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ENG 3099G-099: Myth and Culture Honors

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3099-099: Myth and Culture (3 Credits)

Fall 2016

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“As universal as dreaming, mythmaking characterizes every known people and culture throughout the world. ... Although nothing seems impossible in the mythic realm, even the most ostensibly illogical events are subtly grounded in the values, attitudes, and expectations that govern the society producing the myths.”

Stephen Harris and Gloria Platzner

Texts

Rosenberg, *World Mythology*
Harris and Platzner, *Classical Mythology*
Tolkien, *The Hobbit*
Sloan, *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore*
Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

E-Text

Powell, Barry, “The Big Bang is Hard Science. It Is Also a Creation Story,” *Nautilus*, 4 Sept. 2014. <http://nautil.us/issue/17/big-bangs/the-big-bang-is-hard-science-it-is-also-a-creation-story>

Course Focus

Myths provide ways to explain the unknowable in human experience. They aim toward truth but do so in the guise of fiction. William Harmon and Hugh Holman, in their *Handbook to Literature*, tell us that myth “makes concrete and particular a special perception of human beings or a cosmic view.” In this course, we will explore both of these aspects of myth and how they permeate culture, even in this age of advanced science and technology. We will especially consider a selection of myths and observe them at work in story-telling across the centuries, including examples from contemporary popular culture. In the process we will discuss how each author appropriates myths to achieve new ends. And, as we do so, we will engage with our own attitudes toward myth and preconceptions about systems of belief.

We are surrounded by references to myth in our day-to-day lives, in print and in visual texts of all kinds. The honors component of this course will include a Myth Journal in digital form that you will turn in at the end of the semester, but that you will give brief presentations from during each unit of the semester.

Learning Objectives

- Students will engage in diverse critical perspectives as we discuss the texts.
- Students will perform research tasks based on primary and secondary source readings, and they will make use of traditional library resources as well as library databases and online resources of scholarly repute.
- Students will synthesize, critique, and interpret their findings in their writing assignments.
- Students will craft cogent, defensible, and well-researched theses for their projects.
- Students will discuss their findings in informal, small group settings and in formal presentations for the whole class.

Policies and General Information

--The English Department statement on plagiarism stipulates that any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)--has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the assigned essay and for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. See <http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php> for further information.

--Papers and exams: Hand papers in on time. Late papers will be reduced a letter grade for each class day that they are late without a university approved excuse (properly verified absences due to illness, emergency, or participation in an official University activity). If you miss an exam, and you have a university-approved excuse, you may make up that exam. You will have no more than one week to do so, and the make-up exam may be different from the one given during class.

--If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) or stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, as soon as possible to make an appointment.

--If you require general help with your studies, please make an appointment with The Student Success Center. Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (<http://www.eiu.edu/~success>) for assistance with time management, text 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 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

--Please make use of EIU's Writing Center, located at 3110 Coleman Hall, this semester. The consultants there can help you with brainstorming, organizing, developing support for, and documenting your papers. One caveat: the Writing Center is not a proofreading or editing service. It is a place where you can learn how to become a more thoughtful, independent, and rhetorically effective writer. To schedule an appointment, drop by (3110 Coleman Hall) or call 581-5929.

--Be prepared for class. You'll get more out of class discussions if you are participating in them, and I'll notice if you do not seem prepared to participate.

Requirements and Grades

--Three exams	45% (15% each of final grade)
--Research paper	20%
--Preliminary research report with annotated bibliography	10%
--Final presentation	10%
--Digital Myth Journal Presentations	15%
Total:	100%

Assignments

The **three exams** will cover the three units of study.

The **research paper** topic will be chosen from the assigned readings and issues related to them. The paper will be 7-10 pages long. You will use at least 3-5 secondary sources to support your

arguments, and they should consist of books, journal articles, and web sites of good scholarly repute. You will use MLA Parenthetical Style, with a Works Cited page, for documentation. **For MLA Style, see the Writing Center's web site, specifically, under Resources for Writers, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.**

After midterm, you will have a **research report with an annotated bibliography** due to show the progress that you have made regarding your research project. Don't worry if we haven't yet covered the topic that interests you in class by the time you start your research—this portion of your study is meant to be an independent exploration of a topic that may be completely new to you. The goal is that your independent study will augment what is covered in class and will broaden the scope of the course as a whole for you. You, in turn, will share with the class what you have learned from your research near the end of the semester. Thus, the **preliminary research report and annotated bibliography** will cover the research that you do for your research paper and presentation. It will essentially be your paper proposal. The report will address the topic, why you chose the topic, and the avenues of research that you chose to explore (2-3 pages). The annotated bibliography will consist of bibliographic citations of at least five sources with your notes on each work that describe the document, summarize why it may be useful to your project, and include possible quotations that you might use in the paper (2-3 pages).

The **final presentation** will be a 5-7 minute oral report over your research project, due near the end of the semester. After conducting your research and writing your paper, you will present to the class what you have learned. The goal is to provide, through your and your fellow students' reports, both a "big picture" look at the subjects we have covered over the course of the semester, as well as introduce specialized information that you have focused on during your own independent study.

Digital Myth Journal Presentations will consist of three 5 minute presentations during which you will explicate 2-3 examples of myths at work in culture. The examples may consist of written texts, visual texts, or aural texts. You will turn in the complete Myth Journal at the end of the semester.

Tentative Schedule

Unit 1: Comparative Beginnings

T. Aug. 23—Introduction to course: time, myth, and archetype.

Read: Rosenberg, 2-11, "The Enuma Elish"; Harris and Platzner, 49-83, Hesiod's *Theogony*, and handout, Genesis 1-2, Powell, "The Big Bang...."

Th. Aug. 25—Begin discussion of creation myths.

Read: Harris and Platzner, 84-117, including "Homeric Hymn to Demeter"; Rosenberg 324-329, including "Yin-Yang," "Nu Kua," and "P'an Ku, Creator of the Universe."

T. Aug. 30—Continue discussion of creation myths and consider the "Great Goddess" figure, as Harris and Platzner call her.

Read: Harris and Platzner, 118-141, "The Olympic Family of Zeus," and Rosenberg, 351-458, "The [Polynesian] Creation Cycle."

Th. Sept. 1—Creation myths and the humanity of the gods.

Read: Harris and Platzner, 142-204, separation from the gods, Hesiod's "Works and Days," in touch with the gods, "Hymn to Pythian Apollo," and earth and ecstasy, "Hymn to Dionysus."

T. Sept. 6—Consider the "ages of man" and the stories of Pandora, Apollo and the Oracle at Delphi, and Dionysus.

Read: Begin Tolkien, *Hobbit*.

Th. Sept. 8—Discuss *Hobbit*.

Read: Finish Tolkien, *Hobbit*.

T., Sept. 13—Finish discussion of *Hobbit*.

Th. Sept. 15—**Digital Myth Journal Presentations.** review for Exam 1.

T. Sept. 20—**Exam 1.**

Read: Rosenberg, 26-57, *Gilgamesh*

Unit 2: Epics and Heroes

Th. Sept. 22—Consider elements of the hero and the hero's journey. Where do women come into the stories? What are their roles/archetypes? Consider *Hobbit* further? Discuss *Gilgamesh*.

Read: Harris and Platzner, 228-254, on the hero, 255-272, "Heroes at War," and 273-290, Book I of *Iliad*.

T. Sept. 27—Discuss the hero as warrior, and the examples of Hector and Achilles, considering also Diomedes and the mention of Penthesilea. What are the roles of the gods?

Read: Harris and Platzner, 342-420, on Odysseus and the *Odyssey*.

Th. Sept. 29—Discuss the Greek hero, as depicted in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Consider elements of the hero and the hero's journey. How are elements different/similar to those in the story of Gilgamesh? Where do women come into the stories? What are their roles/archetypes? What do we make of Telemachus's story? What are the roles of the gods in the *Odyssey*?

Read: Begin Rosenberg, "Jason and the Golden Fleece," 169-203, Harris and Platzner, Euripides, *Medea*, 748-777.

T. Oct. 4—Finish discussion of *Odyssey*.

Read: Finish Rosenberg, "Jason and the Golden Fleece," 169-203, Harris and Platzner, Euripides, *Medea*, 748-777, and "Theater of Dionysus," 423-431.

Th. Oct. 6—Consider Jason as a hero in his own myths, as well as how he is depicted by Euripides in the play *Medea*.

T. Oct. 11—Finish discussion of *Medea* and Jason. Discuss Major Papers and Research Report with Annotated Bibliography assignment (Research Report with annotated bibliography due Oct. 27).

Th. Oct. 13—**Digital Myth Journal Presentations.** Review for Exam 2.

T. Oct. 18—**Exam 2.**

Read: *A Wrinkle in Time*

Th. Oct. 20—Library Day: work on Research Report and Annotated Bibliography.

Unit 3: Myth-Making and Myth-Recycling

T. Oct. 25—Begin discussing *A Wrinkle in Time*. Consider that L'Engle once said: "I write for the child in everybody, that part of us that is aware and open and courageous. It's also that part of us that isn't afraid to explore the mythical depths, that vast part of ourselves we know little about and which we often fear because we can't manipulate or control it. That's where art is born."(*Crosswicks Journal 3: The Irrational Season*).

Th. Oct. 27—**Research Report and Annotated Bibliography are due.** Finish discussing *A Wrinkle....*

Read: *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*

T. Nov. 1—Discuss *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*. How does Rowling blend myth and culture? What key archetypes does she employ? What myths does she recycle?

Th. Nov. 3—Finish Discussing *The Sorcerer's Stone*.

Read: Begin reading *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Book Store*.

T. Nov. 8—Begin discussion of *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Book Store*.

Read: Finish reading *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Book Store*.

Th. Nov. 10—Finish discussing *Mr. Penumbra's...*

T. Nov. 15— **Digital Myth Journal Presentations.** Sign up for final presentations.

Th. Nov. 17—Discuss presentations.

T. Nov. 22—Thanksgiving Break

Th. Nov. 24—Thanksgiving Break

T. Nov. 29—Presentations

Th. Dec. 1—Presentations.

T. Dec. 6—Presentations.

Th. Dec. 8—**Research Paper is due.** Review for **Exam 3 (Final exam)**.

Exam 3: Final exam—Wed. Dec. 14, 8:00am-10:00am.