

Warriors, Intellectuals, and Supermen: The Hero in the German Cultural Imagination

GST 3xx

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. David O'Dell Neville
Office Hours: TTh 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM, or by appointment
Contact: dneville@elon.edu | 336.278.5889 | Carlton 213
Instructor Website: <http://facstaff.elon.edu/dneville>

Seminar Overview

Whether facing a fire-breathing dragon with a broadsword or conquering the far-reaches of the known universe with a Geth pulse rifle, the hero is frequently depicted as a solitary figure who must overcome impossible odds and endure strenuous physical hardships in order to accomplish his mission. The actual construction of the heroic figure, however, is much more complex and is ultimately formed through an intricate interplay of social norms and cultural expectations, both explicitly stated and implicitly suggested. Relying on texts primary from the larger German tradition, the seminar will examine the development of the heroic figure through time and across a broad range of texts, including heroic poetry, epic poetry, Arthurian romance, chapbook, epistolary novel, opera, memoir, film, fantasy, graphic novel, and video game. Purpose of the seminar will be to interrogate the manner in which the heroic figure is constructed over time in Western culture, to evaluate how society and culture shape this construction, and to determine what it means to be a hero today. Seminar participants will play a contemporary video game (*Mass Effect 2*) in order to examine its protagonist within the interpretive framework developed through our class readings and discussions and to experience first-hand the manner in which a pure “reading” of its heroic narrative is troubled by player agency and ludic activity. The seminar capstone experience will be a student-led conference where course participants will present their research to a broader audience.

Primary Texts and Secondary Literature

Primary readings are drawn from a wide range of texts and are meant to illustrate the complex formation of the heroic figure across time. Our readings of the primary texts will also be augmented by secondary literature, which is an important part of our interpretive project in that it provides us with one possible interpretation of the primary texts. These interpretations will allow for richer in-class discussions, provide a topic for informed conversation, guide and inspire the research into our own chosen topics, and stretch our interpretive capabilities by demonstrating how professionals in their respective fields approach and interpret texts.

Germanic

1. Anonymous. *Beowulf*. Trans. Howell Chickering. New York: Anchor, 2006.
2. Kaske, R. E. “Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf.” *Studies in Philology* 55 (1958): 423-456.
3. Anonymous. *The Nibelungenlied*. Trans. A. T. Hatto. New York: Penguin, 1965.
4. Gentry, Francis. “Key Concepts in the Nibelungenlied.” *A Companion to the Nibelungenlied*. Ed. Winder McConnell. Columbia: Camden House, 1998. 66-78.

Medieval

5. von Aue, Hartmann. *Iwein: The Knight with the Lion*. Trans. J. W. Thomas. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.
6. Wilson, H. B. “Love and Charity in Hartmann's Iwein” *The Modern Language Review* 57.2 (1962): 216-227.

Early Modern

7. Marlowe, Christopher. *Doctor Faustus*. Ed. David Scott Kasten. New York: Norton, 2004.
8. Deats, Sara. “Doctor Faustus: From Chapbook to Tragedy.” *Essays in Literature* 3.1 (1976): 3-16.

Storm and Stress

9. von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Trans. Burton Pike. New York: Modern Library, 2005.
10. Walker, Joyce S. “Sex, Suicide, and the Sublime: A Reading of Goethe's Werther.” *Monatshefte für Deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur* 91.2 (1999): 208-23.

Romanticism

11. Wagner, Richard. *Parsifal*. Hamburg: Deutsche Grammophon, 2007.
12. Steinberg, Michael. "Music Drama and the End of History." *New German Critique* 69 (1996): 163-179.

Modernity

13. Jünger, Ernst. *Storm of Steel*. Trans. Allen Lane. New York: Penguin, 2004.
14. Huyssen, Andreas. "Fortifying the Heart – Totally: Ernst Jünger's Armored Texts." *New German Critique* 59 (1993): 3-23.
15. Lang, Fritz. *Metropolis*. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2003.
16. Rutsky, R.L. "The Mediation of Technology and Gender: Metropolis, Nazism, Modernism." *New German Critique* 60 (1993): 3-32.
17. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Mariner Books, 2005.
18. Bruce, Alexander M. "Maldon and Moria: On Byrhtnoth, Gandalf, and Heroism in the Lord of the Rings." *Mythlore* 26.1-2 (2007): 149-159

Postmodernity

19. Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics, 1987.
20. Dubose, Mike S. "Holding Out for a Hero: Reaganism, Comic Book Vigilantes, and Captain America." *Journal of Popular Culture*, 40.6 (2007): 915-935
21. McCloud, Scott. "Chapter Four: Time Frames." *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Paperback, 1994.
22. Wachowski, Larry, and Andy Wachowski. *The Matrix*. Los Angeles: Village Roadshow Pictures, 1999.
23. Purse, Lisa. "Digital Heroes in Contemporary Hollywood: Exertion, Identification, and the Virtual Action Body." *Film Criticism* 32.1 (2007): 5-25.
24. Hudson, Casey. *Mass Effect 2*. Redwood City: Electronic Arts, 2010.
25. Murray, Janet. "From Game-Story to Cyberdrama." *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004. 2-11 (or comparable article).

Assignments

Over the course of the semester students will lay the groundwork for the production of one 10- to 13-page research paper. Instead of writing the paper all in one sitting, students will assemble the gradually over time through an iterative and scaffolded process of student/instructor consultation, initial formation of the research topic, assembling of pertinent resources, historical framing of the topic, close reading of the necessary texts, and student/instructor debriefing. Components of the process include:

1. **Student/Instructor Consultation.** During a one-on-one meeting, students will work together with the instructor broadly to discuss the course and its theme, identify areas of possible interest for the student, formulate ideas about a possible research topic, and tentatively identify sources of secondary research.
2. **Bibliographic References** (15+ secondary resources). Working together with the course instructor, students will assemble a working bibliography of secondary literature that could potentially be of importance to their research topic. Purpose of this step is to accustom students to library research, to help them flesh out their research ideas, and to situate their research within a larger scholastic context.
3. **Definition of Problem and Proposed Course of Analysis** (~2 pages). Based on discussions with the course instructor, personal examination of the research topic, and initial forays into existing secondary research, students will formulate a problem to be examined and propose a course of analysis to be pursued in their papers. Students will also recognize that the problem definition and course of analysis will evolve as the project progresses.
4. **Historical and Sociocultural Framing** (~4 pages). Student will seek to explain the relevance of their chosen topic within its historical and sociocultural framework and tenders suggestion as to how this framework could possibly influence the creation and meaning of the work, as well as

theorize how this framework complicates the act of interpretation.

5. **Close Reading and Conclusion** (~4 pages). Informed by class discussion, the reading of secondary literature, and their own interpretation, students will prepare a close reading of their chosen text with an eye toward supporting their argument with carefully selected passages. In this stage, students will seek to join all prior written assignments into one cohesive essay and prepare a conclusion that summarizes their findings and states their importance.
6. **Student/Instructor Debriefing**. Students will meet with the instructor toward the end of the semester to evaluate the work on their project, discuss areas of strength and weakness, synthesize what they have learned, in addition to talk about how their full-length research project can be formatted for a 15-minute conference.
7. **Course Conference**. At the conclusion of the course, students will prepare a short 15-minute presentation on their topic, with supporting audio-visual materials, and present their findings at a final student-led conference for course participants.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity

Any form of dishonesty, plagiarism, copying, or cheating, including the use of homework mills to complete assessments and homework assignments, will immediately subject the offender to discipline procedures as outlined in the Elon University Academic Honor Code and Pledge and will result in an automatic and nonnegotiable "Honor Code F" grade being assigned. Please review the Elon University Academic Honor Code and Pledge: <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/honorcpp.xhtml>

Attendance and Tardiness

It is expected that you will attend all class sessions. Please be courteous and inform the instructor before class if you will not be attending, if you will be coming late, or if you will need to leave early. All excused absences must be cleared through Academic Advising or Student Health Services. Three unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered one half grade (*e.g.*, B+ → B); six unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered one full grade (*e.g.*, A → B), *etc.*

Sleeping in Class

As eating food in class prevents you from learning and participating in class discussions, it will not be tolerated. If you sleep in class you will be assigned an unexcused absence for the day.

Food in Class

As eating food in class prevents you from participating in class discussions, it will not be tolerated. If you eat food in class you will be assigned an unexcused absence for the day.

External Technology in Class

Using a laptop to take notes or access learning materials during class time is acceptable use of technology. Using laptops to play video games, watch Web-based video of a non-instructional nature or that is unrelated to the course topic, or using PDAs to instant message or text is unacceptable use of this technology and will not be tolerated. Students who misuse technology in this manner will be assigned an unexcused absence for the day.

Disorderly Conduct in Class

Offensive or annoying behavior in class will be reported to the Judicial Affairs Office for a hearing and may result in temporary or permanent suspension from class.

Missed Course Assignments, Assessments, and Deadline Extensions

Except in the case of university-approved absences, there will be no provisions made for missing or extending the deadlines of course assignments and assessments. Assignments submitted in a digital format must be saved with the

correct file extension and must be computer-readable. Improperly formatted files, or those that cannot be open as they are corrupted, will not be graded. Assignments and assessments that are submitted late will also not be graded. Finally, assignments and assessments that have not been submitted or graded on account of improperly formatted files, and the deadlines of which have passed, will be assigned a nonnegotiable "F" grade.

Grade Calculation and Grading Rubric

Your final grade will be based on the total points earned in the course; there will be no weighted categories. The grading rubric for all grades assigned in the course is:

Percentage Range	Letter Grade
93-100%	A
90-92.99%	A-
87-89.99%	B+
83-86.99%	B
80-82.99%	B-
77-79.99%	C+
73-76.99%	C
70-72.99%	C-
67-69.99%	D+
63-66.99%	D
60-62.99%	D-
0-59.99%	F