Prof. Dr. Almut-Barbara Renger

Ancient Mythology in Modern Intellectual History

Second Semester 2012–2013

Course Manual

Time and place: Monday, 10.00–12.00 h, Room 123

Course code: THB3GBAM10

Credit points: 10 ECTS

Part of: Degree Program “Religion, Ritual, and Mythology”

Course contents:
With the rediscovery of Greco-Roman culture in the Renaissance, pagan narratives on gods and heroes and the nature of the world came to have a major impact on modern intellectual history as they interacted with more conventional Jewish and Christian themes. Since then Greek, Roman, and Egyptian mythology in particular have remained a fundamental source of inspiration, generating instances of reception in subsequent centuries. In this seminar, through a sustained engagement with selected texts, images, and films, we will examine how elements and structures of ancient mythic narratives have been combined and conflated with new content and signification. The main focus will be on the reception of selected passages of Hesiod’s *Theogony* (above all the myths of Prometheus and Pandora) and Attic tragedy (in particular Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*). Using these texts (in translation) as a starting point, we will look closely at how specific narratives are employed, changed, and reinvented throughout the 20th century in literature and psychoanalysis as well as in paintings, theatre, and film. Theoretical writings on myth and its reception as developed e.g. in the fields of philosophy, anthropology, and comparative religion will provide us with essential background knowledge.

Literature:
A list of texts to be read is to be found below.

Learning goals:
The objective of this seminar is to provide students with a general theoretical framework that is relevant for the academic study of the reception of ancient mythology in modernity. Furthermore, in this course, students will improve their presentation and writing skills.
Specific learning goals:
• Knowledge of ancient mythologies and understanding of the ways they live on and develop in modern thought
• Knowledge of the discussions and methodological approaches related to myth, religion and modernity
• Skills in discussing and presenting own ideas, oral presentation, book review, and writing a short essay
Format:
This course will consist of both lecture and seminar. This means that active participation by students is essential. Although the instructor will give detailed information by means of lectures, work will also be done in collaboration with students who will introduce the readings for the respective week and discuss and present their own ideas. Readings serve as basis for lectures, class discussion, and essay writing.

Assignments and grade breakdown:
Preparation for and active participation in class is compulsory.

Workload: lectures / seminar (14 x 2 hours): 28 hours; discussion on Nestor: 10 hours (20% of the final grade); preparation of presentations: 18 hours (2 x 20% of the final grade); paper: 28 hours (40% of the final grade); expected self-study: 196 hours.

The lectures will take about one hour, the discussions about 30 minutes. A presentation (of a selection of preparatory literature) by a student will take 10-15 minutes. It is essential not just to repeat the content of the reading, but (a) to highlight the crucial argument/ modes of narrative or discourse, (b) provide more information about the context (e.g., the author, the rest of the book, debates that underlie the text, reviews of the book/article, etc.), and (c) to extract a couple of questions or critical remarks that should be discussed in class. The use of handouts is required; Power-Point presentations including images are strongly encouraged. The presentations (even if in preliminary form) have to be sent to the instructor at least five days before the session, otherwise 1.0 will be subtracted from the grade of this assignment. Each student will be responsible for 2 presentations. These will account for 40% (2 x 20%) of the final grade.

Re-examination:
The weighed final grade has to be satisfactory (5.5). If the final grade is unsatisfactory, students can repeat one of the assignments that were unsatisfactory. All material has to be handed in by 7 June 2013.

Program

4 February 1. Introduction

Introduction to the course’s topic, explanation of assignments, distribution of presentations

11 February 2. What is Myth?

Reading:


Additional material:


Presentation:

3-5 students

18 February 3. Introduction into Greek Mythology

Reading:


Additional material:

– The History Channel: Gods & Goddesses, 100 min., A&E Home Video, 2006; published also partly on youtube, e.g. 08-29-2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mN_1ZKacw6o.

Presentation/ critique:

2-3 students

25 February 4. The Myths of Prometheus and Pandora: Divine vs. Mortal, Man vs. Woman, Sacrifice and Betrayal

Reading:


Additional material:

– Jean-Pierre Vernant, “At Man’s Table: Hesiod’s Foundation Myth of Sacrifice,” in: Marcel Detienne & Vernant (eds.), The Cui-

Presentation:
1-2 students

11 March 5. First Women in Creation: Similarities of Hesiod’s Pandora and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination

Reading:


Additional material:

– Albert Lewin (director), Pandora and the Flying Dutchman, 122 min., England, 1951.

Presentation:
1-2 students

18 March 6. Pandora and the Flying Dutchman: Ancient Greek Myth and Dutch Legend

Reading:


The libretto in German:
http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Wagner,+Richard/Musikdramen/Der+fliegende+Holländer

The libretto in English:
http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libwagfli_e.htm

Presentation:
1 student


Reading:

No classes on 1, 8, 15 April

22 April 8. Oedipus the King

Reading:


Additional material:


– [Figure:] Oedipus seated on a rock ponders the riddle of the Theban Sphinx. Attic red-figure kylix, c. 480/470 BC, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, attributed to the so-called Oedipus Painter.

Presentation:
1-2 students

29 April 9. Oedipus and the Sphinx: Thresholds and Liminality

Reading:


Presentation:
1-2 students

6 May 10. Secrets of the Sphinx: Ancient Greek and Egyptian Mythology in Europe’s Modern Intellectual History

Reading:


Additional material:

– [Figure:] J. A. D. Ingres, Œdipe et le Sphinx, 1808–1825, oil on canvas, 189 × 144 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Ingres first painted this composition in 1808, then altered it before presenting it at the Salon of 1827.

Presentation:
1-2 students

13 May 11. The Oedipus Myth in the 20th century

Reading:


Presentation:
2-4 students
12. Freud’s Oedipus and his Collection of Greek, Roman and Egyptian Antiquities

Reading:


Additional material:

– [Figure:] Berggasse 19, Freud’s consulting room, detailed view of the end of the couch, including reproduction of Ingres’s Oedipus and the Sphinx (Œdipe et le Sphinx). Photograph taken by Edmund Engelmann in 1938 before Freud left Vienna after the Nazi annexation of Austria. Reproduced courtesy of Todd Engelmann and Freud Museum, London.

– [Figure:] Medallion for the fiftieth birthday of Sigmund Freud, 1906, by Carl Maria Schwerdtner, which shows Oedipus and the Sphinx. Its inscription is from Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*: “he who unraveled the great riddle, and was first in power.” Bronze, 60 mm, Archives of the University of Vienna, Inv. 102.2.7.


Presentation:
1-2 students

13. With Sophocles contra Freud: Cocteau’s Work on Myth

Reading:


Additional material:

– Second act of The Infernal Machine, read from the translation by Carl Wildman: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdKdW42oE-o

Presentation:
1 student

10 June 14. Conclusion

Concluding discussion and presentation of students’ papers.