

**MYTHOLOGY in LITERATURE 26: 350:515:01 and 21:525:252:02**

**Fall 2021 Thursdays 5:30-8:15**

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**COURSE MECHANICS**

This course is hybrid. Through mid-October we will be meeting remotely and synchronously via Canvas and Zoom. As of mid-October 2021 (the virus variants etc permitting), I'll try to be on campus from time to time and will meet with small groups of students either in our assigned classroom (Engelhard 201) or the English Department lounge (Hill Hall 5<sup>th</sup> floor) or the English Department conference room (Hill 617). Some of these meetings may well occur at other times than our assigned class time; we'll work it out together, and I'll need your input. Please stay tuned. I look forward to meeting my students in person again!

This course is open to MFA students (fiction or poetry), MA students (English), and a few HLLC or HC students. The study of literature through the lens of mythology, and vice versa, has something to offer all of you, and each of you will have something to offer your classmates and me by way of insights into the works we'll be studying.

Several guest lecturers, experts in different areas of Homeric studies as well as in other literature ancient and modern, will be generously visiting us via Zoom in the earlier weeks of the semester. I expect you to learn a bit about these scholars' backgrounds and work, and to have questions for them.

Assigned reading should all be available via the links posted on Canvas under

**Modules**, with the exception of my translation of Euripides' two Iphigenia plays; a link to purchase this text on Kindle is posted. Please do the assigned reading before class each week. Supplemental and recommended reading will be posted along the way.

### **Required texts**

Homer, *Iliad*, translated by Caroline Alexander

David Malouf, *Ransom*

Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*

Barry Unsworth, *The Songs of the Kings*

Euripides, *The Iphigenia Plays*, translated by Rachel Hadas (Northwestern Univ. Press). You'll find these plays online, though in other translations, under their titles: *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*.

### **What is this course about?**

Homer's *Iliad* serves as a gateway to the study not only of Greek mythology but also the wealth of literature generated by the Homeric epic (also the *Odyssey*, but this course focuses on the *Iliad*), from lyric poetry and tragedy to twenty-first century novels. Students will investigate some of the more recent manifestations of this durable, versatile, and endlessly generative tradition, from TV cartoons or series to graphic novels or video games, not to mention movies and plays and operas. Myth turns out to be both omnipresent and shape-shifting; and in our seminar we'll be joining in a lively conversation which has been going on for centuries.

### **Outcomes**

By the end of the course, students will have:

read and discussed the *Iliad* in enough detail to be thoroughly familiar not only with its plot and characters, but also its major thematic strands and poetic techniques;

been exposed to some of the vast numbers of translations of this poem and also to works of literature either inspired by the Iliad or drawing from the same mythological tradition;

gained familiarity with some of the major issues and controversies in Homeric issues;

learned the various ways major literary genres (epic and lyric poetry; drama; fiction) both derive from and transform the essential mythical material fundamental to the Iliad;

completed two short analytical papers on material of their choice, the first from Homer, the second post Homeric;

presented an oral report on a topic of their choosing related to course reading;

written a longer paper/project which may be scholarly or creative, exploring a topic relating to the Iliadic material we've been studying all semester;

had the opportunity to meet and interact with some leading figures in the field of Homeric and classical studies, including (attention poets!) A.E. Stallings, Diane Aronson Svarlien, Natasha Bershadsky, Nita Krevans, Umit Dhuga, and the star of Homeric studies, Gregory Nagy.

**Schedule of Classes** subject to revision; each week I'll provide detailed info about the following week's seminar. Guest lecture schedules are still being finalized.

9/2. Introductory. We'll all get to know each other a bit and compare notes about our familiarity with this material. This week would be a good time to let me know your preferences for the oral reports, which I'll be scheduling ASAP. Let me know your topics soon, too!

9/9. Please read *before class* in Caroline Alexander's translation Books 1 and 3 of the Iliad. (It's fine to read books [chapters] which are not assigned, but we likely won't discuss them.). Alexander's introduction is also well worth reading.

Before each week's seminar, please post on the Discussion Board. I will try to ask specific questions, but you should feel free to choose your own topic to focus on.

9/16 Books 6 and 9

9/23 Books 16 & 18 **A.E. Stallings** visits

9/30 Books 22 & 24 **Diane Arnson Svarlien/Natasha Bershadsky** visit

PAPER ONE is due any time between 9/30 and 10/7.  
600 words MINIMUM, it should focus on a particular passage.  
You have tremendous freedom as far as topics. I'd try to pose and answer a question; or compare translations; or look closely at and analyze a Homeric simile. Just a few ideas.

10/7 Please read David Malouf, *Ransom*, Chapters 1-5.

10/14 Finish *Ransom*. **Umit Dhuga** visits. Individual oral reports begin around now.

NOTE: Beginning probably week of October 18, I'll be on campus periodically.

10/21 Please read Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, Ch. 1-3. Oral reports.

10/28 Continue reading *Silence*. John Blahnik guest lectures.

PAPER TWO, on *Ransom* and/or *Silence*, due between 10/28 and 11/11.  
750 words MINIMUM.

11/4 Finish *Silence*. **Nita Krevans** visits.

11/11 Please read Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* Oral reports continue.

11/18 Euripides, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*. Oral reports continue.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

12/2 Please read first two sections of Unsworth, *The Songs of the Kings*.  
John Blahnik guest lectures.

12/9 Finish *Songs*. Brief presentations on final projects, which are due any time between 12/9 and 12/17.