

## GREEK AND ROMAN MYTHOLOGY (CLASSICS 102)

Winter 2021

Instructor: Isabelle Donald, Ph.D.

**TOPICS FOR PAPER** due Thursday, March 18<sup>th</sup> (GS02) and Friday, March 19<sup>th</sup> (GS01 and GS04)

A good approach to writing a **research paper** on myth is to use the Comparative Theory of myth in order to compare a myth or character from Greek and/or Roman myth with a myth or mythic character from a different culture, whether ancient or modern. This comparison will allow you to investigate whether all myths, regardless of the culture, contain similar motifs, characters, and situations. You can also think about whether these characteristics apply to the modern retelling of ancient myths in science fiction or fantasy novels and films and to consider the influence that Greek and Roman myth may have had on other types of storytelling.

**Subject to my approval**, you may use a different theory of myth such as the Aetiological, Psychological, or Structuralist theories. Please note that regardless of the theory you choose, the topic must be relevant to myth or fantasy and should not pertain to people from history, literary criticism, or modern philosophical ideas.

Following is a list of topics which are common to almost all myths. I have also included a few questions for you to think about as you develop your thesis statement, do your research, and write the paper.

### TOPICS:

1. The **hero/dragon-slayer** (e.g. Zeus vs. Marduk or Heracles vs. Gilgamesh or Beowulf or a hero from science fiction or fantasy). Is there a message in this classic contest between good and evil or is it just a good story? What is the role of the hero? How do the heroes from different cultures compare? Are they equal, similar or different and why (are they equal, similar or different)? Why does the hero fight a **dragon/monster**? What does the dragon/monster represent? Is it what we fear the most, such as death? How do the dragons/monsters from different cultures compare?

2. **Tricksters** (e.g. Prometheus vs. Loki, Coyote or Raven). Why do myths contain so many characters whose ingenuity and cleverness include trickery, the telling of lies, and a thieving nature and who both create and resolve problems? Does the trickster myth have a lesson for the society which tells this type of myth?

3. The **Flood** (as told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and/or Apollodorus' *Library of Mythology* vs. the flood story told in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* or the *Bible*). Who causes the flood, what is its purpose, and why is destruction the only solution? Are there survivors and why?

4. The **Underworld/Afterlife** (as described in Homer's *Odyssey* or Vergil's *Aeneid* vs. Mesopotamian or Egyptian myth or Dante's *Inferno*). How does Homer's view of the Underworld/Afterlife compare with Vergil's or with Egyptian myth and religion? How does Vergil's depiction of the Afterlife compare with the vision of Hell described by Dante? How do Greek or Roman ideas of the Underworld and Afterlife compare with Mesopotamian myth?

5. **Mystery Religions and the Afterlife** (the myth of Demeter and Persephone, as told in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* vs. the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris or the Mesopotamian myth of Inanna/Ishtar and Dumuzi/Tammuz). Why were myths of disappearing and reappearing fertility deities important to people in the ancient world? Why were these myths believed to give an explanation for the mystery of death and the hope of an afterlife?

6. **The Four or Five Ages** (as told in Hesiod's *Works and Days* vs. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* vs. similar stories/myths from the ancient Near East and India). What is the reason for a myth which describes the social and moral decline of human beings and suggests that life was better long ago? Is it a nostalgic longing for the past, dissatisfaction with the present, and/or concern for the future? Is there any significance to describing the different ages through the diminishing value of metals?

7. **Creation Myths** (as told in Hesiod's *Theogony* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* vs. Norse or Mesopotamian mythology or the creation story in the *Bible*). How do these different myths compare in respect to the origin of the world, the gods, and/or human beings?

(please turn to p. 2)

**SOURCES:**

You must use both **primary** and **secondary** sources for the paper. **Primary sources** for Greek and Roman mythology include Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* and Homer's *Iliad*, all of which are required for the course. Except for the *Homeric Hymns*, which are complete in *Classical Mythology*, you should **not cite** the textbook. The Loeb Classical Library (a MacEwan Library Database) provides access to translations of the complete works of all Greek and Roman authors. You can also find older translations of most Classical literature on mythological themes in the Theoi website. Non-Classical primary sources such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* or Dante, can be found in the MacEwan or University of Alberta Libraries. **Secondary** sources are commentaries and discussions on the primary sources by modern authors. These include books and articles in academic journals and are available in the MacEwan or University of Alberta libraries.

**GUIDELINES:**

**Please note that it is important to read these Guidelines before you begin working on your paper.**

1. The body of the paper should be about 1000- 1250 words in length. It must be double spaced, use an 11 or 12-point font. If you cut and paste bibliographic information from the library's website, you must convert the entire paper to the **same typeface and font size** before submitting it. The paper must have 1" margins, and the pages must be numbered beginning with the first page of the body of the paper. It must have a Title page containing the title of your paper, your name and ID (all centred at the top of the page), and the name of the class and section number, my name, and the date the paper is due, in the lower right corner. You must also have a Bibliography with a minimum of **four** sources, alphabetized by the last name of the first author of each book or article.
2. For a comparative paper, two of the sources must be **primary**. For example, if your topic is the Underworld/Afterlife, two primary sources could be Homer's *Odyssey* and Vergil's *Aeneid* and/or Dante's *Inferno*. If there is no primary source, as is often the case for Native American tricksters, you will need a good secondary source which retells these tales based on native oral traditions. In addition to primary sources, you also require two or more **secondary** sources which must be scholarly books or articles from academic journals, including eBooks and Journals in the MacEwan Library databases. **Please check with me if you are uncertain whether or not a book or article is scholarly.** If you use a different theory of myth in writing your paper, you will likely have only one primary source and, therefore, will require at least three secondary sources for a total of **four** or more sources. You may **not** cite Coles Notes, SparkNotes, dictionaries or encyclopaedias of myth or other encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia. Except under special circumstances, and **only with my permission, you should not cite** Internet sites or Youtube as they are usually not reliable in content nor do they provide a critical analysis of the literature or the topic. Many Internet sites, while educational in nature, are also intended for a juvenile audience and thus are not suitable for university-level papers. Please note that translations of primary sources which are on the Internet and eBooks or Journals in the MacEwan Library databases are acceptable. Please note that you may not cite your lecture notes.
3. To avoid plagiarism, you must cite all direct quotations from primary and secondary sources, as well as paraphrases of quotations and ideas from secondary sources. There should be about **three or more** citations per page.
4. For information on how to set up citations and the bibliography please go to Blackboard and follow the instructions in the folder called **Library Research**. You will find instructions for setting up footnotes or endnotes for Greek and Roman **primary** sources, the Bible as well as other **primary** sources such as websites, films, TV series, and video games. For **other ancient** sources (such as *Epic of Gilgamesh*) and **all secondary** sources, please follow the instructions in the *Chicago Notes-Bibliography Documentation Style* which is included in **Citing Sources** along with other tips which will help you to do the citations and bibliography in the proper format.
5. Please proofread a hard copy of your paper for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors before you hand it in. Don't count on the spell-checker to catch misuse of punctuation or the different meanings of "there" and "their" or the many other English words which sound the same but have different spellings and meanings.
6. Please note that all papers must be emailed to me as a PDF document.
7. **A deduction of 10% will be made on late papers.**