

Religion 305 [WSP 315]: Greek Goddesses

Spring 2001

T – Th 10:00–11:20, HL 202

Professor Patricia Miller, 501B Hall of Languages Teaching Assistant:

Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:30–4:00, and by appointment Melissa Conroy

Course Content and Perspectives

In an article written several years ago, feminist theologian Carol Christ made the following remarks that are still relevant today: "The suggestion that the Goddess be reintroduced into Western religion sounds strange to many. Even the word *Goddess* seems to have only a vague and shadowy meaning, connoting perhaps a fertility fetish, a Greek myth, or the beliefs of primitive peoples. What do feminists mean when they say *Goddess*?"

The study of Greek goddesses as a topic in its own right, separable from the larger unit of ancient Greek religion in which the goddesses took their place, is a very recent phenomenon. Only in the past twenty-five years or so have scholars turned their attention to the goddesses as a special focus of study and, as the quotation from Christ suggests, this scholarly enterprise has been fueled by feminist interests. This course, then, exists within a specific cultural and historical context, that is, the movement for women's rights in the late twentieth century, particularly in the United States. Specifically, this course owes its being (and most of its reading material) to efforts by feminist scholars to recover from the past those cultural and religious images that allow for the expression and affirmation of female being-in-the-world. The imagery of the goddesses from Greek antiquity has emerged as a powerful resource for the expression of values and for the construction of a pluralized universe.

Scholars disagree, however, on what kind of values emerge from the study of goddesses and women in antiquity. Some have found in this material a resource for contemporary women's spirituality; others have found there the birthplace of repressive patriarchal structures and perspectives. This debate is still going on, and in this course you as a student of this material will be part of that debate since we will be reading diverse interpretations of the goddess materials.

Since no object exists in a "pure" form in the past--that is, since data from the past are shaped by the ways in which we as interpreters look at them and interact with them--this course is situated *both* in ancient Greek history *and* in contemporary America. Those who write about goddesses--and those of us who read about them--are participating in a renaissance of connectedness with past traditions that, as one part of our heritage, may contribute to new or renewed understandings of the feminine, indeed of the human, for the present time.

Required Texts, available at the Orange Student Bookstore

Sargent, Thelma, trans., *The Homeric Hymns*

Downing, Christine, *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*

DuBois, Page, *Sowing the Body* (Note: this is available only at Campus Copies in

Marshall Square Mall; **reader #6036**)

Foley, Helene, ed., *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

Harrison, Jane Ellen, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*

Pomeroy, Sarah, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*

With the exception of Sargent, these books are also on reserve in the Reserve Room in Bird Library, together with the following:

Neils, Jennifer, *Goddess and Polis*

Olson, Carl, *The Book of the Goddess*

Foley, Helene, "A Question of Origins: Goddess Cults Greek and Modern"

Schedule of Readings

Introduction: Jan. 16

I. The "Great Goddess": Jan. 18 - **23**

Olson, *Book of the Goddess*, Ch.1 (Barstow, "Prehistoric Goddess")

Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, Slaves*, Ch. 1

Downing, *The Goddess*, Ch. 1

II. Mothers: Gaia (Ge) and Rhea: Jan. **25** - 30

Homeric Hymn to Earth and *Homeric Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*

Olson, *Book of the Goddess*, Ch. 4 (Downing, "Mother Goddess")

Downing, *The Goddess*, Ch. 6

Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 257-300

III. Mothers and Daughters: Demeter and Persephone

Feb. **1** - 8: *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in Foley, pp. 2-64

Feb. **13** - 15: Demeter as Grain Goddess

Harrison, *Prolegomena*, Ch. 4

DuBois, *Sowing the Body*, Chs. 2 and 3

First Essay Due, Feb. 20

Feb 20, **22**, 27: Mysteries and the Mother-Daughter Romance

Foley, pp. 65-169

Downing, *The Goddess*, Ch. 2

IV. Wives: Mar. **1** - 8

Homeric Hymn to Hera

Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, Slaves*, Chs. 2-3

DuBois, *Sowing the Body*, Ch. 4

Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 315-21

Downing, *The Goddess*, Ch. 4

Spring Break, March 11 - 18

V. Goddesses of Death: Hecate, Medusa, Ariadne: Mar. **20** - 27

Harrison, *Prolegomena*, Ch. 5

DuBois, *Sowing the Body*, Ch. 5

Downing, *The Goddess*, Ch. 3

Second Essay Due, Mar. 29

VI. Virgins: Athena and Artemis

Athena: Mar. 29, Apr. **3**, 5

Homeric Hymn to Athena

Downing, *The Goddess*, Ch. 5

Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 300-307

Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, Slaves*, Chs. 4-5

Neils, *Goddess and Polis*, pp. 13-27, 103-117 [on reserve, Bird Lib.]

Artemis and Amazons: Apr. **10** - 17

Homeric Hymn to Artemis

Downing, *The Goddess*, Ch. 7

VII. Lovers: Aphrodite: Apr. **19** - 24

Homeric Hymns to Aphrodite

Downing, *The Goddess*, Ch. 8

Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 307-315

VIII. What Was This Course About?: Concluding Reflections

Apr. 26: Olson, *Book of the Goddess*, Ch. 17 (C. Christ, "Symbols of Goddess") [on reserve]

May 1: Helene Foley, "A Question of Origins: Goddess Cults Greek and Modern" [on reserve]

Third Essay Due, May 8 (at Noon in 501 Hall of Languages)

Course Requirements

Among other things, this course is a study in the conflict of interpretations. In order for interpretive positions to be explored, tested, and contested, there must be vigorous public discussion. All students are required to contribute to the ongoing enterprise of classroom discussion and debate.

There are four requirements for this course: **a set of in-class essays and three take-home essays**. Each of these will comprise 25% of the final grade.

The In-Class Essays

Please be aware of the dates in the schedule of readings which are underlined and in boldface. These dates mark the first day of discussion of the material listed underneath the dates. On each of these underlined days, there will be an in-class writing assignment at the beginning of class. Usually, students will be shown an art-slide and asked to discuss the art object from the perspective of the assigned readings. Make notes on the most important points in the readings and bring them to class to use in writing your in-class essay and always bring your copy of the Homeric Hymns, when relevant. **Students are required to write seven of the possible ten in-class essays**. No make-up essays are possible; this means that you must be in class to write the essays. Taken as a whole, the essays are worth 25% of the final grade. If you do not write all seven essays, you will lose the entire 25% of the final grade that the in-class essays represent. The essays will form the basis for beginning class discussions, so be prepared to be asked to read your essay aloud to your classmates and to defend what you have written in the context of spirited intellectual debate. The essays will be collected by the instructor and read for evidence of coverage of the reading material; grading will be on a 4 – 0 scale.

The Take-home Essays

Students are required to write three take-home essays of 5-7 pages in length. The essays must be typed, double-spaced, with standard margins and type size. Due-dates for the essays are Feb. 20, Mar. 29 and May 8. **Late essays will not be accepted**, except for documented medical emergencies. The essays must be grammatically correct and free of spelling errors; essays that are marred in these ways will be returned, uncorrected, for revision and will not be graded until they are in the proper form. When quoting an author, please use quotation marks and give credit in a footnote or in parentheses immediately following the quotation. Familiarize yourself with the rules for plagiarism, and present the ideas of others correctly.

For the first two essays, choose your favorite goddess from the appropriate section of the course and compose an analysis of this goddess in conversation with the ancient sources and with the contemporary authors whose interpretations we will be reading. Pay special attention to conflicts in interpretation, and discuss how these differing views affect one's conception of a particular goddess (in terms of her function in Greek culture, her

attributes, and so forth). Also, please consult the website entitled "Diotima: Materials for the Study of Women and Gender in the Ancient World": <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/>. Click on "Images," and in the list of sites there you will find a host of informational sources; especially good are "Classical Mythology: The Ancient Sources—Olympian Gods and Goddesses," VRoma Project, and Perseus. Choose at least one artwork (a sculpture, vase painting, coin, temple, etc.) to enhance your discussion of the goddess you have selected (and include a copy of this with your essay). You may also draw on any other resources available from these sites (e.g., essays, ancient sources). Be sure to give proper credit when quoting from these sites. The point of the essays is to engage in critical analysis of the course readings.

The assignment is the same for the third essay, but you must additionally include in your analysis ideas from the two essays that we will read for the final two sessions of the course.

Finally: regular attendance is required; class sessions begin at 10:00 a.m.
Please arrive promptly.