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Fall 8-15-2023

ENG 3099G-099 Myth and Culture

Chris Wixson

Eastern Illinois University

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Recommended Citation

Wixson, Chris, "ENG 3099G-099 Myth and Culture" (2023). *Fall 2023*. 48.

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English 3099G: Myth and Culture

fall 2023 / Section 099

Dr. Chris Wixson (*he/him/his*)



The world, as we read it, is made of fragments. Discontinuous points—discrete and dispersed. . . . And what we understand of it we understand by cobbling these pieces together—synthesizing them over time. It is the synthesis we know. (It is all we know.) —Peter Mendelsund

[The study of myth can provide us with] a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us. —Adrienne Rich

syllabus

course philosophy

This course explores the ways in which myth and myth-making across cultures relate to issues of identity, desire, language, epistemology, and violence. Put another way, this course considers not only how we “map” ourselves as individuals but also what binds people together, what keeps them together, what flings them apart, and what keeps them apart. Myths will be approached as organizing narratives engaged in the production of social meaning and metaphysical understanding. They are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves as we strive to make imaginative sense of the universe around us — stories that function as frames of reference within which we put together identities, systems of values, and a body of “knowledge.” We will begin our conversations with short readings about storytelling across a variety of contexts, including mini-units on the superhero, urban legend, and secular love mythology. These will set the stage for our readings of two larger “capstone” texts, Rivers Solomon’s *The Deep* (2019) and Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion* (1987).

Learning Goals

1. To provide opportunities for reading and appreciating complex and challenging texts for the insight they provide about the cultures that produced them as well as our own.
2. To allow each member of the class to engage with the significant issues and questions raised by the texts through writing and class discussion.
3. To assist in the development of skills of critical thinking, interpretive analysis, and argumentative writing.

course texts

The Speckled Band, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; *The Storytelling Animal*, Jonathan Gottschall; *The Deep*, Rivers Solomon; *The Passion*, Jeanette Winterson; and Shorts from (among others): Barnes, Campbell, Carson, Engle, Gottschall, Hammett, Kafka, Khaw, LaValle, Paumgarten, Pence, Powers, and Winterson.

use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

late assignments

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, the assignment will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the assignment, and it becomes a "O."** If you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

special accommodations

If you have a *documented* disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Accessibility and Accommodations (studentdisability@eiu.edu or 581-6583) or visit McAfee 1210 as soon as possible in order to receive approval. Then please contact me as soon as possible in order to discuss arrangements.

writing center and student success center

If you would like assistance with writing assignments in this course or any other, go to www.eiu.edu/writing to make an appointment. The Writing Center works with students from all majors and academic backgrounds and can help you with assignments at any stage of the writing process from brainstorming to final revisions. Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee 1301.

student well-being

Please note that, while reading and writing can be very personal acts, this class is not a therapeutic environment and should not be taken in place of therapy. EIU is committed to supporting and advancing the mental health and well-being of our students. Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal mental health and well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, anxiety, depression, alcohol/drugs, identities, and finances. If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. Below is a list of available campus resources to assist with student well-being:

- **EIU Counseling Clinic:** Human Services Building, 1st floor; 217-581-3413; for after-hours urgent support, call 1-866-567-2400. The Counseling Clinic offers individual and group counseling, emergency services, and resources.
- **Online Mental Health Screening:** online, private screening tool for depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and alcohol and substance misuse.
- **EIU Health Clinic:** Human Services Building, 1st floor; 217-581-3013. The Health Clinic services include lab work, pharmacy, and women's health and men's health programs.
- **Health Education Resource Center (HERC):** 2201 Blair Hall; 217-581-7786. The HERC offers health programming in the areas of alcohol, tobacco and other drug prevention and education, flu and cold prevention and education, nutritional analysis and education, and sexual health education, in addition to other health-related topics.
- **Center for Gender and Sexual Diversity (GSD):** Stevenson Hall, lower level; 217-581-7117. The GSD Center provides services such as the Trans*formation Station, a large library full of books and movies, year-round programming, and a comprehensive Safe Zone Training program.
- **EIU Campus Food Pantry:** 1347 McAfee. The EIU Campus Food Pantry is a means to support students and the campus community by alleviating barriers to consistent, adequate, and healthful food. Anyone with a Panther Card can visit the pantry two times per month.
- **Student Legal Service:** MLK Jr University Union Room 2420; 217-581-6054. Student Legal Service can assist with off-campus housing issues, traffic violations, misdemeanor criminal offenses, municipal ordinance violations, and expungement.
- **Financial Aid and Scholarships:** Student Services Building East Wing; 217-581-6405, Fax: 217-581-6422, finaid@eiu.edu. The Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships provides information and guidance to secure the necessary financial resources to meet educational goals and financial obligations to the university.

tech support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available on the same page. For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question regarding course content, contact me.

ENG 3099G: Myth and Culture

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course calendar

** Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you note any revisions at each class session. Please get into the habit of regularly checking email and the course's D2L website.

** Make sure that you have access to the readings during our class sessions.

Week One – Stories we tell ourselves about ourselves

Mythologies are stories we use to make the world and our lives intelligible and meaningful. Our identities are stories we tell ourselves and each other, often most explicitly via social media.

*Tuesday, August 22:

Read: "Four Course Caveats" / Syllabus, Schedule, and Participation Rubric (D2L)
Parks' "3 Constants" (D2L)

*Thursday, August 24:

Read: Gottschall's *The Storytelling Animal* (pages 21-32) (D2L)
Armstrong's "What is a Myth?" (D2L)
Campbell's "The Four Functions of Myth" (D2L)
In-Class Screening / Discussion

Week Two – Urban Legend Mythology / Superhero Mythologies

*Tuesday, August 29:

Read: Khaw's "Don't Turn on the Lights" / "Urban Legends" Notes (D2L)

*Thursday, August 31:

Read: Gary Engle's "What Makes Superman so Darned American?" (D2L)
In-class Screening / Discussion

Week Three – Clashing Mythologies

*Tuesday, September 5:

Read: Doyle's "The Speckled Band" (D2L)

*Thursday, September 7:

Read: Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* – READ ONLY pages 33-34 (D2L)
(Sam Spade's story about Flitcraft)

Kafka's "The Top" (D2L)

Bring: A 1-2 sentence analysis of "The Top" to share

Week Four – The Mythologies of Romantic Love

*Tuesday, September 12:

Read: Seed Assignment Prompt (D2L)
Powers' "Letter Composed During a Lull in the Fighting" (D2L)
Jeanette Winterson / Julian Barnes excerpts (D2L)

Souls never touch their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with. –Ralph Waldo Emerson

When there is no desire, all things are at peace. *The Tao* 37

*Thursday, September 14:

Read: Anne Carson's "Finding the Edge" (D2L)

**Seed Assignment #1 due to D2L dropbox Friday 9/15 by 11:59 PM

Week Five – The Pull Toward Mythology / Monomyth and the Hero's Journey

*Tuesday, September 19:

Read: Paumgarten's "The Pull" (D2L)
Russell's "St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves" (D2L)

*Thursday, September 21:

Read: Campbell's "The Hero's Journey" (D2L)

Week Six – Solomon's *The Deep* (2019)

*Tuesday, September 26:

Read: *The Deep* Chapters 1-3
Seed Assignments #2, #3-4 Prompt (D2L)

*Thursday, September 28:

Read: *The Deep* Chapter 4

**Seed Assignment #2 due to D2L dropbox Friday, 9/29 by 11:59 PM

Week Seven – In *The Deep*

*Tuesday, October 3:

Read: *The Deep* Chapters 5-7

*Thursday, October 5:

Read: *The Deep* Chapters 8 and 9
Seed Assignment #3 Prompt (in D2L Dropbox)
Optional: "Afterword" (pp. 157-163) / clipping's "The Deep" on YouTube

**Submit Seed Assignment #3 Friday 10/6 by 11:59 PM.

Week Eight – Re-Purposing Fairy Tale Mythology

*Tuesday, October 10:

Read: Georgia-White's "The Influence of Folklore on *The Little Mermaid*" (D2L)
Baptiste's "Mermaids have Always Been Black" (D2L)
Khaw's "And In Our Daughters, We Find a Voice" (D2L)

*Thursday, October 12:

Read: "Rapunzel" (D2L) and Other Fairy Tales

Week Nine – Winterson's *The Passion* (1987)

*Tuesday, October 17:

Read: *The Passion* Part One "The Emperor"

*Thursday, October 19:

Read: *The Passion* Part Two "The Queen of Spades"

****Submit Seed Assignment #4 Friday 10/20 by 11:59 PM.**

Week Ten – In *The Passion*

*Tuesday, October 24:

Read: *The Passion* Part Three "The Zero Winter"

*Thursday, October 26:

Read: *The Passion* Part Three "The Zero Winter"

****Seed Assignment #5 due to D2L dropbox Friday, 10/27 by 11:59 PM**

Week Eleven – In *The Passion* / Proposal for Critical Essay

*Tuesday, October 31:

Read: *The Passion* Part Four "The Rock"

*Thursday, November 2: Proposal Workshop

Read: Critical Essay Assignment Sheet (D2L)

****Critical Essay Proposal DUE to D2L dropbox Friday 11/3 by 11:59 PM**

Week Twelve – Research Week (Mandatory Conferences)

*Tuesday, November 7 and Thursday, November 9: Conferences During Classtime

Week Thirteen – Writing Week

***Tuesday, November 14 and Thursday, November 16:**

**Read: Critical Essay Assignment Sheet / Course Writing Guidelines (D2L)
In-class Writing Workshop / Discussion of TED-style Presentation**

****Critical Essay Due to D2L dropbox Friday 11/17 by 11:59 PM**

HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!!

Week Fourteen – TED-style Presentations

***Tuesday, November 28 and Thursday, November 30: In-class Presentations**

Week Fifteen – Manifesto Devising / Final Exam Planning and Writing Week

***Tuesday, December 5 and Thursday, December 7:**

**Read: Manifesto / Final Exam Assignment Sheet (D2L)
Final Exam Workshop / Optional Conferences**

****Final Exam and Manifesto Due to the D2L Dropbox by Wednesday, December 13th at 11:59 PM****