

Myth Class: Classical Studies 1500

Hello! My name is Professor Emily Wilson, and I will be teaching the Classical Studies Mythology class for the first time in spring 2025. This course has previously been taught by Professor Peter Struck (who is now a dean and not teaching the class any more). I have not yet finalized my syllabus for the course, so I am providing this note to give students who might consider taking the class an idea of what it will entail.

About me: I've been teaching at Penn for a little over twenty years, including many undergraduate courses on ancient literature and culture. I feel very lucky that I get to teach such smart, curious students every year. As an instructor and as a scholar, I work on ancient Greek and Roman epic, tragedy, poetry, narrative and philosophy, and their later receptions. I have published several books and articles in these areas, and a number of translations of ancient texts, including translations of Seneca, Sophocles, Euripides, and the two Homeric epics, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Parts of these will feature in the Myth course!

Teaching philosophy: I want everyone to feel welcome in my classroom, whatever your background. Mythology is an introductory level class and requires no prior knowledge of ancient literature, ancient history, or Latin or Greek. If you're already a Classics Major, or you did Latin in high school, you're certainly welcome – but you're equally welcome if you don't yet know anything at all about the ancient world or ancient literature. Everyone will bring different strengths to the class. The only prior requirements are curiosity and a willingness to engage with the material. Primary goals are: to acquire knowledge of the rich field of ancient myth; to gain skills in historical and cultural analysis, close reading, critical thinking, and comparison of sources; to think, learn, and have fun with this fascinating and highly entertaining topic. Questions and discussion are always welcome, in class and/or in office hours. I want to hear from you!

The Myth Course: The course will meet three times a week: two lectures with me, plus a "section" discussion, in smaller groups, with your graduate student Teaching Assistant. The graduate assistants from Classical Studies are always great, and the section discussion will give you extra time to discuss and unpack the material, and get to know your peers. Assignments will be mostly reading short passages from ancient texts (in English translation), looking at images from ancient art, and a few film/ TV clips. Assessment will be based on quizzes and a final exam, plus a project on a myth of your choice. We'll consider specific themes prominent in Greek and Roman myth, including monsters, heroes and hybrids, death and the underworld, war, sex and gender, parents and children, curiosity, and the creation of the universe. We'll study specific gods and goddesses, including a deep dive into Dionysos/ Bacchus, god of wine, transformation and theater. We'll compare literary sources with visual images. We'll consider allegorical, feminist and psychoanalytic interpretations of myth, and how myth parallels or contrasts with science, religion and history as a way of making sense of human life. We'll discuss what myth is – is it different from fable, legend, folklore, story, or fairy tales? How and why do myths change? Is there such a thing as the canonical version of a myth? We'll look at parallels between ancient Greek and Roman myths and those from other parts of the ancient world, and

we'll consider whether there might be modern myths. We'll consider recent adaptations of ancient myths (such as *Percy Jackson*, *Song of Achilles*, and *Kaos*), and talk about why some myths are popular than others at particular moments in cultural history.