, begin thinking about the questions posed on the assignment sheet for Essay #2.

For Tuesday, read lines 66-375 from Hesiod's *Theogony*, a Greek epic poem of about 1,000 lines ca. 8th/7th c. Use the arrows as guide!

- Th 9/17
 - For Thursday, read lines 375-491. Bring a device to class if you'd prefer to type writing activity F.

Week 4

- T 9/22
 - In preparation for class today, read "Aristophanes' Speech" from Plato's *Symposium*, a dialogue from the classical Athenian canon. The dialogue tells the story of a drinking party, attended by Socrates, his friends, and their boyfriends. The dialogue's narrator recounts speeches that each attendant gave at the party on the nature of Eros. Read from the same dialogue "The Speech of Diotima," which includes several subsections.
- Th 9/24
 - Today in class, we complete writing activity G. Bring a device on which to complete it, or write by hand.

Next week, we meet for our third conference. Sign up [here](#).

II. *Gods & mortals*

Week 5 [Conference for Essay #2] Essay #2 draft (4-5 pages) due

- T 9/29
 - This week, we begin to encounter materials pertinent to the questions posed for Essay #3, so consider these as you finish up your draft of Essay #2, due by 11:59PM on Friday, 10/2.

We'll read Apuleius' story of Cupid & Psyche this week. Apuleius (born ca. 125 CE) was a Middle Platonist philosopher from North Africa, and he composed works in Latin. The *Golden Ass*, from which our story is excerpted, is a novel about a man named Lucius who is transformed accidentally into a donkey. For Tuesday, read through page 77 of the packet.

- Th 10/1
 - Bring two copies of your Essay #2 to class for peer review (H).

Week 6 Essay #2 due

- T 10/6
 - Essay #2 is due on Friday, 10/9 at 11:59PM in preparation for Fall break.

For today's class, finish up the tale of Cupid & Psyche.

- Th 10/8 *STUDENT-LED CLASS*
 - Meet with your small group during our normal class session, anywhere you wish. Feel free to use our classroom! Read the excerpt from the *Odyssey* included in your packet. How does the relationship between Odysseus and Calypso compare to that between Cupid and Psyche? Choose a moment—by which I mean a passage or even just a sentence—from each text that you feel encapsulates a point of comparison or contrast between them. Use these moments to complete writing activity I. Then, hand it in to the appropriate Assignment drop-off point on Moodle.

Week 7 Fall break

Week 8

- T 10/20
 - This week, we'll practice reading scholarship and using the ideas of scholars as a tool to excavate our own. Read for today an excerpt from Froma Zeitlin's "Eros Tyrannos." Read up through page 30, then 33-40 on the *Hymn to Aphrodite* and 45-51 on the *Symposium*.
- Th 10/22
 - Bring a device to class today, if you prefer, to complete writing activity I, a continuation of Tuesday's themes.

Week 9

- T 10/27
 - We move to consider one of the most influential ancient texts for English-language receptions of Greek and Roman myth: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE). Read in your packet selections from Books 1-3, ending after

“Narcissus is changed into a flower.”

- Th 10/29
 - Bring a device on which to complete writing activity K, a lens tutorial, in class today.

III. *Mortals & mortals*

Week 10 Essay #3 (5-6 pages) draft due

- T 11/2
 - This Tuesday, we begin to read material relevant to Essay #4, so consider its assignment sheet even as you finish drafting Essay #3.

Let's stick with Ovid, and see how he characterizes erotic relationships between human beings—or does he? After all, his *Metamorphoses*, as you know, catalogues transformation. Begin with the first half of Book 10, through line 355.

- Th 11/5
 - Bring two copies of your Essay #3 to class for peer review (L).

We meet to discuss our third essay next week, so sign up for a time slot here.

Week 11 Essay #3 due [Conference for Essay #3]

- T 11/10
 - Finish Book 10 for today's meeting.
- Th 11/12
 - We continue to delve into tales of misplaced desires by reading Seneca's Latin tragedy, *Phaedra*, this week. Begin for Thursday by reading through Act II. I'll provide more content for the play in class, but keep in mind that Seneca lived ca. 4BCE-65 CE and was a prominent intellectual and Stoic.

Week 12

- T 11/17
 - For Thursday's class, read through the end of the play.
- Th 11/19
 - Bring a device to class to complete writing activity M, another lens tutorial. Your work on this activity could springboard you into Essay #4, if you so choose.

IV. *Beyond myth?*

Week 13

- T 11/24
- The next three weeks of class look at texts on desire which are not obviously mythic in nature—are they?

For Tuesday, read the selections from Propertius and Sappho. Propertius is a Latin love elegist, ca. 54-2 BCE; Sappho is an archaic Greek lyric poet, ca. 630-570 BCE. You may read these texts in any order, but do spend some time with the poets: read Propertius and Sappho several times over, preferably at least once out loud to a friend or to yourself.

- Th 11/26
- **Thanksgiving break!**

Week 14

- T 12/1
- Let's theorize these poems! Read the selections from Anne Carson's *Eros the Bittersweet*.
- Th 12/3
- Bring a device to class today to complete writing activity N on using Carson's ideas to read some of our texts.

Week 15 Essay #4 draft (6-8 pages) due

- T 12/8
- Our final readings of the semester are the fragments of Archilochus and Anacreon, much-imitated archaic Greek poets. Bring something to write with for writing activity Q.
- Th 12/10
- Bring two copies of your Essay #4 to class for our final peer review (P).

Finals week Essay #4 due