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ENG 3009G-005: Myth and culture

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English 3009G Section 005
Myth and Culture
Carol Stevens
Spring 2005
6:30-9:00 p.m. in Coleman Hall 3150

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Course Description

The catalog describes this course as follows: “Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythic, historical, anthropological, and scientific ways of understanding.” What that means for us is that we will be reading stories including Near Eastern, Greek and Roman, Asian, and North American myths, and learning as much as we can about how the stories relate to and help us understand the cultures they come from. The class will involve much small group work in a variety of activities related to the material and the understanding of cultures, some lectures, and lots of general discussion. There will be a great deal of reading and writing. English 3009G is a writing-intensive course which you may use to satisfy the 3000-level Electronic Writing Portfolio requirement.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester I expect you to know:

♦ What myths are and how they function
♦ How to distinguish among myths, legends, and folk tales
♦ How to understand the stories of some of the world’s great cultures (including but not limited to Assyrian-Sumerian-Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Hindu, Tibetan Buddhist, and Native American, especially Mayan and Navajo
♦ How these cultures differ from and are similar to each other and our own
♦ How myths affect the practices and beliefs in a culture

With this knowledge, I hope you will
♦ Be more conscious of the forces and events that shape cultures and societies
♦ Be able to speak and write clearly and well about myths and the cultures they represent
♦ Be able to encounter myths and cultures you have not previously studied and be able to reason to some understanding of them on your own.
♦ Have a better understanding of the richness and diversity of cultures
♦ Recognize references and allusions to these myths when you encounter them in literature and art
♦ Take pleasure and enjoyment from your knowledge

Course Prerequisites

English 1002G or 1092G or their equivalents and at least sophomore standing.

Texts

There is a great deal of reading in this course. Some of it will be easier, and some will be more difficult. Keeping up with all of the reading provides the surest means of doing well, and procrastinating is sure to get you into trouble. Some of the stories will seem strange to you, but I think you will enjoy them.
Burgos-Debray, I, Rigoberta Menchu
Dundes, Sacred Narrative.
Hesse, Siddhartha (continued on next page)
Leonard and McClure, *Myth and Knowing*
Lhalungpa, *The Life of Milarepa.* (We’ll also use Eva Van Dam’s graphic novel version of this.)
Tapahonso, *Sāami Dahataal (The Women Are Singing).*
Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh.*
Tedlock, *Popol Vuh.* (We’ll also use Eva Van Dam’s graphic novel version of this.)
Zolbrod, *Dine Bahane*’

*And all handouts and assigned web readings*

**Grade Breakdown**

Based on 100 points:
- A midterm and final exam 25 points
- Two papers 50 points
- Quizzes as given, participation, web postings, group work and presentations, WebCT responses and shorter writing assignments 25 points.

91-100=A; 80-90=B; 70-79=C; 65-69=D.

**Policies:**

You’re expected to be here when the class is meeting. Period. We only meet once a week, so we’ll cover a lot in each meeting. Absence without excuse will be penalized by lowered grades.

I will give permission for make-up work only in the case of serious illness or emergency. If you must be absent, call me. If it’s a serious illness or emergency, let me know and I’ll see that you’re not penalized.

Plan to hand in papers on time. If you are having problems, let me know. Without explicit prior excuse, *papers a week or more late will not be accepted at all.*

**Paper Format**

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, and stapled, with no binders, folders, or covers of any kind. Use a font No larger than this (12 points). Shorter assignments should have your name, the date, and the course number and section in the upper right corner. Papers should have a title page. Use MLA style and documentation format for all work.

**Academic Honesty**

The English Department’s statement on plagiarism is as follows: 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 a grade of F for the assigned work and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. I expect you to do your own work, to use only authorized help such as the Writing Center, conferences with me, and discussion groups in glass. I expect you to use sources properly, to imbed them appropriately into your work, to use quotation, paraphrase, or summary as needed, with careful and painstaking documentation. This applies not only to books and articles, but to media and electronic sources, including all web and online sources.

**Students with Disabilities**

If you have a documented disability, and wish to receive academic accommodation, please contact the **Office of Disability Services** at 581-6583.
Courtesies in the Classroom As Workplace

It is important to recognize that the literature classroom is in most respects a workplace like any other. We have a limited period of time in which to complete a great deal of work. We need complete attention for the entire class period each time we meet. As a teacher I prefer a relatively relaxed, and generally very lively, atmosphere, especially because I lecture only part of the time. Whether we are working together, in small groups, or quietly on our own, I expect us to be completely focused on the work at hand, and have adopted these policies as the best way of guaranteeing each student the conditions needed to accomplish that work. Remaining in this section constitutes an agreement to abide by these policies. I promise to treat each of you with respect, and I expect the same of you. This means being on time, ready to work. It means listening courteously and attentively to each other, and disagreeing, when we disagree, reasonably and without disparaging remarks. It means taking care of personal needs before or after class, cell phones and beepers turned off for the duration of class. As discussion moderator, I have a responsibility to see that everyone gets a chance to participate, so I may ask you to yield the floor to someone else.

Responses

Sometime in the next week or so, I will set up the WebCT Bulletin Board for this class. Each week, beginning with the Jan. 27 meeting, you will be required to post, at least 24 hours before class, a separate response to a specified reading assignment to the Bulletin Board. It should be a thoughtful response of 1-2 paragraphs to the assigned reading, in which you respond to the posting of at least one other class member and quote from the work to support your discussion. I’ll record them week to week, but won’t grade them til the end of the semester. They must be on time, and will be graded for aptness to the reading, clarity, thoughtfulness, and completeness. The highest point totals will be reserved for those responses which go beyond the minimum requirements, and/or are more frequent. If for reasons beyond your control you fail to gain access to WebCT, bring a typed, 1-page response to the appropriate class period. Same rules, except that you won’t be able to respond to anyone else’s posting. I’ll record and comment on them as we go, and grade them at the end of the semester. For next week, bring a written response.

Please note: any policy statement or syllabus is by its nature a tentative document. Circumstances may force changes in anything including readings, other assignments, even grading policies. I intend to adhere to this policy statement and the course schedule, but should changes be necessary in any part of it, an announcement in class will be considered sufficient notice.