

Fall 8-15-2011

## ENG 3009G-002: Myth And Culture

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### ENGLISH 3009G.002: Myth and Culture

**Course Description:** Through primary readings of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding myth by using comparative analysis. After some theoretical grounding in Joseph Campbell, Claude Levi-Strauss, Ernst Cassirer and Clifford Geertz, we'll examine selected Native American mythologies and the film *The Mission* in order to consider the impact of colonialism on cultural traditions. We'll conclude with a look at traditions from the Pacific by examining Palauan "storyboards" and the contemporary novel *Melal* set in the Marshall Islands, in which tradition collides with the modernity of nuclear warfare.

**Course Format:** Lecture and discussion, preferably much more the latter, dependent on your willingness and preparation to contribute to discussions.

**Required Texts:**

- Barclay, Robert. *Melal: A Novel of the Pacific*. U of Hawai'i P, 2002.
- Cassirer, Ernst. *Language and Myth*. Trans. Susanne Langer. 1946; rpt. Dover, 1953.
- Delgado, James. *Ghost Ships* [Not all students will receive this text. Please note explanation in class.]
- Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. Basic, 1983.
- Grace, Patricia. *Dogside Story*. U of Hawai'i P, 2002.
- Hau'ofa, Epeli. *Tales of the Tikongs*. 1983; rpt. U of Hawai'i P, 1994.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*. U of Toronto P, 1978.

**Course Requirements and Grading:** Discussion (participation, reading quizzes as necessary)--15%; midterm essay examination--15%; short essays, five (two 1-2 pp, three 2-3 pp) for a total of approximately 12 typewritten pages--50%; and a final essay examination--20%. Prerequisite: English 1002C, or 1092C, or the equivalent. (General Education Program and Group 2)

**General Policies:**

*Grading Standards:* I shall follow the EIU English Department Guidelines, distributed in class. In all cases, I shall use a plus and minus system to distinguish, say, a high *B* from a low one.

*Attendance:* I do take roll, and I evaluate attendance only indirectly in the context of your participation in the course (15%); however, each two days is the equivalent of a week in the fifteen-week semester. Obviously, cuts have a direct influence on your participation.

*Conferences:* These are at your request unless I ask to see you. Please ask for help as soon as you feel you need it; please don't wait until the last few days of class.

*Submission of work:* Essays should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of the paper only, titled and indicate the following: name, date, course and section number, and assignment number. Exercises and quizzes must be legible.

*Late Essays:* For each day that the essay is late, the letter grade will fall by one full grade: an *A* essay due on Friday will be an *F* by the next Thursday. If difficulties arise, please see me.

**Plagiarism:** The English Department Policy

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism--"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the representation of them as one's own 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 course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If I discover an act of plagiarism, I shall exercise the right to the fullest extent possible. (See *The Blair Handbook*, pp. 242-244, but see also pp. 228-242 for a further discussion of what constitutes plagiarism and how to integrate properly your material from sources.)

**Students with Disabilities:**

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

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### ENGLISH 3009G.002: Myth and Culture—Syllabus

#### August

M 22: **Course Introduction: Contexts and Frames**

Foundational ideas: the word *myth* as utterly false, as absolute truth

W 24: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero's Journey* (video BL 304.H45x, 1987)  
The archetypal approach to myth

F 26: Discussion of *The Hero's Journey* and archetypal approaches

Handouts: "Myth" and "Culture" (Ray Williams)

"Archetype" (*Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics*)

"Myth" (*Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics*)

M 29: Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning (MM)*: "The Meeting of Myth and Science"; "'Primitive' Thinking and the 'Civilized' Mind" (Structuralist approaches)

W 31: (*MM*): "When Myth Becomes History"

#### September

F 2: Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth (LM)*:

"The Place of Language and Myth in the Pattern of Human Culture" (Symbolist approaches)

M 5: **Labor Day—no classes**

W 7: (*LM*): "The Evolution of Religious Ideas"

F 9: (*LM*): "Language and Conception"

M 12: Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge (LK)*: "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought" (Interpretive anthropological approaches)

W14: (*LK*): "Found in Translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination"

F 16: (*LK*): "Common Sense as a Cultural System"

M 19: **Review Discussion**: Comparison of perspectives and methods:

interpretive anthropology (*LK*), structuralism (*MM*), archetypal (handouts) and symbolist (*LM*) approaches to myth studies. Assumptions and experience—student premises for developing working definitions of myth, religion, history and science. What world through whose eyes?

**Essay #1 assignment**—working definitions (1-2 pp). (These preceding theoretical readings will be introduced in lecture, but you should read them carefully and reflectively. Work through them over the course of the term; for example, finish the Levi-Strauss chapters by the second week, work through the Cassirer book in the third week and complete the Geertz essays over the next two weeks. You can always, of course, go back and forth among the texts and essays as one mythic text or another seems to lend itself to a particular approach.

W 21: (continued)

F 23: Types of myth—ritual, origin, cult, prestige and eschatological concepts. Diffusion and disintegration of myths.

- M 26: **Native American Mythologies**  
Poetics of orality and literacy (handout)  
W 28: Native American mythology (handout)  
F 30: "Acoma Pueblo origin myth" (handout); **Essay #2 assignment**—analysis of on  
Native American myth, using perspective in *LK*, *MM* or *LM*-2-3 pp.  
**Essay #1 DUE**

**October**

- M 3: "Winnebago trickster cycle" (handout)  
W 5: (continued)  
F 7: *The Mission* (film); *Take-home midterm essay examination assigned*
- M 10: (continued)  
W 12: (continued); discussion of myth, culture and colonization; **Essay #2 DUE**  
F 14: **Fall Break—No classes**
- M 17: Geertz, *LK*: "The Way We Think Now: Toward an Ethnography of Modern  
Thought"; "Local Knowledge: Fact and Law in Comparative Perspective."  
W 19: Cassier, *LM*: "The Successive Phases of Religious Thought"; "The Power of  
Metaphor."  
F 21: (continued); **Take-home midterm essay examination DUE**

- M 24: **Pacific Island Traditions**  
Patricia Grace, *Dogside Story*; **Essay #3 assignment**  
W 26: (continued)  
F 28: (continued)

M 31: (continued)

**November**

- W 2: (continued)  
F 4: The Palauan "storyboards" (lecture and handout); **Essay #3 DUE**
- M 7: Epeli Hau'ofa, *Tales of the Tikongs*; **Essay #4 assignment**  
W 9: (continued)  
F 11: (continued)

M 14: (continued)

- W 16: *The Bikini Atoll: A Look Back at Fifty Years of Exodus and Nuclear  
Testing in the South Pacific* (Dir. Nick Versteeg/Dusmar Multimedia-A&E  
History/1997/47 min); *Ghost Fleet*: Chapters 1-5, 9 (optional)  
**Essay #4 DUE**  
F 18: Discussion of *The Bikini Atoll*

**Thanksgiving Break**

- M 28: Robert Barclay, *Melal*; **Essay #5 assignment**  
W 30: (continued)

**December**

- F 2: (continued)  
M 5: (continued)  
W 7: (continued); **Essay #5 DUE**  
F 9: Review

**Final Examination: Wednesday, December 14, 10:15-12:15 in CH2120**

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**ENGLISH 3009G.002: Myth and Culture—(REVISED) Syllabus**

*September*

W 28: (LK): "Common Sense as a Cultural System"

**Essay #1 assignment**—working definitions (1-2 pp). (These preceding theoretical readings will be introduced in lecture, but you should read them carefully and reflectively. Work through them over the course of the term; for example, finish the Levi-Strauss chapters by the second week, work through the Cassirer book in the third week and complete the Geertz essays over the next two weeks. You can always, of course, go back and forth among the texts and essays as one mythic text or another seems to lend itself to a particular approach.

F 30: Types of myth—ritual, origin, cult, prestige and eschatological concepts. Diffusion and disintegration of myths.

**Review Discussion:** Comparison of perspectives and methods: interpretive anthropology (*LK*), structuralism (*MM*), archetypal (handouts) and symbolist (*LM*) approaches to myth studies. Assumptions and experience—student premises for developing working definitions of myth, religion, history and science. What world through whose eyes?

*October*

M 3: **Native American Mythologies**

Poetics of orality and literacy (handout)  
 Native American mythology (handout)

W 5: "Acoma Pueblo origin myth" (handout);

F 7: (continued); **Essay #2 assignment**—analysis of on Native American myth, using perspective in *LK*, *MM* or *LM*—2-3 pp.

**Essay #1 DUE**

M 10: "Winnebago trickster cycle" (handout)

W 12: (continued)

F 14: **Fall Break—No classes**

M 17: *The Mission* (film); *Take-home midterm essay examination assigned*

W 19: (continued)

F 21: (continued); discussion of myth, culture and colonization; **Essay #2 DUE**

M 24: Cassirer, *LM*: "The Successive Phases of Religious Thought"; "The Power of Metaphor."

W 26: (continued)

F 28: (continued); **Take-home midterm essay examination DUE**

M 31: **Pacific Island Traditions**

Patricia Grace, *Dogside Story*; **Essay #3 assignment**

*November*

W 2: (continued)

F 4: (continued)

M 7: (continued)  
W 9: (continued)  
F 11: The Palauan "storyboards" (lecture and handout); **Essay #3 DUE**

M 14: Epeli Hau'ofa, *Tales of the Tikongs*; **Essay #4 assignment**  
W 16: (continued)  
F 18: (continued); **Essay #4 DUE**

***Thanksgiving Break***

M 28: (continued); **Essay #5 assignment**  
W 30: (continued)

***December***

F 2: (continued)  
  
M 5: *The Bikini Atoll: A Look Back at Fifty Years of Exodus and Nuclear Testing in the South Pacific* (Dir. Nick Versteeg/Dusmar Multimedia-A&E History/1997/47 min); *Ghost Fleet*: Chapters 1-5, 9 (optional)  
  
W 7: Discussion of *The Bikini Atoll*; **Essay #5 DUE**  
F 9: Review

**Final Examination: Wednesday, December 14, 10:15-12:15 in CH2120**