

MAJOR PROJECT: GRECO-ROMAN INFLUENCE

Major Project: For this longer research project, students will examine how a post-classical author, poet, or playwright adapts ancient Greco-Roman mythology in his or her later works. You will want to examine at least one Greek or Roman myth in translation and compare/contrast it with the later, more modern adaptation.

Presentation (50 points): As part of a small group, you will give a collective presentation on your preliminary findings on Carson-Newman's Research Day (Thursday, April 19th). Dr. Wheeler will coordinate with you and assign you to groups looking at similar material to make it easier to present your findings. This presentation should take about 15-20 minutes for the group, and each group should consist of perhaps 3-4 students.

Major Paper (100 points): On Monday, April 30th, you will submit a final research essay in MLA format. It will be 10-12 pages long (not counting the Works Cited page). It will be double-spaced, using only fonts such as Times or Times New Roman at font size 12 or smaller. Do not exceed or fall short of this page length. Your essay will document significant changes from the original Greek or Roman work that appear in the later adaptation, and your thesis will then argue for a plausible explanation about why those changes appear. For example, you might explore in what ways a particular medieval poet changes Ovidian stories and explain how those changes illustrate a later medieval ideology. You might explore how a Romantic British poet steals Greek mythological images to espouse the ideals of Romanticism, and so on.

NB: If you are taking this class for a MARS credit, you must focus on either a medieval or Renaissance adaptation of a classic myth or mythological figure. Students taking the course for general education or for English degree requirements are free to use as an adapted work from any time period with my approval.

Format: In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, please include the following material flush against the left margin: your name, your teacher's name, the course, and the due date of the final project (not necessarily the date you finished the work):

Jane Doe
Professor Wheeler
English 475
30 April 2012

The essay should be typed or word-processed on high quality paper. Aim for a professional appearance. It should be written in the Modern Language Association format (MLA). You may find it useful to peruse the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition, for more information. A sample first page and sample Works Cited page can be downloaded in PDF format from the class website under the "Research" link or from C-N Online.

The body of your essay should be double-spaced and left-margin justified rather than fully justified (i.e., your right margin should be a "ragged right," with uneven edges.) Maintain one-inch margins all around the essay. On every page *including the first*, insert a header with your last name and the page number. By viewing "header" on most word-processors, you can set up your document to include automatically such a header on each page.

Final Tips:

1. Avoid excessive summary of the literary works. Assume I have already read them, and I don't need you to tell me the entire tale in miniature if it isn't pertinent to the passages you analyze. Instead, stick to close reading of those specific passages where artistic changes occur from the original myths. If you want help with close reading, you might review these materials on the class website under the "literature resources" button.
2. Grammar and neatness count. Because faulty grammar can lead to miscommunication, and sloppiness detracts from the author's *ethos* in the paper, grammar and neatness are in many ways inseparable from content. Proofread essays before submission. Your paper should be completely free of spelling errors--and that will prove challenging since your spell-checker is useless for Middle English words and Greek names, if you are using a medieval version of a myth or the Fitzgerald translations.
3. *I will not accept papers that are not attached together using paper clips or staples. Dog-eared copies together is unacceptable.*
4. Start early. Do not churn out inferior thinking a few days before the essay is due.
5. Double-check your format for margins, spacing, and so on. Remember that the default margins in Microsoft Word are set to 1.25 inches, but MLA requires 1.0 inch.
6. Do not make unsupported assertions. If you claim something exists or occurs, support that claim with evidence (such as quotations) drawn from the text or historical research.
7. The prompt is just a beginning spot. It is your responsibility to develop a clear **thesis** (i.e., an argument in a single sentence that your paper will prove or disprove). Focus on that narrow thesis, rather than wandering from point to point. State that thesis explicitly somewhere in your essay; I should not have to guess what your argument is from context alone.
8. You will impress your teacher if you show a clear awareness of the vocabulary we have discussed in class and that I have posted for each week in the syllabus.
9. Remember that MLA format requires you to use backslashes to indicate line breaks in short quotations taken from poetry or metered drama, and that poetry and metered drama is cited by book and line number in parenthetical citations rather than page numbers.
10. In terms of sources, a good rule of thumb is to have about one source for each page found in the body of your paper. An 8-10-page paper might have 8-10 sources. A 10-12-page paper might have 10-12 sources, etc.

Some Possible Text Suggestions (Works We Will Read in Class!):

Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* is a Middle English series of short adaptations from Ovid's *Heroides*. Ovid's work was a series of fictional letters written by female mythological characters abandoned or betrayed by male lovers or husbands. In Chaucer's version, these women have become Saints of Love, and their tales are told in the format of medieval Saint's Lives.

The anonymous *Sir Orfeo* is a Middle English adaptation of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, only in this account, Sir Orfeo is a medieval bard-king or minstrel-king rather than Greek *rhapsodoi*, and his Queen has not been taken by Hades, but rather kidnapped by an evil fairy-king and taken into a Fairyland with overtones of the Christian hell.

Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* is a lengthy poem about the tragic love affair between the goddess of love and her lost human lover adapted from a series of Greek myths.

The 16th- and 17th-century poems of Andrew Marvell and Robert Herrick often make use of allusions to mythological deities. One of my favorites is Marvell's account of an angry Nymph seeking to hide wild animals from British hunters.

The 17th- and 18th- century poems of Matthew Prior and Samuel Johnson often make use of allusions to mythological deities. They are short, but pertinent.

The Romantic period has oodles of poems dealing with Greek deities, including Byron's "Prometheus," Shelly's "Arethusa," "Hymn to Apollo," and "Hymn to Pan." Even Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us" tips its hat to the Greek sea-gods. In what ways do classical allusions manifest the Romantics' obsession with the individual imagination or their love of nature?

The Victorian poet Lord Tennyson's poem "The Lotus-Eaters" is about Odysseus's crew on the island of the Lotus-Eaters in *The Odyssey*. Even more famous, his poem "Ulysses" imagines what Odysseus does after finally arriving home to Penelope—he leaves her again for new adventures!

The Victorian poet Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" is a short dramatic monologue in which we hear the imaginary reaction of the last priestess of Persephone (Roman Proserpine) as Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire and "the pale Galilean" conquers and destroys her world.

On C-N online, I have clustered together a number of short poems by modern 20th- and 21st-century poems themed around a particular deity, mythological heroes, or mythological events. These include poems about mythic abductions (including Yeats' "Leda and the Swan"), Artemis, Hecate, Dionysus, Pan, Heroes, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, Orpheus, Venus, and a host of Ovidian poems dealing with Narcissus; Philomela; Icarus and Daedalus; and Psyche and Cupid. These are all

very brief poems, but quite good ones for analysis and comparison. We will vote on which ones to read for the last week of class.

Other Possible Text Suggestions (Not Ones We Are Reading in Class!)

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is a lengthy poem set during the Trojan War. He takes characters from *The Iliad* as his cast, and focuses on the doomed love affair between the daughter of the prophet Calchas (Criseyde) and one of the royal sons of Priam, Prince Troilus. The Homeric characters of Diomedes and Pandarus get a lot more stage time. He also wrote, "The Complaint of Mars and Venus," and in *The Canterbury Tales*, his "Manciple's Tale" and "Merchant's Tale" feature Greco-Roman gods as characters.

Adaptations of Cupid: Shakespeare's sonnets frequently feature the character of Cupid, as adapted from a series of Greek myths. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a play-within-a-play in which the mechanicals re-enact the legend of "Pyramus and Thisbe" from Ovid.

Racine's *Phédra* (also spelled *Phaedra*) is a French Enlightenment play retelling the myth of Theseus' wife Phaedra—and how she attempts to seduce Hippolytus.

Lord Byron's poem "Darkness" is an apocalyptic vision of what happens if Earth's sun should ever burn out. In the final lines of the poem, however, he personifies Darkness as female, using the phrase, "Darkness had no need of them. She was the universe." Is this personification a sign that he is thinking throughout the poem as Darkness being equivalent to Nyx? You might fashion an argument supporting or refuting this claim.

Eugene O'Neill's play trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, is a 1931 adaptation of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* set in the aftermath of the American Civil War.

In terms of pop culture, I will also entertain proposals dealing with children's books such as *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, Greek mythology in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or film and television adaptations of Greco-Roman myth--such as *Minority Report* as *Oedipus Rex*, Disney movies about Hercules, or *Battlestar Galactica* and the Pantheon. **Be warned**, however! Students who have chosen such pop cultural works in the past have usually struggled a bit to produce quality papers. You will need to do more than point out differences—you must explain how the ideologies embedded in American pop culture drive those changes—social concerns beyond mere entertainment. How do pop culture depictions of myths illustrate uniquely postmodern American concerns and values?