

Department of English
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

ENGE2190 Gods Behaving Badly: Myths and Legends from Around the World
Prof. Mike Ingham

(To be updated)

ENGE2190 Gods Behaving Badly: Myths and Legends from Around the World

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 Although the concept of myth might seem outdated in modern secular culture, by drawing comparisons between the ancient and contemporary worlds, students will be encouraged to see how myth-making of some kind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 and Scandinavian – before considering the appeal of myth in contemporary popular culture, especially *The Lord of Rings*, and *Game of Thrones*.

Learning outcomes:

- 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.

Learning activities:

Lecture: 1hr 45 minutes in class	Interactive tutorial: 45 minutes in class
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Assessment Scheme:**3 written responses of 600-800 words each worth 25%.**

These written tasks will ask students for their responses to the reading, lectures, and/or tutorial discussions. They will ask students to:

- i) Compare and contrast the different myths they have encountered.
- ii) Evaluate the persuasiveness of myth to answer presiding moral and existential questions.
- iii) Critique the role of myth in human society.

These responses need not be written as formal essays. Specific questions and guidelines will be given to students in the course itself.

Lecture and tutorial participation: 10%

(NB punctuality to class and attentiveness within class will also be taken into account.)

1 presentation to be delivered in tutorials: 15%**Learning resources for students:**Required reading:

Reading will typically be 10-15 pages per week. The readings will be uploaded to Blackboard for students to access. Students are expected to bring a copy of the required readings to lectures and tutorials.

Suggested further reading:

Dundes, Alan. Ed. *The Flood Myth*. Berkley: U of California Press.

Campbell, J. (1991). *Primitive Mythology*. London: Penguin Books.

Downing, C. (2007). *The goddess: Mythological images of the feminine*. iUniverse.

Ellwood, R. (1999). *The politics of myth: a study of C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Leeming, David A. (1990). *The World of Myth*. Oxford: OUP

Sproul, Barbara C. (1991). *Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World*. NY:

HarperCollins

Feedback for evaluation:

Students are welcome to give feedback on the course at any time. They can do so by communicating to me directly or by email, or by talking to the TAs.

Course Syllabus:

Week	Lecture	Topics and Reading	Reading
1	Introduction	Definition of “myth”: <i>mythos</i> Archetypes across cultures	No reading
2	WHAT IS A GOD?	Gods as archetype; The Great Mother; Gender roles and the gods; Lesser deities, demi-gods and Godlike Humans	Homeric <i>Hymn to Demeter</i> (selections)
3	HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN? <i>Creation Myths</i>	Cosmogony, theogony; Creation motifs and modes of creation; Creation stories from Babylonian, Greek, Christian, Norse, Chinese, Japanese and Mayan narratives	<i>Genesis</i> (selections); “Enuma Elish” (selections); Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> (selections); <i>The Prose Edda</i> (selections); <i>Popul Vuh</i> (selections)
4	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	WHY HAS THE WORLD CHANGED? <i>Disaster Myths</i>	Disaster Myths; The deluge motif	<i>Genesis</i> (selections); “Atrahasis” (selections); Ovid <i>Metamorphosis</i> (selections)
6	HOW WILL IT ALL END? <i>Myths of the Apocalypse</i>	The final destruction; Eschatology; Signs of the apocalypse; The apocalypse now	<i>Revelation</i> (selections); <i>The Prose Edda</i> (Ragnorak)
7	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	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> (selections from book 11); Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i> (selections from book 6); Dante, <i>Inferno</i> (selections from canto 1).
8	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)

9	WHO AM I? <i>Myths and Desire</i>	Mythic love stories; the power and danger of emotion	Virgil, <i>The Aeneid</i> (selections from book 4)
10	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)
11	SCANDANAVIAN LEGEND <i>The Sagas</i>	Justice and Revenge; Ancestry; the Norse revival	<i>The Sagas</i> (selections)
12	OLD GODS AND NEW: <i>GOT, LOTR, and Modern Myth</i>	Contemporary uses of old archetypes	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> (selections); "On Fairy Tales" (selections)
13	THE GODS OF A GODLESS WORLD <i>Technology and Social Media</i>	Technology as God; Social media as myth-telling	

Teacher's contact details:

Professor/Lecturer/Instructor	
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A facility for posting announcements:

Relevant announcements and course documents (eg. Lecture ppt, reading/written assignments, tutorial questions, etc.) will be posted regularly to Blackboard).

Academic honesty and plagiarism:

In your written assignments and presentation, all types of source materials, including online resources, must be properly acknowledged. All cases of failure to acknowledge would constitute plagiarism.

The University has implemented a zero tolerance policy against plagiarism and has required all written work to be submitted via Veriguide at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/veriguide> .

To comply with University regulations, you are therefore asked to:

1. submit written work via Veriguide before the due date and print the receipt issued by Veriguide
2. submit a hard copy of written work, along with the receipt from Veriguide and the signed declaration of honesty (which comes with the Veriguide receipt).

This must be stapled to your assignment.

Assignments without the receipt will NOT be graded.

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