



Course Title: Myth and the Art of Storytelling: Reading and Writing in Greece

Course Code: GREA ENCW 357S/557S

Instructor: Nalini Jones

Credits: 3 undergraduate or graduate credits

**Semester(s)/Terms
to be offered:**

Summer

**Course
Description:**

This course is an exploration of the ways Greek myths inspire, animate, and continue to shape notable contemporary literature written in English. Readings for the first part of the course include material about Greek myths and history, recently-published novels and short fiction, and poetry.

Seminar discussions will be conducted in class rooms and during site and museum visits. The class culminates in a week-long creative writing workshop on the island of Aegina.

Students participate in a writing retreat with prompts and exercises, seminars on craft, workshop discussions, and thoughtful commentary from peers and instructor.

**Learning
Outcomes:**

Over the course of this class, students:

1. gain general knowledge of classical Greek mythology and key periods in Greek history; (journal entries, presentation)
2. broaden their reading and interpretation of contemporary fiction and poetry, and improve their critical and analytical skills; (journal entries, essay)
3. become more practiced as public speakers; (presentation, workshop participation)
4. articulate their ideas about readings clearly, with a focus in written work on support from the texts; (essay)



5. consider the role of story-telling in Homer's time and ours, and in particular, to the way modern literature that invokes myth can offer fresh perspectives on history, politics, and culture; (journal entries, essay)
6. develop as creative writers: through short readings, exercises, seminars, and the submission of their own writing to a workshop; (workshop assignments for portfolio)
7. learn to read like writers, with an eye toward craft and a writer's choices; to critique their peers' work in a workshop format; and to revise their work constructively; (final creative portfolio).

Students do not need any formal training in creative writing to excel; the class is commensurate with undergraduate literature courses in its emphasis on close and attentive reading.

Workshop evaluations will rely on class participation and improvement in writing.

**Course
Requirements:**

- Students will keep journals, with informal written responses to readings (occasionally guided by prompts from the instructor) and notes about particular myths. Each student will be asked to briefly present a response, either on site or in a classroom.
- Students will be assigned analytical essay(s) (see below).
- At the end of the week-long workshop, students will submit a creative portfolio, containing revised workshop exercises [approximately 1,000 words] and a longer submission of 12-20 pages prose (fiction or creative nonfiction such as memoir or personal essay); or 3-6 poems.

Undergraduate level:

- journal responses to reading (20%)
- 1 brief in-class presentation (10%)
- 1 essay, 3-4 pages [1,000-1,500 words] (20%)
- 1 creative portfolio (30%)
- Participation (20%)



Graduate level:

Note higher expectations regarding quality of written work, including more sophisticated literary analysis and use of craft and technique in creative work.

- journal responses to reading (15%)
- 1 brief in-class presentation (10%)
- 1 essay, 3-4 pages [1,000-1,500 words] (15%)
- 1 essay, 5-6 pages [2,000-2,500 words] in which students must synthesize material from primary text(s) and at least 2 research sources (15%)
- 1 creative portfolio (30%)
- Participation (15%)

Primary Texts:

1. Duffy, Carol Ann. *The World's Wife*. London: Picador, 1999; New York: Faber & Faber, 2001. (selected poems)
ISBN 033037222X, cost: to be determined
2. Lyon, Annabel. *The Golden Mean: A Novel of Aristotle and Alexander the Great*. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2009; New York: Vintage, 2011. (novel)
ISBN 9780307593993, cost: to be determined
3. Mason, Zachary. *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010; New York: Picador, 2011. (selected chapters)
ISBN 9780312680466, cost: to be determined
4. Shepard, Jim. "My Aeschylus." *Like You'd Understand, Anyway*. New York: Knopf, 2007. (short story)
ISBN 9780307265210, cost: to be determined
5. Unsworth, Barry. *The Songs of the Kings*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003; New York: W. W. Norton, 2004. (novel)
ISBN 0393322831, cost: to be determined
6. Welty, Eudora. "Shower of Gold" and "Sir Rabbit." *The Golden Apples*. 1949; New York: Harvest Books, 1998. (short stories) ISBN 015636090, cost: to be determined

Course Outline:

1. Introduction to course: Overview of myths and pantheon
2. Athens: The Athenian Agora: The world of the ancient Greeks



3. Athens: National Archaeological Museum, Classical and Hellenistic material
4. Athens: The Athenian Acropolis: literature and politics (the Periclean building program), Theatre of Dionysus; introduction to ancient Greek theatre and *Iphigenia in Aulis*
5. Sunion: Temple of Poseidon; discussion of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; opening chapters from *The Lost Books* (pp. 3-16)
6. Corinth: Story-telling and landscape; "Place in Fiction," "Mrs. Sisyphus"
7. Mycenae: Palace complex, tombs; *The Songs of the Kings*
8. Sparta: Temple of Artemis Orthia, Menelaion; *The Songs of the Kings*
9. Epidauros: Theatre, Asklepeion; "Sanitorium" from *The Lost Books*;
(possibly also discussion of Chiron and excerpt from *The Centaur*)
10. Eleusis: The Mysteries; selected Duffy poems; "The Iliad of Odysseus" and "Last Islands" from *The Lost Books*
11. Delphi: Temple of Apollo, the oracle; *The Songs of the Kings*
12. Thessaloniki: Archaeological Museum, Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great;
"Alexander's Odyssey" from *The Lost Books*
13. Pella and Mieza: Palace site, museum, and The Nymphaeion; *The Golden Mean*
14. Athens: Plato's Academy; *The Golden Mean*; (possibly also the Lyceum)
15. Marathon: Battle of Marathon 490 BC; "My Aeschylus"

Week 4

Aegina: Creative writing workshop

- daily writing exercises
- scheduled time for free writing
- workshop discussions and critiques
- talks on craft
- student readings (optional)
- Film viewing (if possible): *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

*Essay due final day of week 3, before start of workshop on Aegina

*Final portfolio due on the last day of the course.



- Other Policies:** Class participation will be essential, particularly during the workshop component of the course.
- Prerequisites:** No prerequisites. Students do not need prior coursework in creative writing. Graduate students and those with more experience in creative writing will be offered more advanced exercises and instructor critiques.
- Rationale and Impact of the Course:** This course offers students a chance to consider the relationship between contemporary literature and the stories of ancient Greece--in essence, to explore the way literature can connect us, across centuries and across the world, to another culture. By immersing ourselves in the history and myths of classical Greece--through readings, and more concretely through visits to museums and archeological sites--we'll gradually develop a sense of why such stories were so significant and what they might have meant to the Greeks who heard them. Then through our discussions and journal responses, we'll explore why those same stories might attract modern authors; how they have been recast or retold; and why they might remain significant, thousands of years later.
- As a literature class *in situ*, the course also provides an opportunity for students to visit the places evoked in the novels, stories, and poems they're reading, and therefore to pay particular attention to setting as a literary device.
- Finally, the weeklong writing workshop gives students time and guidance as they shift from readers to writers. They'll be encouraged to work on projects of their own, intended for workshop discussion, and to experiment with their own creative retellings.
- Special Conditions:** Several class sessions will take place at archaeological sites and museums. A DVD player may be needed in the final week of the course.