

REL 341.001 THEORIES OF MYTH SPRING 2019

Lectures: Tuesdays 3:30 – 5:50 at MA210

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Course Website

<https://religion.ua.edu/courses/rel-341-001-theories-of-myth-2/>

Description and Objectives

From Hercules to Achilles, to Odysseus, and from Oedipus Rex to Medea, myths of the ancient Greek world are as popular today as they were thousands of years ago. Why do we re-tell those ancient myths today? What makes something a myth? What's the difference between a myth and a story? Is it the great deeds of the supernatural characters? How did scholars try to explain the origin and function of myths? Do we produce myths today? The course will address those questions by looking at several myths of the ancient Greco-Roman world but also will look at the theories scholars developed in order to understand those stories.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Describe myths of the ancient Greek world.
- Describe and discuss theories of myth.
- Summarize and analyze assigned reading material.
- Implement the above knowledge in writing assignments and oral presentations.

Readings

This course has no required books but PDF readings that will be available through the course's Blackboard site; you are required though to have a hard copy of the readings in class. The schedule below provides a list of the readings that you will be responsible for on any given day. Doing all of your assigned readings well in advance of class is important because our seminar and the discussions all presume that you have the necessary background knowledge provided by these readings.

Excused Absences

Evidence of your legitimate absence must be presented to the professor in a timely fashion if you wish it not to count against you in the seminar. If you miss a presentation, that you were responsible for, you must contact the professor immediately to explain and document your legitimate absence, and you will be required to hand in your presentation as a writing assignment, the next class.

Requirements and Assignments

Regular attendance, adequate preparation for each day's readings, and active participation will be necessary requirements for this class as well as the following assignments:

1. Abstracts (50%)

You will be required to write 10 abstracts on the reading of the day (see tentative schedule below), that accurately describe the argument of the reading for that week, avoiding all assessment, commentary, or quotation, and which has to be **followed by one question (worth 1% out of 5%)**; each abstract should be a paragraph long (no more than one page), typed, double spaced, and with a 12 point Times Roman or Times New Roman font. Each abstract is worth 5% of your course grade for a total of 60%. Abstracts should be handed-in in class **no late abstracts will be accepted.**

2. Presentations (20%)

Throughout the course each student will have to make 2 presentations (assigned during the first day of class).

Presentation I: You will be required to present a myth from Ancient Greece (Your presentation should include the myth as presented by the ancient author and two scholarly interpretations).

Presentation II: You will be responsible for leading the discussion on one of the assigned reading materials.

Each presentation will worth 10% of your course grade for a total of 20%.

3. Final Assignment (30%)

At the end of the course you will be required to write a paper (of maximum 3000 words) applying things taught in the course at the piece of data you presented in class (see *Presentation I*).

Grading Scale

A+	95-100%	C	70-74
A	90-94	D+	65-69
B+	85-89	D	60-64
B	80-84	D-	50-59
C+	75-79	F	below 50

General Comments

1. Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence and amounts to using the intellectual labor of another author without proper quotation, citation, and acknowledgment. If the instructor suspects that a student has copied the work of another author (whether that author is a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will immediately be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

2. No grades of "I" (incomplete) will be assigned in this course. In my experience, when awarded at the 100-level a grade of "I" rarely leads to the completion of course requirements. Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate your absence from class becoming routine. Although I cannot guarantee that reasonable accommodations can be made for all occasion that may arise, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance our ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you.

3. Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact the professor outside of class time as soon as possible to review documentation and discuss accommodations. Also, students should familiarize themselves with the Office of Disability Services at <http://www.ods.ua.edu>.

4. UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at www.ua.edu. In the event of an emergency, students consult this site for further directions. Also familiarize yourselves with UA's Severe Weather Protocol at www.prepare.ua.edu

5. The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.

Tentative Schedule

- Jan. 15 Intro to the Course
- Jan. 22 McCutcheon's "Myth" _____
Plato's myth of the Cave in *Republic* (514a – 520a) _____
- Jan. 29 Lincoln's "From Homer through Plato"
The Homeric Hymn to Demeter _____
Euripides' *Helen* _____
- Feb. 5 Graf's "The Rise of the Scientific Study of Myth" _____
Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* _____
Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers* _____
Aeschylus' *The Eumenides* _____
- Feb. 12 Graf's "New Approaches to the Interpretation of Myth" _____
Sophocles' *Electra* _____
Euripides' *Electra* _____
- Feb. 19 Lincoln's "Myth, Sentiment and the Construction of Social Forms" _____
Aristophanes' *Frogs* _____
Aristophanes' *Peace* _____
- Feb. 26 Lincoln's "The Politics of Myth"
Euripides' *Bacchae* _____
- Mar. 5 Visiting Prof. Yiannis Xydopoulos "Myths in Athenian Political Discourse of the 4th c. BCE"
- Mar. 12 **Spring Break**
- Mar. 19 Lincoln's "Between History and Myth" _____
Euripides' *Medea* _____
Ovid's *Metamorphoses* "Medea and Jason" Book VII, 1-158 and "The Flight of Medea" Book VII 350-403 _____
- Mar. 26 McCutcheon's "The Perfect Past" _____

Plutarch's Theseus _____

Ovid's Metamorphoses "Theseus and Aegeus" Book VII 404-500 and "The
Minotaur, Ariadne" Book VIII 1-259 _____

Apr. 2 Smith's "A Pearl of Great Price" _____

Sophocles' Oedipus _____

Sophocles' Antigoni _____

Apr. 9 Barthes's "Mythologies" _____

Apr. 16 Movie

Apr. 23 Lincoln's "Avalon"

Final Paper Due April 30

Bibliography

1. Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.
2. Graf, Fritz. "The Rise of the Scientific Study of Myth." In *Greek Mythology: An Introduction*, 9-34. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
3. Graf, Fritz. "New Approaches to the Interpretation of Myth in the Twentieth Century." In *Greek Mythology: An Introduction*, 35-56. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
4. Lincoln, Bruce. "From Homer through Plato." In *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*, 19-43. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
5. Lincoln, Bruce. "Myth, Sentiment, and the Construction of Social Forms." In *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 13-24. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [1989].
6. Lincoln, Bruce. "The Politics of Myth." In *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 25-35. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [1989].
7. Lincoln, Bruce. "Between History and Myth." In *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions*, 53-62. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2012.
8. McCutcheon, Russell. "The perfect past and the irony of narrative: Bruce Lincoln's *Theorizing Myth*." In *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric*, 213-229. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
9. McCutcheon, Russell. "Myth" In W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion*, 190-208. London and New York: Cassell, 2000.
10. Smith, Jonathan Z. "A Pearl of Great Price." In *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, 90-101. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.