

ARTH 250-2: Ancient History in Modern Media
(3 Credits)

Class Location: AND138

Professor: Dr. Rachel Polinsky

Office: Anderson 135

Office Hours: Monday 11:00AM-12:00PM

Tuesday 11:00AM-12:00PM, 3:00-4:00PM

Thursday 11:00AM-12:00PM

Friday 11:00AM-12:00PM

OR by appointment

Important Academic Dates/Deadlines:

<https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-resources/academic-deadlines-important-dates-2025-2026/>

Last Day to ADD/DROP a Course: January 6

Last Day to Withdraw from a Course: January 21

Course Description:

This course examines how the ancient Greek and Roman worlds have been portrayed in modern media. Students will engage with ancient myths and history, art and architecture, and more, through the modern lens of pop culture media like film, television, books, music, and so on! Why have these narratives, themes, characters, and images remained so prominent in our modern social and cultural discourse and how have they been adapted to modern audiences?

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

- Be able to think critically about creative decision making and artistic intent in relation to storytelling (concerning both historical and modern narratives/elements).
- Have a good understanding of and be able to correctly apply art historical and other relevant terminology from the course.
- Clearly comprehend and be able to discuss relevant iconography, themes, and art historical concepts, and be able to apply them beyond the immediate course materials.
- Be able to analytically and critically address art objects and their socio-cultural associations.
- Learn and develop skills in and related to critical and analytical writing and debate/discussion.

Student Expectations:

- Arrive to class on time or contact the professor in advance if you know you will be late
- Do the assigned readings and watch the assigned films for class
- Complete and submit assignments on time
- Participate in class discussions and activities
- Be respectful of your classmates and professor

Learning Assessments:

Students are assessed based on their participation in class, submission of regular assignments, and their term project. The class is discussion-based and requires student involvement and participation, including submitting their discussion questions/comments on D2L for each film. The term project (outlined below) consists of a proposal presentation, a check-in appointment, a final presentation, and the final submission.

Attendance and Participation Policy:

I expect students to show up on time for every class and to participate. If you know you will be absent, please contact the professor ahead of class.

This class is discussion-based so I expect students to participate in class discussions and activities.

Course Materials:

Access to readings and films are all provided through D2L or are indicated in the syllabus where/how they can be accessed (i.e., streaming services, reserved DVDs in the library, or Dr. P's own DVD). If students have any issues with accessing the materials, they can speak with the instructor.

Assignments and Grading:

- Participation: 30%
- Film Questions/Comments: 10%
- Project/Paper Proposal: 20%
- Project/Paper Final Presentation: 20%
- Project/Paper Final Submission: 20%

Participation:

Students are expected to be present, attentive, and engage in and contribute to class discussions and course materials. The course is heavily discussion-based and every student is expected and required to participate by asking questions, contributing to discussions, participating in class activities, and giving presentations.

Film Discussion Questions/Comments:

Students need to post THREE (3) discussion questions or observations per movie on their respective Discussion board on D2L. These are to facilitate class discussions, and will be visible to the entire class. Students are encouraged to respond to or indicate that another student's question(s) or comment(s) are something they would like to discuss in class in addition to their own questions/comments.

Project/Paper Proposal Presentation:

Students need to prepare a short proposal presentation for their final project/paper (no more than 5 minutes each). Students need to outline what they plan to do for the final assignment and indicate what their goal is for their project/paper. The presentations will be followed up by a few minutes of questions/feedback from the class. The purpose of the assignment is to get feedback from classmates about their topic and the direction they want to go.

Assignment Guidelines:

Students are to create a proposal for a modern adaptation/version of an ancient narrative, myth, event, et.al. They need to consider what the intended audience and desired experience/outcome of it is going to be, how they plan to put it into action, what kinds of

resources they may need, etc.

Project/Paper Check-in:

Each student/group is required to meet with the professor to address various questions, going over critiques, and discussing the student's project/paper overall. This counts as a class participation activity.

In place of meeting for class on the set date, each student will book a 15-minute window with the professor. Students will have to sign up for a time slot.

Project/Paper Final submission:

Students are to make or write up a proposal for a modern adaptation/retelling of an ancient narrative, myth, event, et.al. They need to consider what the intended audience and desired experience/outcome of it is going to be, how they plan to put it into action, what kinds of resources they may need, etc. The adaptation can be in the form of a script, short film (5 or so minutes), artwork, etc. Alongside the adaptation/retelling, students need to provide a 2-3 (TWO-THREE) page explanation of the decisions you made and the influences/inspirations you took from the ancient world.

If the project/paper is done as a group, then each member must include an explanation of their contributions to it; this should be no more than 1 (ONE) page per student.

Project/Paper Final Presentation:

Students are to present their modern adaptation of a Greek/Roman narrative/character/historical event/etc. Students will need to be able to explain what ancient narrative, myth, event, et.al., they picked and why they are adapting it for modern audiences. They need to have visual aids, such as slides and/or handouts. If this project is done as a group, then during the presentation students need to indicate what they each contributed to the final outcome.

Late Assignment Policy:

Students are expected to submit assignments on time. If a student needs an extension, they need to request it no later than 24 hours in advance of the original deadline; exceptions to this rule can occur. Students with relevant accommodations need to communicate with the professor to determine an appropriate deadline. For each 24-hour period after the deadline that an assignment is late, it is docked 3% of a letter grade (e.g., A- → B+).

Academic Accommodations:

Hartwick College is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and welcomes students with disabilities into all the College's educational programs. The AccessAbility Services Office is responsible for the determination of appropriate modifications for students who encounter barriers due to a disability. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic accommodations, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of AccessAbility Services and Academic Inclusivity, at AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu. To serve you best, requests should be made as early as possible. Please let me know if you have questions or need assistance. **I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design.** I am always happy to consider creative solutions provided they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity. Please feel welcome to work with me as your partner in designing a learning experience that best leverages your strengths and meets your needs -- let's communicate as regularly and as often as you feel comfortable doing.

Inclement Weather Plans:

If the campus is closed due to inclement weather, then class will be canceled (no virtual

meeting). In place of class, the professor will publish a discussion board related to the topic of that class and students are expected to respond to it in accordance with the instructions. If the weather impacts your ability to do/complete your assignments, then contact the professor as soon as possible to figure out a plan. If the weather impacts our exam schedules or your ability to attend an exam, then we will determine an alternative option at that time.

Course & College Policies and Campus Resources:

- Academic Honesty: <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/>.
- Title IX/Sexual Misconduct: <https://www.hartwick.edu/about-us/employment/human-resources/title-ix/>.
- Counseling: <https://www.hartwick.edu/campus-life/health-wellness/counseling-center/> ○
 - Counseling Center Phone: (607) 431-4420
 - Heart Peer Counselors Phone: (607) 431-5050

Classroom Etiquette:

- Technological devices are allowed in the classroom as long as they do not distract from the course topic or distract other students and/or the professor. If you are not sure if your device(s) may be a distraction or if you have other questions about tech in the classroom, please reach out to the professor.
- As long as students clean up after themselves and are not a major distraction to their classmates and professor, they are allowed to eat and drink in the classroom. Be aware that some students may have allergies so it may be best to avoid bringing items that are common allergens (i.e., peanuts).
- If you are caught using AI software (such as ChatGPT) on assignments, they will be considered plagiarism.

Sample Dates:

January 5: J-Term 2026 Begins

January 6: Self-Service ADD/DROP ends at 5PM

January 15 + 16: Project/Paper Proposal Presentations

January 21: Project/Paper Check-In Meetings (Last day to Withdraw from a class)

January 22 & 23: Project/Paper Final Presentations (submit paper on D2L by 11:59PM on day of the presentation)

January 23: Last day of class

January 30: Final grades are available in Self-Service

Syllabus

Introduction // Time Bandits, Blood of Zeus and Modern Retellings

Mythical Greece vs. Historical Rome:

Class Question: Why do we mythologize Greece even when portraying in historical events? Why do we emphasize the historical nature of Rome even when portraying fantastical/fictional events?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966) (1hr 39min)
 - Format: D2L
 - *300* (2006) (1hr 57min)
 - Format: DVD or online rental
- Read:
 - Martin M. Winkler, "The Roman Empire in American Cinema after 1945," *The Classical Journal* vol. 93 no. 2 (December 1997- January 1998): 167-196.
 - Dana Murray, "The Success and Failure of Greek History in Film," *World History et cetera*, October 1, 2015.
<https://etc.worldhistory.org/culture/greek-history-in-film/>.

Mythic Monsters

Class Question: What makes a monster? Are monsters always villains? Are monsters and villains synonymous?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *Perseus Against the Monsters* (1963) (1hr 25min)
 - Format: D2L
 - *The Gorgon* (1965) (1hr 23min)
 - Format: D2L
- Read:
 - Fiona Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Monsters in Greek Literature* (2021), pp.1-20.

The Mythic Hero: Heracles/Hercules

Class Question: Who is Heracles/Hercules? Why is he still so popular? How was he perceived by the ancient Greeks versus modern audiences?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *Hercules* (1983) (1hr 45min)
 - Format: D2L
 - *Hercules* (1997) (1hr 33min)
 - Format: DVD, Disney+
 - *Hercules* (2014, the one starring The Rock) (1hr 38min)
 - Format: DVD, Amazon Prime, Philo, MGM+, The Roku Channel

- Read:
 - “Preface,” in *The Modern Hercules* (2007), pp. ix-xv
 - Lisa Maurice, “Disney’s *Hercules* in Context: Mouse-morality for Mini heroes,” in *The Modern Hercules* (2007), pp. 468-487
 - Sam Summers, “A Real American Hero: the Superhero-fication of Disney’s *Hercules*,” in *The Modern Hercules* (2007), pp. 488-505.

Historic Warriors and Fighters: The Gladiator

Class Question: Can we categorize movies about gladiators as sports films? Or are these historical films that feature sport? Many sports films involve an underdog narrative, so can we describe gladiator movies as having underdog narratives?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *Spartacus* (1960) (3hr 17min)
 - Format: D2L
 - *Gladiator* (2000) (2hr 35min)
 - Format: DVD on Reserve in the Library, Paramount+, Philo, AMC+, The Roku Channel
- Read: Seán Crosson, “The Sports Film,” *KINEMA* (Fall 2015).
<https://openjournals.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/kinema/article/view/1320/1730>.

Epic Wars: The Iliad

Class Question: How do these films/narratives address and portray war in ancient Greece? How do the films portray ideologies around war and nationhood? What exactly is “epic war”?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *Troy* (2004) (2hr 43min)
 - Format: D2L
 - *Iphigenia* (1977) (2hr 10min)
 - Format: D2L
- Read:
 - David Wallace, “The Iliad,” *LitCharts*, September 17, 2013.
<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-iliad>
 - Vanessa Nikolovska, “The Natures of Monsters and Heroes,” *The Review: A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research* 16 (2015): 26-35.

Epic Wars: The Odyssey

Class Question: Who is Odysseus and how are his exploits after the Trojan Wars reflected in the epic and art of the ancient world? How has the film managed to adapt the events of the *Odyssey* for modern audiences?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000) (1hr 46min)
 - Format: DVD, DVD on reserve in the Library

- Read:
 - Lena Tsykynovska, "The Odyssey," *LitCharts*, September 15, 2013. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-odyssey>.

Project/Paper Proposal Presentations

Women and War:

Class Question: What is Lysistrata's role in the play? How is Lysistrata portrayed in the original play versus the 2015 adaptation? How does *Lysistrata* play into ancient Greeks' perceptions of women (or counter them)?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *Chi-Raq* (2015) (2hr 7min)
 - Format: DVD, Amazon Prime Video (free)
- Read:
 - Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (translation and commentary by Sarah Ruden, 2003).
 - Kevin Wetmore, "She (Don't) Gotta Have It: African-American Reception of *Lysistrata*," in *Ancient Comedy and Reception: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Henderson*, edited by S. Douglas Olson (2014), pp.786-796.

Project/Paper Check-In Day

Women in Politics

Class Question: Who was Cleopatra? How is Cleopatra portrayed in pop culture and, more broadly, throughout time? Why has she remained so prominent in the global zeitgeist?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *Cleopatra* (1963) (3hr 53min)
 - Format: D2L
- Read: Ehaab Abdou, "Unpacking Ideologies Shaping Cleopatra's Representation," *Public History Weekly* (October 26, 2023). <https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/11-2023-6/ideologies-cleopatra/>.

New Narratives, Old Stories/Old Narratives, New Stories: Class

Question: How do you tell an old story in a new way?

Assigned Reading/Movie(s):

- Watch:
 - *Hadestown*
 - Format: D2L
 - *Blood of Zeus* (only need to watch one or two episodes)
 - Format: Netflix

- Read: TBD

Final Project/Paper Presentations