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SYLLABUS ARCHIVE

Course and Instructor Information:

Ancient Greece in Literature and Film

Prof. Ryan Abrecht

University of San Diego, History Department

Helpful Context:

Course first designed in Spring 2017 and most recently taught in Spring 2019.

Average enrollment: 35

This is an undergraduate course primarily intended for non-majors.

It is taught completely in-person.

It fulfills a Core Curriculum "Historical Inquiry" requirement.

Reflections of the Instructor:

Q: What do you consider to be particular strengths of this course?

A: Increasing student engagement; practicing multiple critical approaches.

HIST 155: GREEK HISTORY IN LITERATURE AND FILM

MW 2:30-3:50



COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to History 155! In this class, we'll study Greek history by analyzing novels, film, and television set in ancient Greece. As we do so, we'll ask ourselves what separates history from fiction and what we mean when we argue about "accurate" representations of the past. We'll assess the conventions of literary works and visual media to think about how a good (or not so good) piece of historical fiction is crafted, as well as how different creative processes produce different understandings of the history behind the drama. Finally, we'll discuss whether Greek history has been used or abused, and decide whether historical fiction enhances or distorts our understanding of the past.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Professor:	Dr. Ryan Abrecht
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Office Hours:	XXX

KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the relationship between history and fiction? Are they totally separate things, or different points on a shared spectrum?
- How should we compare different types of fictional media such as novels and films? What are the conventions of different literary and cinematic genres, and their respective audiences?
- What key figures and events shaped Greek history in the archaic and classical periods?
- What does ancient Greece signify in our popular culture? How do fictionalized portrayals of antiquity shape our understanding of our own times?
- Do works historical fiction chiefly expand, or distort, our understanding of the past? Can fiction be dangerous?

HISTORICAL INQUIRY LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, you will be able to: formulate and investigate historical questions about ancient Greece and its legacy (LO 1); analyze a range of of media about ancient Greece while demonstrating understanding of their historical contexts and referencing them to support your analysis (LO 2); engage with contemporary scholarship in history, literary theory, and film and media studies (LO 3); effectively communicate your understanding of archaic and classical Greek history in conversation and writing (LO 4); and cite sources correctly following the conventions of the Chicago Manual of Style (LO 5).

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (Canongate, 2006).
- Homer, *The Essential Homer*. Translated by Stanley Lombardo (Hackett Classics, 2000).
- Frank Miller, *300* (Dark Horse, 1999).
- Kieron Gillen, Ryan Kelly, and Jordie Bellair, *Three* (Image Comics, 2014).
- Alecos Papadatos, Abraham Kawa, Annie Di Donna, *Democracy* (Bloomsbury, 2015).
- Mary Renault, *The Last of the Wine* (Vintage, 2001).
- Sophocles, *Oedipus the King and Other Tragedies*. Translated by Oliver Taplin (Oxford, 2016).
- Annabel Lyon, *The Golden Mean* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).
- Aristophanes, *The Complete Plays*. Translated by Paul Roche (New American Library, 2005).
- Additional course readings shared as PDFs via Blackboard (marked “BB” below)

GRADING STANDARDS

Class participation	10%
Response papers (4)	60% (15% each)
Exam #1	15%
Exam #2	15%

ATTENDANCE

You should be present at every class, mentally and physically. This is especially true on days when we analyze film or TV clips (marked “View” below), as they will not be made available outside class. I understand that extenuating circumstances sometimes arise; if this is the case, please let me know why you cannot attend. If circumstances make you miss more than three classes, you may have overextended yourself and should consider dropping the course.

PARTICIPATION

We’ll spend a lot of time talking to each other in this class; you should strive to take an active role in all discussions. I’m eager to hear your comments, thoughts, questions, and opinions. I appreciate that people learn in different ways and that some are more verbal than others, but also believe that engaging with one’s peers is one of the best ways to master challenging material and acquire new skills. Plus, it makes class more fun!

PREPARATION

Staying on top of the readings is crucial. Above all, it is important that you finish each book on time, since its due date will coincide with a response paper and a discussion of the work as a whole. My lectures will provide historical context for major characters, events, and concepts. As we work through the three novels. Just don’t use these days as an excuse to slide on the reading! You won’t be able to cram an entire book into your head the night before it’s due.

EXAMS

Two in-class examinations will assess your knowledge of the major historical figures and events we’ll study this semester, and your understanding of their significance for both ancient and modern history. Chronologically, the exams will cover Greek history from roughly the late Bronze Age through the career of Alexander the Great. Study guides will be posted in advance of the exams, and I will provide more detailed information about them as the course progresses.

RESPONSE PAPERS

Four papers (approximately 4 pages each) will ask you to respond to the readings and engage with issues such as: the relationship between history and fiction, how the creative process of authors and filmmakers shapes the ways we remember the past, what role historical research plays in the creation of works of historical fiction, or the relationship between representations of the past and the concerns of the present. Prompts for each paper assignment will be forthcoming; their due dates are listed in **red** below.

LATE WORK

Illnesses, death in the family, and other traumatic events are unfortunately part of life. If you contact me within 24 hours and provide documentation, I do my best to accommodate your situation. Otherwise, late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for each calendar day they are overdue.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately passes off another's words or ideas without acknowledging their source. If you plagiarize in this class, you will fail the assignment on which you are working and your case may be passed on for additional disciplinary action as a violation of the university's Academic Integrity Policy. I will issue guidelines about how to cite sources properly in advance of the first writing assignment, and am always available for consultation if you are uncertain about tackling this task.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

28 January (M)	Introduction: The Gospel Truth
30 January (W)	History and Fiction Read: Curthoys and Docker, <i>Is History Fiction?</i> chs. 2-3 Korhonen, "The History/Literature Debate"
4 February (M)	Historical Fiction: Uses and Abuses Read: Pouncy, "History, Real and Invented" Bartel, "The Puzzle of Historical Criticism"
6 February (W)	The Trojan War: Myth Meets History Read: <i>Iliad</i> bks 1-4
11 February (M)	The Odyssey and the Heroic Legacy Read: <i>Odyssey</i> bks 1, 5-10, 21-23
13 February (W)	Heroism Reimagined Read: Atwood, <i>Penelopiad</i> (to ch. 14) View: <i>Xena: Warrior Princess</i> (1996)
18 February (M)	Heroism at Home Read: Atwood, <i>Penelopiad</i> (to finish)
20 February (W)	Archaic Greece and the Rise of the Polis PAPER #1 DUE

- 25 February (M) **Sparta and the Persian Wars**
Read: Miller, *300*
- 27 February (W) **Orientalism, Then and Now**
Read: Hauser, *Orientalism* (introduction)
Oh and Kutufam, "The Orientalized Other and Corrosive
Femininity in Miller's 300"
- 4 March (M) **NO CLASS (Spring Break)**
- 6 March (W) **NO CLASS (Spring Break)**
- 11 March (M) **Spartan Superheroes, Spartan Slavedrivers**
Read: Gillen, Kelly, and Bellair, *Three*
Kovacs, "Truth, Justice, and the Spartan Way"
- 13 March (W) **Athens and the Invention of Democracy**
Read: Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (pp. 53-73)
- 18 March (M) **Democratic Heroes?**
Read: Papadatos, Kawa, and Di Donna, *Democracy*
- 20 March (W) **Democracy and Empire**
PAPER #2 DUE
- 25 March (M) **EXAM #1**
- 27 March (W) **Athens, Sparta, and the Peloponnesian War**
Read: Renault, *Last of the Wine* (to pg. 151)
- 1 April (M) **Greek Love and Gender Relations**
Read: Renault, *Last of the Wine* (to pg. 220)
- 3 April (W) **The Pursuit of Excellence**
Read: Renault, *Last of the Wine* (to pg. 297)
- 8 April (M) **Imagining Athens**
Read: Renault, *Last of the Wine* (to finish)
- 10 April (W) **Greek Drama and its Legacy**
PAPER #3 DUE
- 15 April (M) **Drama and Democracy**
Read: Sophocles, *Philoctetes*
View: *Theater of War*
- 17 April (W) **The Oedipus Complex**
Read: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
- 22 April (M) **NO CLASS (Easter Break)**

- 24 April (W) **Laughing at Death**
Read: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
- 29 April (M) **The Art of Adaptation**
Read: Aristophanes, *Frogs*
- 1 May (W) **Lysistrata in Chicago**
View: *Chi-Raq* (2015)
PAPER #4 DUE
- 6 May (M) **Postwar Athens and the Rise of Macedon**
Read: Lyon, *The Golden Mean* (first third)
- 8 May (W) **The Life and Times of Alexander the Great**
Read: Lyon, *The Golden Mean* (second third)
- 13 May (M) **Final Thoughts: Ancient Greece's Future**
Read: Lyon, *The Golden Mean* (to finish)
- FINAL EXAM:** **May 20 (Monday), 2:00-4:00 pm**