

# A conversation with Lisa Maurizio

**OUP:** Tell us a little bit about yourself.



**Lisa Maurizio:** I've been teaching Classical Mythology for about twenty-five years, at a variety of different schools. When I was a graduate assistant at Princeton University, I was a teaching assistant in a large Classical Mythology class. Then I went on to Stanford University, where

I again taught Classical Mythology to a large number of students, 200–300 at a time. At the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where I taught next, I taught about 500 students at a time. I currently teach Classical Mythology at Bates College, a small New England college in Lewiston, Maine, to much smaller groups of students—about fifty at a time.

**OUP:** Twenty-five years is a long time. How has the course changed over the years?

**Lisa Maurizio:** When I began teaching Classical Mythology, there was no Internet, so textbooks had to provide information about the gods and goddesses and heroes and heroines. Now, of course, with Google and the Internet, students can look up all the information that formerly they had to get from textbooks. So, due to the Internet, students want to know different sorts of things about Greek myth, not just the “who,” “what,” and “where”. They want to know how to interpret the strange symbols and images.

**OUP:** So, student preferences and interests have changed. What about instructors' interests?



**Lisa Maurizio:** The field of mythology among scholars has changed a lot too; they want to use theories from anthropology, psychology, and even cognitive science and media studies to understand ancient Greek myths. Scholars are also increasingly interested in thinking about Greece in relation to the Ancient Near East and Italy.

**OUP:** How is your book different from the other classical mythology books available to students?



**Lisa Maurizio:** Most current textbooks really want to tell students about classical myths, and they spend a lot of time doing that. But that ends up being their primary focus. What they don't do is provide students with *ways to think about classical myths*. So what I wanted to do was provide a textbook

that helps students think about myths by asking challenging questions of them from current theories.

The other thing I wanted to provide that other textbooks don't provide is an opportunity and way for students to think about how current and contemporary artists use myths. This textbook includes many case studies about how modern artists use myths. These cases really go a long way towards helping students figure out what it means when they see myth in contemporary media.

**OUP:** How are the chapters in *Classical Mythology in Context* organized?

**Lisa Maurizio:** Each chapter is devoted to a god, a goddess, a hero, or a heroine, or looks at them in pairs. Each chapter has four sections. In the first section, **History**, myth is treated as part of the dynamic religious system of ancient Greece. In the **Theory** section, we look at different ways of asking and answering questions about Greek myth. In the **Comparison** section, we look at Greek myths by comparing them to the myths from the Ancient Near East or from Italy. And finally, in the **Reception** section of each chapter, we look at the ways that modern and contemporary artists have received—that is, have used myth—in their own artwork.

**OUP:** Primary sources are obviously an essential part of this course. How do you treat sources in your book?



**Lisa Maurizio:** Each chapter contains *tons* of primary sources, both visual and written. This is something that really makes this textbook unique: its emphasis on *visual* sources, not just written ones. It contains sources from other parts of the Mediterranean basin—ancient myths, both

visual and written. Finally, all of the Greek primary written sources are from the *Oxford World's Classics* series, so they're in up-to-date, readable translations.