Mythology Outside Reading List

You are responsible for reading two of the books from this list over the course of the first semester. You will prove that you read these books by either doing a book interview or by writing a 500-word summary and response. Due dates for completing this assignment will be posted in class and on my website. You may read mythology-themed books not on this list, but you must get your book pre-approved.

**THE SONG OF AchillEs by MADaLINE MILLER**
Betrayal, ardor, war, and prophecy—in The Song of Achilles, author Madeline Miller brings together everything loved about The Iliad without the labor of epic poetry. In this new twist on the Trojan War story, Patroclus and Achilles are the quintessential mismatched pair—a mortal underdog exiled in shame and a glorious demigod revered by all—but what would a novel of ancient Greece be without star-crossed love? Miller includes other good tragic bits—foreknowledge of death, ruthless choices that pit pride and reputation against the lives of innocents, the folly of men and gods—and through her beautiful writing, readers become bystanders in the battlefield of Troy awash with blood, exaltation, and despair. It infuses the essence of Homer with modern storytelling.

**THE PenELOPiaD: THE MYTH OF PenELOPE & ODYSSeUS by MARGARET ATWOOD**
Drawing on a range of sources, in addition to The Odyssey, Atwood scripts the narrative of Penelope, the faithful and devoted wife of Odysseus and her 12 maids, who were killed upon the master's return. Atwood proposes striking interpretations of her characters that challenge the patriarchal nature of Greek mythology. The chapters transition between the firsthand account of Penelope and the chorus of maids as readers are taken from Penelope's early life to her afterlife. These dark figures speak straightforwardly in their accusations of Penelope and Odysseus, while, at other times, they make use of rhyme. This benefits the novel by creating an eerie resonance and haunting demeanor that enhances this engaging tale.

**MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA by EUGENE O'NEILL**
Long fascinated by the power of ancient Greek drama (traces of which show in earlier works), O'Neill based his play on Aeschylus' Orestia. But while O'Neill borrows both the story and numerous devices from ancient Greek theatre, he is no slave to either plot or style: he transposes the tale to post-Civil War New England, where the ancient tale of incestuous love, revenge, murder, and insanity plays out with a ferocity to rival the original. O'Neill's characters have motivations that are influenced by the psychological theories of the 1930s. Hence, it can be understood from a Freudian perspective, with characters displaying Oedipus and Electa complexes. Mourning Becomes Electra is divided into three plays: Homecoming, The Hunted, and The Haunted.

**THE FIREBRAND by MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY**
Bradley (The Mists of Avalon) has combined several legends about the fall of Troy in this novel, told from the point of view of Kassandra, daughter of King Priam. After receiving the gift of prophecy from the god Apollo and then rejecting him, she was cursed when he decreed that her vision would be taken as dreams or the ravings of a madwoman. She makes a strong statement about the desirability of women having control of their own destinies and about the cruelties men inflict upon them.

*Due to the length of this book, I will count it as two books!*

**TILL WE HAVE FACES by C.S.Lewis**
This tale of two princesses - one beautiful and one unattractive - and of the struggle between sacred and profane love is Lewis's reworking of the myth of Cupid and Psyche and one of his most enduring works. C.S. Lewis's novel Till We Have Faces is based on the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche, however Lewis chooses to tell the story through Orual, Psyche's older sister. While Lewis does retell the well-known story of Psyche and Cupid, that is only a tiny piece of the story he creates. Till We Have Faces is actually the story of Orual's struggle to find love, and to discover her own identity.

**TROY: LORD OF THE SILVER BOW by DAVID GEMMELL**
Bestseller Gemmell (Legend) boldly recasts the Trojan War in this first of a new trilogy, which centers on a warrior variously called Helikaon, Aeneas or the Golden One, who's blessed by luck to have all he turns his hand to prosper. Populated by compelling and finely drawn characters taken from either Greek mythology (Odysseus, Hektor, etc.) or the author's own fertile imagination, the novel lays the groundwork for the war to come. Spurred by prophecy, Agamemnon, King of Mykene, sets his men the task of killing Aeneas. The ensuing conflict threatens to engulf the Mediterranean. While this enchanting tale is more historical fiction than fantasy (the obligatory oracles and Kassandra's prophecies are the only hints of magic), genre fans and more general readers alike will have trouble putting it down.

**WEIGHT: THE MYTH OF ATLAS AND HERACLES by JEANETTE WINTERSoN**
Winterson's work is always beguiling, and here she proves that often, less is more, especially with a story that she emphasizes again and again has been told before. She wants to tell the story again, and this might be the best retelling of them all. Atlas, a titan among the Titans, has been sentenced to hold the weight of the world on his immensely strong shoulders for pretty much the whole of time. (Time being relative and unimportant in the long view, we might as well say he must carry the world for all eternity.) He spends his time reflecting on past loves, past mistakes, and, of course, the weight. One day, though, a reprieve comes in an unlikely form: Herakles.
**QUIVER by STEPHANY SPINNER**

Greek gods and mortals spring to life in this riveting retelling of the myth of Atalanta, the fleet-footed girl warrior who could outrun any man in ancient Greece. Cast off and abandoned at birth, Atalanta—saved by a she-bear and raised by hunters—proves herself to be a superior archer and the fastest runner in the land. But her skills and independence anger many, including her father, the Arcadian King, who suddenly reclaims her and demands that she produce an heir to the throne. Atalanta has pledged herself to Artemis, goddess of the hunt, who has forbidden her to marry. Unwilling to break her promise, Atalanta suggests a grim compromise: she will marry the first man to beat her in a race, but everyone she defeats must die. All the while, Artemis, Apollo, Aphrodite, Eros, and Zeus himself watch—and interfere—from on high.

**PYGMALION by GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

One of Shaw's best works, Pygmalion is a perceptive comedy of wit and wisdom about the unique relationship between a spunky cockney flower-girl and her irascible speech professor. The flower girl Eliza Doolittle teaches the egotistical phonetics professor Henry Higgins that to be a lady means more than just learning to speak like one.

*Please note that this is a play and that there is dialect that can cause confusion (don't simply look at length)*

**AGE OF BRONZE Volumes 1 & 2 by ERIC SCHANOWER**

Volume 1: Daring heroes, breathtaking women, betrayals, love and death—the most spectacular war story ever told: The Trojan War. When a lustful Trojan prince abducts the beautiful Queen Helen of Sparta, Helen’s husband vows to recover her no matter the cost. So begins the Trojan War. From far and wide the ancient kings of Greece bring their ships to join the massive force to pledge their allegiance to High King Agamemnon. Featuring the greatest of the Greek heroes: Achilles, Odysseus, and Herakles, along with a cast of thousands.

Volume 2 offers readers an intense retelling of the saga of the Trojan War using multiple literary and historical sources as a springboard. Both accessible and compelling, this collection opens with Paris, Prince of Troy, returning home with Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, as his stolen paramour, unconcerned that she is wed to a king who is determined to reclaim her. Paris’s father, Priam, reluctantly welcomes Helen to his land. Meanwhile, the inexperienced warrior Achilles leads a bloody assault on an island which he mistakenly believes to be Troy.

* You must read BOTH graphic novels in addition to another book on the list to complete the semester’s Outside Reading requirements (they count as one book)!

**BONE GAP by LAURA RUBY**

Based on the myth of Persephone and Hades, Bone Gap is the story of Roza, a beautiful girl who is taken from a quiet midwestern town and imprisoned by a mysterious man, and Finn, the only witness, who cannot forgive himself for being unable to identify her kidnapper. As we follow them through their melancholy pasts, their terrifying presents, their uncertain futures, acclaimed author Laura Ruby weaves a heartbreaking tale of love and loss, magic and mystery, regret and forgiveness—a story about how the face the world sees is never the sum of who we are. In this world, heroism isn't born of muscle, competence, and desire, but of the ability to look beyond the surface and embrace otherworldliness and kindred spirits.

**AMERICAN GODS by NEIL GAIMAN**

In American Gods, the gods of European yore are squaring off for a rumble with new indigenous deities: "gods of credit card and freeway, of Internet and telephone..." Released from prison the day after his beloved wife dies in a car accident, Shadow takes a job as emissary for Mr. Wednesday, avatar of the Norse god Odin, unaware that his boss's recruiting trip across the American heartland will subject him to repeat visits from the reanimated corpse of his dead wife and brutal roughing up by the goons of Wednesday's adversary, Mr. World. At last Shadow must reevaluate his own deeply held beliefs in order to determine his crucial role in the final showdown. Gaiman offers an outside-in and inside-out perspective on the soul and spirituality of the country--our obsessions with money and power, our jumbled religious heritage and its societal outcomes, and the millenial decisions we face about what's real and what's not.

All book reviews from Amazon.com and Publishers Weekly.