

Department of English
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

ENGE2190/UGED2197
Gods Behaving Badly:
Myths and Legends from Across the World

Dr. Pinky Lui

1. Course Description:

The course will consider myths and legends from around the world with particular sensitivity to one peculiar aspect of them: that the gods depicted in them often behave no better than the people whose lives they determine. In order to explain why this is the case, the course will seek to understand the nature and function of myth, and the complex uses to which they are put in order to explain some of our most pressing questions: How did we all begin? Where are we? Who are we? Why is there so much wrong with the world? What's the solution? Where will we go when we die? How will it all end? Although the concept of myth might seem outdated in modern secular culture, by drawing comparisons between the ancient and contemporary worlds, students will be encouraged to see how myth-making of some kind is as inevitable and innately human as the questions which prompt it. The course will begin by establishing some archetypal similarities between myths – from myths of Creation to myths of Apocalypse – and then consider myths from specific cultures – including Greco-Roman, Scandinavian, and Egyptian – before considering the appeal of myth in contemporary popular culture, especially *The Lord of Rings*, *Game of Thrones*, and *The Sandman*.

2. Learning Outcomes:

After successful completion of this course you will:

- Students will acquire knowledge of the different types of myths from ancient and contemporary worlds in order to comprehend the similarities and differences between them
- Students will learn to analyse various myths as vehicles for cultural values and anxieties
- Students will evaluate the power and persuasiveness of myths to give answers to presiding moral and existential questions including the meaning of life, the nature of death, and the existence of God
- Students will synthesise their knowledge of a broad range of myths in order to understand the greater role of myth in human society
- Students will critique the way contemporary technology has facilitated a new conception of mythology and myth-making
- Students will evaluate the representation of gender in myth

3. Class organization and assessments:

Each week consists of a lecture and a tutorial. Students are expected to finish the required reading before class, attend all lectures and tutorials, and contribute to the tutorial discussions.

Assessment Tasks	Weight
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Attendance and Participation	10%
Reading Responses + Final Reflection	10%
Presentation	15%
Mid-Term Exam	25%
Term Paper	40%

4. Course schedule:

Week	Lecture	Topics	Reading
1 9/9	Introduction	Definition of “myth”: <i>mythos</i> Archetypes across cultures	-
2 16/9	WHAT IS A GOD?	Gods as archetype; The Great Mother; Gender roles and the gods; Lesser deities, demi-gods and Godlike Humans	Homer, <i>Hymn to Demeter</i> (selections); Plutarch, <i>Isis and Osiris</i> (selections)
3 23/9	HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN? <i>Creation Myths</i>	Cosmogony, theogony; Creation motifs and modes of creation; Creation stories	<i>Genesis</i> (selections); “Enuma Elish” (selections); Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> (selections); <i>The Prose Edda</i> (selections)
4 30/9	WHY DO I SUFFER? <i>Myths about Evil</i>	The Problem of Evil; The Fall; Changing Ages	<i>Genesis</i> (selections); Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> (Pandora); <i>Works and Days</i> (selections)
5 7/10	HOW WILL IT ALL END? <i>Myths of the Apocalypse</i>	Disaster Myths; The deluge motif; Disaster Myths; The deluge motif; Eschatology; Theomachy; The apocalypse now	<i>Genesis</i> (selections); <i>The Epic of Gilgamesh</i> (selections), Ovid’s <i>Metamorphosis</i> (selections); <i>Revelation</i> (selections); <i>The Prose Edda</i> (Ragnarok)
6 14/10	WHERE DO WE GO? <i>Myths of the Afterlife</i>	Heaven/Elysium/Valhalla and Hell/Hades/Tartarus; The descent motif; Final Judgement; Gods of the Afterlife Judgement in the Afterlife:	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> (selections from book 11); Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i> (selections from book 6); Dante, <i>Inferno</i> (selections from canto 1)
7 21/10	Mid-Term Exam		

8 28/10	WHY IS THE WORLD IN SUCH A MESS? <i>Trickster Gods</i>	The ambivalence of the trickster figure; Prometheus: trickster hero; Loki; Raven and Coyote; The Monkey King (Sun Wukong)	Hesiod and Aeschylus, “Prometheus” (selections); <i>The Prose Edda</i> (selections); <i>Journey to the West</i> (extract)
9 4/11	WHO AM I? <i>Myths and Sexual Desire</i>	Mythic love stories; the power and danger of emotion: Greek; Mesopotamian; Chinese; Hindu; Celtic	Virgil, <i>The Aeneid</i> (selections from book 4) <i>Enuma Elish</i> extracts
10 11/11	FROM ZEUS TO JUPITER <i>Greco-Roman Myth</i>	The Titans and Olympians; The Pantheon of Gods; Heroes and Gods	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> (selections from book 1); Extracts from Stephen Fry: <i>Mythos & Heroes</i>
11 18/11	SCANDANAVIAN LEGEND <i>The Sagas</i>	Justice and Revenge; Ancestry	<i>The Prose Edda & Sagas</i> (selections)
12 25/11	OLD GODS AND NEW: <i>GOT, LOTR,</i> and Modern Myths	Contemporary uses of old archetypes: adaptations and variations across media	J.R.R. Tolkien’s <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> (selections); “On Fairy Tales” (selections); <i>Game of Thrones</i> (tv series)
13 2/12	GODS AS MEN, MEN AS GODS: <i>Gods as Storytellers</i>	Making and the Unmaking of a God; adaptations and variations across media	Neil Gaiman’s <i>The Sandman</i> (“Calliope”); <i>Dune</i> (film)

5. Required and recommended readings

All required course readings will be uploaded to Blackboard. Students are encouraged to read beyond the required excerpts of selected texts.

Recommended Readings:

- Campbell, J. (1991). *Primitive Mythology*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fry, Stephen. (2017) *Mythos: The Greek Myths Retold*. Michael Joseph Books.
- López-Ruiz, Carolina. (2018) *Gods, Heroes, and Monsters*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Marks, Daniel. (2016) *World Mythology in Bite Sized Chunks*. Michael O’Mara Books.
- Sproul, Barbara C. (1991). *Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World*. New York: Harper Collins

6. Contact details for teacher(s)

Lecturer Name:	Dr. Pinky Lui
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Teaching Assistant Name:	
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Email:	

7. Feedback for Evaluation

Students are welcome to give feedback to the course at any time. They can do so by communicating to the lecturer directly or by email.

8. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in teaching, learning and assessments

Students are not allowed to use any AI tools in any kind of learning activity or assessment that will be counted towards students' final grade of the course, or used for evaluating students' attainment of the desired learning outcomes. Students are expected to produce their own work independently without any collaboration or use of AI tools.

9. Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>. With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed [declaration](#) that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality. Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher. Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

The copyright of the teaching materials, including lecture notes, assignments and examination questions, etc., produced by staff members/teachers of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) belongs to CUHK. Students may download the teaching materials produced by the staff members/teachers from the Learning Management Systems, e.g.

Blackboard, adopted by CUHK for their own educational use, but shall not distribute/share/copy the materials to a third-party without seeking prior permission from the staff members/teachers concerned.

Department of English

Grade A / Excellent: Outstanding performance on ALL learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would surpass the normal expectations at this level and typical of standards that may be common at higher levels of study. The 'A' grade should be reserved for truly excellent work that exceeds the level expected for the majority of students and are expected to be achieved only by a small minority

Grade A- / Very Good: Generally outstanding performance on ALMOST ALL learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would fully fulfill the normal expectations at this level and occasionally reaches standards that may be common at higher levels of study.

Grade B+ / Good (Plus): HIGH performance on all learning outcomes, OR HIGH performance on some learning outcomes which compensates WELL for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply WELL the principles or skills learned in the course in a comprehensive manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level WELL.

Grade B / Good: SUBSTANTIAL performance on all learning outcomes, OR SUBSTANTIAL performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a MORE COMPREHENSIVE manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

Grade B- / Good (Minus): GOOD performance on all learning outcomes, OR GOOD performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a COMPREHENSIVE manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

Grade C+ / Fair (Plus): VERY SATISFACTORY performance on the majority of learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a SOMEWHAT SUSTAINED manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

Grade C / Fair: SATISFACTORY performance on the majority of learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to partially apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

Grade C- / Fair (Minus): SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY performance on A NUMBER OF learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to SOMEWHAT apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the BARE basic requirement at this level.

Grade D+ / Pass (Plus): BARELY SATISFACTORY performance on A FEW learning outcomes.

Addresses the course inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in some areas while responding minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

Grade D / Pass: ALMOST BARELY satisfactory performance on VERY FEW learning outcomes.

Addresses the course inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in very few areas while responding very minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

Grade F / Failure: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Fails to address the course and likely does not understand what the course requires. In other words, the work completely misses the point.