

ENGL 303/75956; COMPL 320; CLA 306: Western Literary Backgrounds: Transformative Texts

Instructor: Professor Marlene Hennessy

Location: Mytilini, Isle of Lesbos, Greece

Summer 2024 (July 14 -August 7)

This course can be used to complete: 1) Pluralism & Diversity: Group D (Europe); 2) Required course for English: Foundations for Secondary Education Major; 3) Pre-1800 requirement for all English majors; 4) ELECTIVE for English/Comp Lit/Classical Studies majors or ELECTIVE FOR ALL MAJORS.

Prerequisite: ENGL 220 or equivalent; 3 credits

Course Description:

This unique study-abroad course offers students the opportunity to engage in intensive study and discussion of what are often called “The Great Books”; together we will read some of the world’s most influential and enduring literary works from ancient Greece and Rome. After beginning with the luminous lyric poetry of Sappho, we will read Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Euripides’ *Bacchae*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Students will encounter these foundational ancient texts again and again in the allusions of later Western literature. We not only will focus on the literary elements and rhetorical features of these transformative texts, but also will become familiar with some of the historical contexts that informed them. Throughout we will consider how these writers sought to make sense of their world and how they addressed complex questions about human existence. Topics will include war and heroism, sex and death, poetic creation, and religion and society. There will also be a special focus on the afterlives of these works in the archaeology and material culture of the Mediterranean. As much as possible we will consider the intellectual legacy of these texts across literary history, including recent critical approaches.

Lesbos (Lesbos) is an ideal study-abroad location with thousands of years of history and culture. This scenic island appears in both Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as a strategic part of the Trojan Empire renowned for its handicrafts. According to earlier mythology, the head of Orpheus was buried here by the Muses after washing up on its shores. Sappho, the great lyric poet, was born on the island c. 610 BC and is sometimes referred to as “the tenth Muse.” Lesbos stands at the crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean and is rich in Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Anatolian, and Ottoman heritage, which we will encounter through our site visits. We will reside near the port city of Mytilini, a historic intellectual center in the Aegean known today for both its vibrant student community and castle, a majestic fortress perched above the city that holds live music and performances on summer nights. Our study of transformative ancient texts in this course will be set against the sun, sea, and stunning landscapes of this legendary island.

As part of our course-work we will have experience-based opportunities for learning, with excursions to many iconic historical and cultural sites. Site visits in Athens include the Acropolis Museum and the National Archaeological Museum. Visits outside of Mytilini on the isle of Lesbos include: the Roman Aqueduct of Moria, dating from the 2nd-3rd century AD (6 km away) and the Temple of Messon (29 km away), dedicated to the three gods Zeus, Dionysus, and an Aeolian Mother goddess. This ancient temple, located at the center of the island, is one of the most outstanding examples of Ionian architecture; we will visit the on-site museum there and the nearby ruins of an amphitheater. We will also tour Molyvos castle (57 km away), an atmospheric Byzantine-era castle that is one of the most well preserved in the Mediterranean, with stunning Ottoman medieval architecture. The castle is located above the town of Molyvos (also known as Mythimna), which contains an agora (market) described as “one of the most beautiful streets in the world.” This visit includes an optional trip afterwards to the nearby beach of Petra and the mineral baths of Eftalouy. Our final visit will be to the Petrified Forest (full-day excursion, 1.5 hrs away). This unique landscape, created by volcanic eruptions over 20 million years ago, is one of the wonders of the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. After walking in the footsteps of Aristotle and Lesbos-born philosopher Theophrastus, who wrote about the flora and fauna here, we will visit Moni Ypsilou, an 8th-century hilltop monastery with a museum with antique icons and Byzantine manuscripts. Afterwards, we will stop in the nearby traditional village of Sigri to have our farewell meal at one of the best restaurants on the island, the Cavo di Oro.

Optional site visits that include: in Mytilini, the Archaeological Museum; the Byzantine Museum; the Theophilos Museum, with paintings by one of the most celebrated folk artists, who was inspired by mythology and history; Eriade Museum, where students can view treasures of modern art including those by Greek painters, as well as Picasso, Matisse, and Chagall; the Byzantine gothic church of St Symeon, with 17th-century icons; the Baroque church of St Therapon; and Mitylene castle. Other places of interest include Thermi or Pirgi Thermis (9 km away), Bronze Age ruins of a prehistoric settlement that has been excavated and has become an archaeological site; the historic Monastery of St Raphael (14 km away); Taxiarchis Monastery and Church (Moni Taxiarchon) in Mantamados, dated from the 17th century, steeped in history and filled with legendary Byzantine icons (36 km away); and Eressos or Skala Eresou (83 km away), the birthplace of Sappho, which also contains ruins of the 5th-century Church of Saint Andrew, with an archeological museum with relics of life from the ancient era up to Byzantine times. Nearby on the hill of Vigla is a Hellenic polygonal wall, ruins of a medieval castle, a Roman cistern and two turrets, one Genovese and the other Turkish. Lesbos is a remarkable gateway for visiting mainland Greece, other Greek islands, and Turkey.

Required Texts: (3 purchased or rented books)

Title/ Author/Translator/ISBN #/ Price New/Used/ Rental Price @ Shakespeare & Co.

1. *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works*, transl. D. Rayor Cambridge, 2023) (selections on Blackboard)
2. *The Iliad*, Homer. Translated by Richmond Lattimore. # 0226470490 /\$15/11.25 /Rentable \$6-\$82.
3. *The Odyssey*, Homer. Translated by Robert Fagles. #0140268863/\$18/13.50/ Rentable \$9-12
4. *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles. Translated by Robert Fagles. (on Blackboard) Online. https://jenningswanack.weebly.com/uploads/6/6/8/4/66845623/oedipus_full_text_fagles_with_scenes_labeled.pdf4.
5. *The Bacchae*, transl. William Arrowsmith (Blackboard, online at: <https://classics.domains.skidmore.edu/lit-campus-only/primary/translations/Euripides%20Bac.pdf>)
6. *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum; # 0151705291/\$10.35/kindle \$9.99.

Learning Outcomes: The course will emphasize close reading, critical imagination, and academic discussion, and it is expected that students will strengthen these analytical skills. Students will deepen their understanding of the chain of influence which extends from the earliest Western literary texts through to the works of the present day. They will develop an understanding of these older texts as literary productions in their own right as well as acquire facility in recognizing allusions to these works. They will also become familiar with recent literary and historical approaches to these transformative texts.

Requirements: weekly in-class writing assignments and class participation; one 5-page paper; one 10-page paper.

Class Schedule:

WEEK ONE

Sun 7/14	Arrive in Athens 6PM Welcome Dinner: Location TBD (3hrs)
Mon 7/15	Visit Acropolis Museum and National Archaeological Museum (3hrs)
Tues 7/16	Travel to Lesbos (enter ferry information) Student Lodging: University of the Aegean <i>Sappho</i> (selections); Introduction to Homer's works

Weds 7/17	10AM - 1 PM Class (3 hrs) <i>Iliad</i> Bks 1-8
Thurs 7/18	10AM - 1PM Class (3 hrs) <i>Iliad</i> Books 9-16

WEEK TWO

Tues 7/23	10AM - 1PM Class (3hrs) <i>Iliad</i> Books 17-24
Weds 7/24	10AM - 1PM Class (3hrs) <i>Odyssey</i> Books 1-8
Thurs 7/25	10AM - 1PM Class (3hrs) <i>Odyssey</i> Books 9-16
Fri 7/26	Optional: visit Archaeological and Byzantine Museums

WEEK THREE

Tues 7/30	10AM - 1PM Class (3hrs) <i>paper 1 due; Odyssey</i> Books 17-24
Weds 7/31	10AM - 1PM Class (3hrs) <i>Oedipus Rex/ Bacchae</i>
Thurs 8/1	10AM - 1PM Class (3hrs) <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Fri 8/2	Optional: Theophilos and Eriade Museums

WEEK FOUR

Mon 8/5	Visit Roman Acqueduct of Moria, Temple of Messon, and Molivos Castle (full day)
Tues 8/6	Visit Petrified Forest, Moni Ypsilou, and Sigri (full day)

	7PM Farewell Dinner
Weds 8/7	Departure

POST-GREECE

Weds 8/25	<i>final essay due by 8/15 MS Word, via e-mail</i>
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