

TO THE UNDERWORLD AND BACK
L283.01 Spring 2010

Dr. Saul Myers

Tuesdays 1-3:45, Bunting 470

Office Hours: Bunting 429 Tuesday 4-5 and by appointment

410-235-1225

Itinerary

A hero's descent to the underworld and his return to the realm of the living is a powerful myth that had been adapted by Homer, Virgil, and Dante to the grand designs of epic poetry. After reviewing the 'descent and return' theme in Greek and Roman myth, this course traces the transformation of the myth into epic as we follow the journeys of Odysseus, Aeneas, and Dante into the nether regions. What kind of experience is this? What kind of knowledge does the hero gain by this search of the realm of the dead? What conventions concerning this journey have the Greek, Roman and Christian epic traditions established, conventions still honored, and also undermined, in the Cantos of Ezra Pound? Already in Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs* some of these conventions are poked fun of. The second half of our study explores romantic, modern and contemporary variations of the descent/visit to the underworld theme. We'll see how the idea of Hell is transformed in the visionary poetry of Blake and Rimbaud, and then how it becomes the venue for the philosophical drama of Sartre. When we come to Kafka's story *The Hunter Gracchus* it will be difficult for us to mark off the realm of the living from that of the dead, as Kafka's protagonist wanders both realms without being a member of either. How does the contemporary novelist Echenoz continue and change the Orpheus story? We can't address any of these questions without making the literary journey ourselves. So let's go.

Requirements

You write two 5-page essays for this course as well short, two paragraph responses to each weekly reading. There are occasional in-class writings as well. The essays, weekly short responses, and in-class writings comprise 75% of your final grade. The final component of your grade will be based on my evaluation of your participation in class. The factors that comprise participation are: preparedness (have you done the reading and thought about it?), the quality of your contributions to discussion and interpretation, and your attendance record.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. All excused absences must be verified. The instructor reserves the right to fail any student who has accrued more than two unexcused absences.

If you miss a class, you are responsible for the assigned reading due on that day as well as for the assignment due for the next week.

Plagiarism Statement and Policy

Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas without acknowledgment. It is a serious breach of academic integrity and is grounds for failure of an assignment or failure of the course. Repeat offenses will be referred to Academic Affairs with a recommendation for suspension or dismissal from MICA.

To be responsible when summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, include a citation like:

Henri Michaux quipped “If Christ had not been crucified, he would not have had a hundred disciples in Europe.” (Michaux, p. 33)

Be sure to cite the source in parentheses and then give the source in a Works Cited at the end of your paper. Follow standard guidelines such as those given in the *MLA* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Familiarize yourself with these guidelines in Diana Hacker’s *A Pocket Style Manual*, and always check with your instructor before turning in questionable work.

Texts

The following required texts are available at the College Bookstore:

The Inferno of Dante (Robert Pinsky translation); Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell* (Donald Revell translation);

Aristophanes, *Frogs* (Ian Johnston translation); Sartre, *No Exit and Two other Plays*; Echenoz, *Piano*.

All other readings will be either class handouts or posted on Blackboard.

Reading Schedule

January

19 Introduction. The Greek Mythic Foundation: Living visitors to the Underworld: Persephone, Herakles, Odysseus, and Orpheus
Consideration: The story of Orpheus and Eurydice, in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

26 Homer, *The Odyssey* (Fitzgerald translation), from book Eleven: Odysseus must visit the Underworld to consult Tiresias the soothsayer about his future.
Ezra Pound, Canto I (handouts)

February

2 Virgil, *The Aeneid* (Fitzgerald translation), Book VI (handout) Aeneas’s journey through the Underworld (handout)

9 Aristophanes, *Frogs*

16 Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos I-VIII(pp 3-93)

23 Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos IX-XVII (87-177)

March

2 Dante, *The inferno*, Cantos XVIII-XXVI (181-279)

9 Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos XXVII-XXXIV (283-end)

SPRING BREAK

23 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* **First Essay Due**

30 Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*

April	
6	Sartre, "No Exit"
13	Echenoz, <i>Piano</i>
20	Kafka, "The Hunter Gracchus"
27	Watch sections of the film <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> Final Essay Due
May	
4	Conclusions.

ADA Compliance Statement

Learning Resource Center ADA Compliance Statement Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://www.mica.edu/LRC>

Health and Safety Compliance

From the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)

The Office works to provide EHS support for all members of the MICA community. The primary goal of the Office is to be proactive in establishing a culture of safety in which each member of the community shares ownership responsibility that allows each person to be involved in maintaining a healthy work and studying environment. EHS uses several methods to achieve this objective.

First, the EHS office looks at the totality of the EHS requirements by combining campus needs with state and federal requirements and clearly communicating the shared policies and procedures. Second, EHS identifies training needs and develops guidelines for the use of equipment, material and procedures. Third, we ensure compliance with policies through evaluations, inspections, and committees.

It is the responsibility of faculty and students to understand health and safety policies relevant to their individual activities and to review MICA's Emergency Action Plan, as well as to participate in training, drills, etc. It is also each faculty member's responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of the Academic Department's also publish EHS procedures and policies such as a dress code, the use of personal protective equipment, fire safety, training, and how to properly dispose of chemical waste. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, it is the responsibility of the faculty to review, test, and assess each student's awareness of basic safety procedures, such as evacuation routes, use of chemicals, fire prevention, and all other guidelines posted by the Environmental Health and Safety Office, (e.g., smoking policy, independent studio policies, pet policy, disposing of hazardous and chemical waste, etc).

To become a member of the Faculty EHS Committee or for any questions relating to EHS, please contact Denelle Bowser, EHS Manager, at dbowser@mica.edu or by calling 410.462.7593. You can also visit the department online at www.mica.edu/ehs

H1N1 Pandemic Information

From the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)

What to do if I get sick?

If you are sick consider the following:

- Limit contact with other people as much as possible. DO NOT GO TO CLASS! Seek medical*

attention at Mount Royal Medial Assoc. (410) 225-8855 but please call ahead

- Students who are sick should self-isolate for at least 24 hours after any fever is gone.*
- Make sure to get plenty of rest and drink clear fluids to keep from being dehydrated*
- Avoid normal activities including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings*

Reporting Procedures

- Contact the Office of Student Affairs at 410-225-2422 who will assist with plans for self-isolation, arranging for meals, and any other necessary support*
- Contact any faculty whose class you anticipate missing and inform them of your illness. Work with them to make arrangements for catching up on any missed work. If you have difficulty reaching your faculty or if your illness lingers to the point where you will miss two or more of any one class contact the Office of Student Affairs*