The Ancient Hero and the Heroic
FIRST UG-68
The Gallatin School, New York University
Fall 2011
Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00-12:15, Weinstein, room SB20

SYLLABUS

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Office hours: MW 9-10, T 10-noon, and MTW by appointment
To reserve an appointment time during office hours, please visit:
https://www.google.com/calendar/selfsched?sstoken=UUh5U09MYnZSelk4fGRIZmF1bHR8MzFiZTc1Y2Q3OWZhZmY1MmU5YjYjYWRhMTc2MWRJ

The names of ancient heroes are well-known, even today: Gilgamesh, Achilles, Herakles (Hercules), Jason, Aeneas. But the nature of these individuals is a complex and ambivalent one, even in the context of the ancient world, in which they were worshipped and celebrated. They are capable of distinctly unheroic behavior: they are selfish and destructive—at times committing horrific deeds—and on occasion they even become the subject of lampoon within the cultures that simultaneously honored them with sacrifices and temples. This class will explore this apparent slippage between the ancient identities of “the hero” and the modern understandings of “the heroic.” We will pay particular attention to the issues of what it is that defines a hero, how cultural understandings of heroic behavior differ, and whether ancient heroes are—and in what respect—heroic. In pursuing these topics, we will make use of both the literary and the visual construction of heroes, and the course will involve class trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

• Class attendance and participation [25% of final grade]
  Both are essential to the success of the class and to your success in the class. Persistent unexcused absences or late arrivals to class will adversely affect your final grade. Class work may only be made up in cases of excused absences, which are limited to documented medical and family emergencies.

• Weekly responses [10% of final grade]
  These posts to the course discussion board, written in response to specific questions, are designed to focus your preparation for class on themes and questions that will be relevant in our discussions.

• Three written assignments [65% of final grade]
  o Assignment 1 due in class on Oct. 19 = 20% of final grade.
  o Assignment 2 due in class on Nov. 2 = 20% of final grade.
  o Assignment 3 due by 5:00 pm on Dec. 2 = 25% of final grade.
  These assignments can be found on the course wiki on the Syllabus and Assignments page. For the grading criteria, please see the “Grading” section, under “Course Policies,” below.
**READINGS**
Required texts, available at the NYU Bookstore, include:
- Homer, *Odyssey* (trans. Fagles)

Additional required readings will be posted on the class wiki. They will be under the “Assignments” tab, along with the paper assignments (in the green folder).

**COURSE WIKI**
Find readings, announcements, assignments, and more on our course wiki!
https://sites.google.com/a/nyu.edu/first-heroes/

And our discussion board (you can get there through the wiki as well)...
https://atlas.nyu.edu/~FIRST-UG68_1_001_FA11
(Click on the “Discussion” tab at the left.)

**COURSE POLICIES**

**Electronics**
Under no circumstances are calls, texting, email, social networking, online shopping, or web surfing acceptable during class. Your phone should be turned off and put away. You may use your laptop for accessing readings and taking notes only; I trust you to stay engaged with class discussion, and will ask you to put your computer away if it becomes distracting to you or others.

**Grading**
Grading of all written assignments (including weekly responses) will be based on the following criteria:
- Content (direct and focused engagement with the assigned topic; delineation of a coherent thesis; relevant engagement of primary material and, where relevant, secondary scholarship in support of your thesis)
- Structure (presentation of argument and supporting discussion in a clear and logical way)
- Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word choice

**Late policies**
Papers are due on the day assigned at the beginning of class. A paper turned in at any point after they have been collected will be considered one day late. Late papers unaccompanied by written documentation of an excused absence will be reduced 2/3 letter grade per day after the deadline has passed (ie, a B+ will become a B- after one day late, a C after 2 days, and so on). Please note that notification of an absence does not automatically qualify as an excused absence.

Because the weekly responses are designed to stimulate discussion and to raise questions in class, late responses will not be accepted.
Incompletes
Grades of Incomplete will only be given in cases of documented medical or family emergencies that interfere with your ability to complete coursework in a timely manner. Before requesting an Incomplete, please familiarize yourself with Gallatin's school-wide policies at http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/grades/incompletePolicy.html

Citation of sources
As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

If you have any questions about proper citation or about what constitutes plagiarism, please feel free to ask me!

Be careful of using the internet as a source: there is a great deal of misinformation out there, particularly about ancient mythology. As a general rule, it is best not to use websites ending in .com or .net, and it is in your interest to check with me before citing any information found online for your research in this class. You will be held responsible for the integrity of any information gleaned from internet sources.

COURSE CALENDAR
While I do my best to stay on schedule, the calendar is subject to change at any point during the semester, in order to accommodate the needs and interests of the class.

Readings should be prepared for Monday class, unless otherwise indicated.

**Week 1**
W. Sept. 7: Introduction, Heroic expectations

**Week 2**
M. Sept. 12: The *Oresteia*
W. Sept. 14: Orestes as tragic hero

Read for this week:
- Review the *Oresteia* from convocation (for Monday).

Post to the discussion group:
- An outline of Aristotle’s definition of the tragic hero. What are its main components? Does Orestes fit Aristotle’s definition of the tragic hero? (Post by 9:00 am on Wednesday.)
**Week 3**  
M. Sept. 19: Epic poetry  
W. Sept. 21: Achilles in *The Iliad*

Read for this week:  

Post to the discussion group:  
- How does Achilles conform to your definition of the hero? (Post by 9:00 am on Wednesday.)

**Week 4**  
M. Sept. 26: Achilles as hero  
W. Sept. 28: Assignment 1 prep and review

Read for this week:  
- Nagy, G. “Heroes and the Homeric *Iliad*.”  
  [http://www.uh.edu/~cldue/texts/introductiontohomer.html](http://www.uh.edu/~cldue/texts/introductiontohomer.html)

Post to the discussion group:  
- Does either reading for this week change your perspective on Achilles? How? (Post by 9:00 am Monday.)

**Week 5**  
M. Oct. 3: Odysseus  
W. Oct. 5: Campbell’s heroes

Read for this week:  

Post to the discussion group:  
- A defense or critique of the following statement: Campbell’s understanding of the hero is restricted to the modern. (Post by 9:00 am on Wednesday.)

**Week 6**  
M. Oct. 10: NO CLASS, University-wide.  
W. Oct. 12: NO CLASS, Museum trip 1 held in lieu of this class

Hero biographies (Assignment 1) workshopping this week. Participation is optional, but encouraged. A response that results in positive changes to your partner’s paper will earn you an extra point on your own.

How it will work:  
1. Email a complete draft of your Assignment 1 to me by Monday (10/10) at 11:00 am.  
2. If you submit a draft, you will receive someone else’s draft to review by 3:00 pm that day.  
3. Write a response to your partner’s paper, commenting on the paper’s structure, use of evidence, and clarity of argument. It should include three things that you like about the paper, and three things that you felt were unclear or could be improved.  
4. Email your response to your partner *and cc me* by 11:00 am on Wednesday (10/12).
Please remember: Your job is to give your partner a new, constructive eye; treat his or her work as you would expect yours to be treated... be respectful and offer comments in a constructive way.

**Week 7**
M. Oct. 17: Gilgamesh  
W. Oct. 19: Talking about images of heroes. **Assignment 1 due today in class.**

Read for this week:

**Week 8**
M. Oct. 24: Assignment 2 prep and review  
W. Oct. 26: Herakles: Athletic hero

Read for this week:

**FRIDAY, OCT. 28, Trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art**
There are two options for times: 5:30 pm or 7:00 pm.  
Classes will be held in the Near Eastern, Greek, and Roman galleries and will last approximately one hour. We will meet in the main lobby.  
The Met is located at 1000 Fifth Avenue at East 82nd Street; get directions at www.metmuseum.org.  
This trip is a required component of the course, and will contribute to your Attendance and Participation grade.

**Week 9**
M. Oct. 31. Herakles: Comedic hero  
W. Nov. 2. Herakles: Animated hero. **Assignment 2 due in class.**

Read for this week:
- Aristophanes, *The Frogs.*

**Week 10**
M. Nov. 7. Perseus  
W. Nov. 9. Rank's heroes

Read for this week:

Post to the discussion group:
- How might we use Rank's heroic structure to think about the ancient heroes we've discussed thus far? (Post by 9:00 am on Wednesday.)
**Week 11**
M. Nov. 14. Plato’s heroes  
W. Nov. 16. Assignment 3 prep and review

Read for this week:  
- Nehamas, “Plato’s Pop Culture Problem, and Ours,” 2010  

Post to group discussion:  
- Do you agree with Plato’s critique of the ways in which heroes are portrayed? Do you agree with his solution? (Post by 9:00 am on Monday.)

**Week 12**
M. Nov. 21. NO CLASS, Museum trip 2 held in lieu of this class.

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

**Week 13**
M. Nov. 28. Jason: Epic hero?  
W. Nov. 30. Medea: Tragic hero?  
**F. Dec. 2 by 5:00 pm. Complete draft of Assignment 3 due.**

Read for this week:  
- Euripides, *Medea* (for Wednesday).

Post to the group discussion:  
- Who is the hero of Euripides’ *Medea*? According to what definition do you make that assessment? (Post by 9:00 am on Wednesday.)

**Week 14**
M. Dec. 5. Assignment 3 in-class workshop  
W. Dec. 7. Modern heroes  
**F. Dec. 9 by 5:00 pm. Assignment 3 due.**

Read for this week:  
- The paper drafts from your group (for Monday).

Write for this week:  
- Bring to class on Monday: A response to each paper, which concentrates on the paper’s structure, use of evidence, and clarity of argument. It should include three things that you like about the paper and three things that you felt were unclear or could be improved.  
  Please remember: You are giving your group members a new, constructive eye; treat others’ work as you would expect them to treat yours... be respectful and offer comments in a constructive way.

**FRIDAY, DEC. 9. Trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.**
There are two options for times: 5:30 pm or 7:00 pm.  
Classes will be held in the Near Eastern, Greek, and Roman galleries and will last approximately one hour. We will meet in the main lobby.
The Met is located at 1000 Fifth Avenue at East 82nd Street; get directions at www.metmuseum.org.
This trip is a required component of the course, and will contribute to your Attendance and Participation grade.

**Week 15**
Dec. 12. Modern heroes
Dec. 14. Conclusion