

CLST 1208: Ancient Women's Voices from Homer to *Hadestown*

Tuesdays 5:15-8:15 • Cohen 203

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Office hours: by appointment

sign-up via Calendly: <https://calendly.com/clst1208/officehours>

Course description: “We may call Eurydice forth from the world of the dead, but we cannot make her answer.” Such is the challenge, as described by Margaret Atwood, that faces a scholar of historically marginalized groups. Most of our knowledge about the lives of ancient Greek and Roman women comes from male sources, from which we imagine a female perspective. But what about when these figures have speaking roles? Are they still voiceless?



This course provides an introductory survey of ancient Greek and Roman literary and dramatic texts which feature women as voiced (speaking) subjects. Readings will include excerpts in translation from Homeric epic, tragedy, Greek and Roman comedy, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and Ovid. We will also consider the poetry of two ancient women, Sulpicia and Sappho. Can we assume that they represent authentic experiences of ancient women? Are these voices just as artificial and mediated by literary convention as their male-authored counterparts? We will compare these ancient examples with modern reimaginings which offer new ways to reclaim, reframe, and problematize the "Classical" canon; these texts include Madeline Miller's *Circe*, Nina MacLaughlin's *Wake, Siren: Ovid Resung*, and the musical *Hadestown*.

As we study the voices of ancient figures, students will have the opportunity to develop and refine their own. As a Communication Within the Curriculum (CWIC) seminar, this course cultivates critical speaking skills through both seminar-style discussion and a variety of oral communication assignments. No prior knowledge is required.

Course objectives: By the end of this course, students will:

- Gain familiarity with a range of ancient Greek and Roman literary genres
- Practice interpreting the literary representations of ancient women
- Interrogate modern assumptions about "Classical" literature and ancient approaches to gender
- Learn to speak confidently, deliberately, and sensitively both in front of an audience and among peers

GRADING AND EXPECTATIONS

Grade breakdown:

- Participation: 25%
- Group presentation: 20%
- Individual presentation: 30%
- Character defense: 10%
- Cultural/historical context report: 10%
- Classical Studies colloquium report: 5%

CWiC seminar requirements: Students will meet with an **undergraduate speaking advisor**, outside of class, at least twice: 1 rehearsal each for both the **group** and **individual** presentations. It is up to you to schedule this with your assigned CWiC advisor (TBA). Additionally, all of your graded presentations will be recorded by me. I will send you these recordings and use them to provide feedback on your presentations.

Graded components

Participation (25%): One of the primary objectives of this course is to gain practice and confidence in speaking both formally and informally. To that end, all students are expected to participate **regularly and actively** during class. Active participation involves coming prepared to discuss the readings, asking questions, offering opinions and observations, listening and responding to classmates, and volunteering to read aloud.

Group presentation (20%): In assigned groups of three, students will present on a text selected from a list of options (coming soon). The presentation should cover general information about the text and provide several distinct interpretations of the text's treatment of its female characters. These interpretations should be developed collectively and in consultation with at least two secondary sources. Each student is required to speak for at least 5 and no more than 7 minutes. The group is expected to provide a handout with relevant quotations from the text. **Rehearsal with CWiC advisor required.**

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| Tuesday, September 10: | Groups assigned |
| Tuesday, September 24: | Texts selected |
| Tuesday, October 15: | Presentations given |

Individual presentation (30%): The final project for the course will be a solo presentation (15-20 minutes) which develops and expands on some aspect of the course. The topic may either be selected from a list of prompts (coming soon) or proposed in consultation with me. An accompanying bibliography should contain a total of 5-10 sources (primary and secondary). **Rehearsal with CWiC advisor required; note that this rehearsal must occur before December 9th (last day of classes).**

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| Tuesday, October 29: | Topics selected |
| Tuesday, December 3: | Outline or script submitted |
| Final exam slot TBD: | Presentations |

Character defense (10%): Each student will compose and deliver a short (3-5 minutes), persuasive speech in the voice of a character from our readings. This assignment is inspired by an ancient rhetorical exercise (*ethopoeia*) and gives students an opportunity to implement various rhetorical devices, practice effective delivery of a scripted presentation, and engage with the same processes of creative reinterpretation that we see in the modern reading assignments.

Tuesday, November 5: Characters selected

Tuesday, November 19: Presentations

Cultural/historical context report (10%): Each student will take a turn presenting a brief overview of cultural and historical context for an assigned reading. This context should be synthesized from relevant entries in both the [Oxford Classical Dictionary](#) and the [Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome](#) (both available to access online through Penn's library; see the Canvas page for a tutorial). This report should be at least 2 and no more than 4 minutes in length. The goal of this exercise is for students to practice synthesizing sources, conveying information concisely, and speaking within strict time limits. Sign-ups will occur in our first class.

Classical Studies Colloquium report (5%): At some point during the semester, each student will attend **one** session of the [Penn Classical Studies Colloquium](#) (Thursdays 4:45-6:15 PM, Cohen 402) and then post a brief (250 word) report on Canvas that evaluates the effectiveness and style of the speaker. Upcoming lectures can be browsed on the [events calendar](#). You may also attend one of this semester's [Penn Public Lectures on Classical Antiquity and the Contemporary World](#). Please see me if you have a recurring time conflict and we will work out an alternative event for you to attend.

POLICIES

Attendance: Our class time together is an essential and irreplaceable component of this course. Attendance will be taken for each class session. Each student is required to submit a [Course Action Notice](#) for each missed class. A deduction to the participation grade will occur in the event of: 1) **any** uncommunicated absence, and 2) **3 or more** total absences.

Late work/extensions: The in-person nature of most of our assignments makes it imperative that you communicate with me, with as much notice as possible, if you are struggling to meet a deadline. Requests to reschedule a presentation without penalty must be communicated to me **by the Friday beforehand**. Exceptions will be made, at my discretion, for extraordinary or emergency circumstances.

CWiC undergraduate advisors: You are encouraged to meet with your CWiC undergraduate advisor more than the required two times. This advisor is an undergraduate trained and paid to assist students with presentations. They cannot offer advice on course content. They are **not** a TA, and will not grade any of your work. Though the advisor is in general communication with me, all advising sessions are confidential.

Contacting me: I am reachable by email (jcarrick@sas.upenn.edu) or via Canvas during weekdays (roughly 10 AM to 10 PM). Do not count on a reply over the weekend. You may schedule an appointment via email or [Calendly](#).

Classroom conduct

Breaks: Each session is guaranteed to contain a consistently timed and substantial break. We will determine as a class whether one long or two shorter breaks is preferred.

Food: You are welcome and encouraged to bring food and drink to class, particularly since we meet right through dinnertime. I only ask that you save anything particularly messy or smelly for the break period, and that you refrain from eating during student presentations.

Electronics: You may use electronic devices to access readings that are under discussion and to take notes. If I suspect that you are becoming distracted by your device, I will ask you to put it away.

Fidgeting, doodling, etc.: I encourage you to make use of any strategies (fidget toys, doodling, sitting weirdly) that help you stay focused and engaged in class, as long as they are not distracting to other students. It is much more important to me that you are truly engaged rather than performing the appearance of “polite” engagement.

Academic integrity: You must familiarize yourself with Penn’s [Code of Academic Integrity](#). It is your responsibility to ensure your behavior does not violate this code. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.

Use of AI: All of your ideas must be your own or cited properly. You are not strictly forbidden from using ChatGPT or other generative AI tools; I understand that they can be helpful as a brainstorming mechanism. I strongly encourage you **not** to utilize them in the composition or construction of any of your presentations. Generative AI is essentially fancy autocorrect and using it in your writing can only have a deleterious effect on your work.

Statement from [Weingarten](#)

The Weingarten Center offers a variety of resources to support all Penn students in reaching their academic goals. All services are free and confidential. To contact the Weingarten Center, call 215-573-9235. The office is located in Stouffer Commons, 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300.

Academic Support: Learning consultations and learning strategies workshops support students in developing more efficient and effective study skills and learning strategies. Learning specialists work with undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to address time and project management, academic reading and writing, note-taking, problem-solving, exam preparation, test-taking, self-regulation, and flexibility.

Undergraduates can also take advantage of free on-campus tutoring for many Penn courses in both drop-in and weekly contract formats. Tutoring may be individual or in small groups. Tutors will assist with applying course information, understanding key concepts, and developing course-specific strategies. Tutoring support is available throughout the term but is best accessed early in the semester.

Disability Services: The University of Pennsylvania is committed to the accessibility of its programs and services. Students with a disability or medical condition can request reasonable accommodations through the Weingarten Center website. Disability Services determines accommodations on an individualized basis through an interactive process, including a meeting with the student and a review of their disability documentation. Students who have approved accommodations are encouraged to notify their faculty members and share their accommodation letters at the start of each semester. Students can contact Disability Services by calling 215-573-9235 or emailing disabilityservices@vpul.upenn.edu.

SCHEDULE

This is a preliminary outline of the semester's materials. Finalized reading assignments will be posted at least a week in advance on Canvas. All texts are provided.

0. Getting started

August 27:

- Sappho, selected fragments (trans. Mary Barnard)
- Erika L. Weiberg, "'For you know how we cared for you': Sappho and Queer Epistemology" from *Believing Ancient Women*
- Eva Stehle, "Greek lyric and gender"
- Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter* [in class]
- Fragments of ancient women writers [in class]
- Virginia Woolf, excerpt from *Professions for Women* (1942) [in class]

1. Homeric epic

September 3

- Homer, selections
- Madeline Miller, *Circe* (excerpts)

September 10 [**Presentation groups assigned**]

- Homer, *Odyssey* (excerpts - books 1-4, 19-23)
- Margaret Atwood, *Penelopiad*
- Emily Wilson, introduction to *Odyssey* translation

September 17

- Homer, *Iliad*, book 3, 6, 24
- Natalie Haynes, *A Thousand Ships* (selections)

2. Greek tragedy

September 24 [**Group topics selected**]

- Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*
- Jane Cahill, "Introduction" and "Clytemnestra's story"

October 1

- Sophocles, *Antigone*
- Seonjae Kim, *Riot Antigone*

October 8

- Euripides, *Medea*
- Mariane McDonald, *Medea, Queen of Colchester*

3. Humorous representations

October 15 [Group presentations]

- Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

October 22

- Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans*
- Plautus, selections

4. Roman literature

October 29 [Final project topics selected]

- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
- Nina MacLaughlin, *Wake, Siren: Ovid Resung*
- Amy Richlin, "Reading Ovid's Rapes" (1992)

November 5 [Characters selected for character defense]

- Eurydice, various versions
- Persephone, various versions
- Anais Mitchell, *Hadestown* [play clips/audio in class]
- Nikita Gill, *Great Goddesses: Life Lessons from Myths and Monsters*

November 12

- Vergil, *Aeneid*
- Ursula K. Le Guin, *Lavinia*

November 19 [Character defense presentations]

- Ovid, *Heroides*

November 26: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

December 3: Sulpicia, elegiac poet-*puella* [Draft of outline or script due]

- Sulpicia, elegies

TBD (final exam slot): Final presentations