



English 9130A

The Orphic Tradition: Gender, Genre, Genius

Fall Term 2015
Wednesdays from 9:30am to 12:30pm
Weldon Library 107

Professor James Miller
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1. Course Description



Firebrand of hell first tynd in Phlegeton,
By thousand furies, and from thence out throwen
Into this world, to worke confusion,
And set it all on fire by force vnknown,
Is wicked discord, whose small sparkes once blowen
None but a God or godlike man can slake;
Such as was Orpheus, that when strife was growen
Amongst those famous ympes of Greece, did take
His siluer Harpe in hand, and shortly friends them make.

The Orphic fantasy of a “godlike man” with musical powers, a genius capable of imposing concord on the chaotic world with his “siluer Harpe” or any other instrument he happens to play, decisively animated Spenser's grand project to sing Gloriana's ideal civilization into existence amid the barbarous forces threatening Elizabeth's realm with “confusion.” The first half of the course will trace the complex development of the Orphic tradition from its origins in Ancient Greek religion and philosophy through its culturally influential variations in classical Latin poetry to its mystical, erotic, and political allegorizations in Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. The second half of the course will consider Modern and Postmodern treatments of the Orpheus Myth with a critical focus on issues of gender and genre within the Paragone or “Inter-Arts Debate.” While the reading list will lean heavily towards works written in English, certain key Orphic texts in the wider tradition of Western literature – e.g. the anonymous *Orphic Hymns*, Virgil's *Georgics IV*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Dante's *Purgatorio* 28 – will also be studied from a comparative perspective in English translations. Among the modern treatments of the Orpheus Myth, three works representing three different genres (drama, lyric, novel) will be given sustained attention in the course: *Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams; *The Orpheus and Eurydice Cycle* by Margaret Atwood; and *The Ground beneath Her Feet* by Salman Rushdie. Since the Paragone debate between the arts (as to which art is “supreme” over all the others) will be a unifying critical concern in the course, some attention will also be paid to the contributions made to the Orphic tradition by opera, dance, painting, and cinema. Screenings of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Cocteau's *Orphée*, and Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* will be scheduled in tandem with the course.

2. Assignments / Grade Breakdown

1. Critical Essay (20-25 pages).....60%
2. Oral Presentation in class (30 minutes).....30%
To be scheduled in weeks 4-13
3. Respondent's Remarks (10 minutes).....10%
To be scheduled in weeks 4-13





3. Schedule of Readings

WEEK ONE: September 16 → Mythological Criticism: Myth / Mytheme / Meme

Readings: Lévi-Strauss, “The Structure of Myths” (1958)

Dawkins, excerpt from *The Selfish Gene* (1976)

WEEK TWO: September 23 → Orpheus as mystical philosopher

Readings: *Orphic Hymns*; Plato, *Symposium* [speech of Phaedrus]

WEEK THREE: September 30 → Orpheus as tragic bard

Readings: Virgil, *Georgics* IV; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

WEEK FOUR: October 7 → Orpheus as questing soul

Readings: Boethius, *De consolazione* [hymn];

Anon, *Sir Orfeo* [Breton lai in Middle English]

WEEK FIVE: October 14→ Orpheus as saved soul

Readings: Dante, *Purgatorio* 9-10, 28, 30

WEEK SIX: October 21→ Orpheus as ideal pastoral poet
Readings: R.B., "Orpheus His Journey to Hell";
Spenser, "Epithalamion" and *Faerie Queene* VI.10

WEEK SEVEN: October 28→ Orpheus as civilizing genius
Readings: Bacon, *The Wisdom of the Ancients* [ch. XI];
Milton, "Lycidas," "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity"
Marvel, "Upon Appleton House"

WEEK EIGHT: November 4→ Orpheus as genre-generator
Screenings: Monteverdi, *Orfeo*;
Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*

WEEK NINE: November 11→ Orpheus as Romantic ego-mirror
Reading: Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*
Screening: Cocteau, *Orfée*

WEEK TEN: November 18→ Orpheus as erotic life-force
Readings: Williams, *Orpheus Descending*
Screening: Camus, *Orfeu Negro*

WEEK ELEVEN: November 25→ Orpheus as modern anti-muse
Readings: Dick, "Orpheus with Clay Feet"

WEEK TWELVE: December 2→ Eurydice as gender-contender
Readings: Sarah Ruhl, *Eurydice*
Margaret Atwood, *The Orpheus and Eurydice Cycle*

WEEK THIRTEEN: December 9→ Orpheus as postmodern celebrity
Readings: Rushdie, *The Ground beneath Her Feet*





4. Required Readings

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myths" (1958) [online text]
2. Richard Dawkins, "Memes: the new replicators," *The Selfish Gene*, ch. 11 (1976) [online text]
3. Anonymous, *Orphic Hymns* [online text]
4. Plato, Speech of Phaedrus, *Symposium* [online text]
5. Virgil, *Georgics* IV [online text]
6. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, books 10-11 [online text]

7. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* Book 3, meter 12 [online text]
8. Anonymous, *Sir Orfeo* [online text]
9. Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio* 9-10, 28, 30 [online text]
10. R.B., "Orpheus His Journey to Hell" [online text]
11. Edmund Spenser, "Epithalamion" [online text]
12. Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene* VI.10 [online text]
13. Francis Bacon, *The Wisdom of the Ancients* chapter XI [online text]
14. John Milton, "Lycidas" [online text]
15. John Milton, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" [online text]
16. Andrew Marvel, "Upon Appleton House" [online text]
17. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus* [on order at UWO Bookstore]
18. Tennessee Williams, *Orpheus Descending* [on order at UWO Bookstore]
19. Philip K. Dick, "Orpheus with Clay Feet" [on order at UWO Bookstore]
20. Sarah Ruhl, *Eurydice* [on order at UWO Bookstore]
21. Margaret Atwood, *The Orpheus and Eurydice Cycle* [Weldon, reserved book]
22. Salman Rushdie, *The Ground beneath Her Feet* [on order at UWO Bookstore]

5. Required Viewings [screenings to be scheduled in The Pride Library]

1. Claudio Monteverdi, *Orfeo* [opera]
2. Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice* [opera]
3. Jean Cocteau, *Orf  e* [film]
4. Michel Camus, *Orfeu Negro* [film]

6. URLs for Online Texts

Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myths” (1958)

http://www.jstor.org/stable/536768?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Richard Dawkins, “Memes: The New Replicators,” Chapter Eleven of *The Selfish Gene*

<http://www.rubinghscience.org/memetics/dawkinsmemes.html>

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book 3, metre 12

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14328/14328-h/14328-h.htm>

Anonymous, *Sir Orfeo*

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-sir-orfeo>

Dante, *Purgatorio* 9-10, 28, 30

<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/index.html>

Richard Barnfield, “Orpheus His Journey to Hell” (1595)

<http://literature.proquest.com/searchFulltext.do?id=Z000473124&childSectionId=Z200473127&divLevel=&queryId=2869995358019&area=poetry&forward=textsFT&pageSize=&print=No&size=44Kb&queryType=findWork&fromToc=true&warn=Yes>

Spenser, *Epithalamion* (online)

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174458>

Spenser, *Faerie Queene* VI.10

<http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/queene6.html>

Francis Bacon, *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, chapter XI

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Wisdom_of_the_Ancients/3#Chapter_XI

Andrew Marvel, "Upon Appleton House"

<http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/marvell/appleton.htm>

John Milton, "Lycidas"

https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/lycidas/text.shtml

John Milton, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity"

https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/nativity/text.shtml



7. Books on order at the UWO Bookstore

1. Tennessee Williams, *Orpheus Descending*

- **Paperback:** 208 pages --> full title: *Orpheus Descending and Suddenly Last Summer*
- **Publisher:** New Directions (Dec 4 2012)
- **ISBN-10:** 0811219399
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0811219396

2. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Poems: with parallel German text* [for "The Sonnets to Orpheus"]

Paperback: 416 pages

- **Publisher:** Oxford University Press; Bilingual edition (May 14 2011)
- **ISBN-10:** 019956941X
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0199569410

3. Salman Rushdie, *The Ground beneath Her Feet*

Paperback: 592 pages

- **Publisher:** Vintage Canada; Vintage Canada ed., 2000 edition (May 9 2000)
- **ISBN-10:** 0676972640
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0676972641

4. Philip K. Dick, "Orpheus with Clay Feet"

The Collected Stories Of Philip K. Dick Volume 4: The Minority Report (Citadel Twilight)

Series: Citadel Twilight

- **Paperback:** 396 pages
- **Publisher:** Citadel; 1st Carol Pub. Group Ed edition (January 27, 1998)
- **ISBN-10:** 0806512768
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0806512761

5. Sarah Ruhl, *Eurydice*

- ***Paperback:*** 71 pages
- **Publisher:** Samuel French Inc Plays (Dec 28 2009)
- **Language:** English
- **ISBN-10:** 0573662444
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0573662447

8. Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf.

9. Graduate Course Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For

example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. for example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.