

Fall 8-15-2005

ENG 3009-003-006: Myth and Culture

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3009 - 003
-006

Dr. William J. Searle

English 3009-003—sec. 003—10:00—10:50 MWF—CH3609

English 3009-006—sec. 006—12:00—12:50 MWF—CH3609

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The following texts are used for English 3009G:

William Buck. Trans. *Mahabharata*. New York, New York: Penguin/Meridian, 1987.

Alan Dundes. Editor. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley, California: U. of Cal. Press, 1984.

Richard Erdoes and Alfonse Ortiz. Editors. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York, New York: Random House/Pantheon, 1984.

Hermann Hesse. *Siddhartha*. Trans. By Gilda Rosner. New York, New York: Bantam, 1951, rpt. 1971.

John Neihardt. *Black Elk Speaks*. Lincoln, Nebraska: U. of Nebraska Press, 1932, rpt. 1979.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. By Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana U. Press, 1953, rpt. 1983.

Nancy K. Sandars. Trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York, New York: Penguin, 1960, rpt. 1972.

Mary Shelley. *Frankenstein*. New York, New York: Signet, 1831, rpt. 1963.

Barbara C. Sproul. *Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World*. San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 1991.

ATTENDANCE: Plan to attend every class. You might glance at page 55 of the 2004-20-5 catalog concerning this matter. Obviously, a student seldom does well in a course when he or she cuts class frequently. For that reason, I have established the following attendance policy. For every five unexcused absences, your final grade will be lowered one letter grade. If you have ten unexcused absences, your final grade will be lowered two letter grades, etc. Late papers (exams quizzes, etc.) will be accepted only in cases of extreme emergency—severe illness, official university activity, or other urgent reasons.

DEPARTMENTAL STATEMENT OF PLAGIARISM: “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, or thoughts of

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 the immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”

GRADING: Approximately 20 percent of your grade will consist of class participation (class discussion, group work, and perhaps a group project or two) and writing exercises (exclusive of out-of-class papers, as frequent reading check quizzes, etc.). More important, the classroom exercises, discussions, etc. will help you with exams and papers, the other eighty percent of your grade. There will be two one-hour exams, each worth 10 percent, and two short essays of a minimum of 1,000 words (approximately 4 typewritten pages) each worth 20 percent, and a final worth 20 percent. Of course, you are responsible for keeping up with reading and writing assignments, even if you are unable to attend class. In other words, a missed class is not an excuse for not being prepared on your return. Learn the assignment from a classmate or from your instructor. 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.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: “Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present,” writes contemporary Mexican author Carlos Fuentes. A constant among all peoples, a shared legacy of ancestral memories, perhaps a part of our very fiber, myth is, in part, the thread that binds a society (and societies) together, that which informs national identities and codes of moral conduct. So crucial are they, in fact, that people, even today, are willing to die for their myths.

Of course, we won't go to that extent in our class. Our focus will be on the intersection between myth and culture as it is illustrated in some darn good reads. Anthropologists, psychologists, theologians, philosophers, literary theorists, etc. have all grappled with the term myth. So expect some treatment of theory and where appropriate (and accessible) application to Mediterranean, Easter, and Modern mythologies. Our quest (just couldn't resist that word) should reveal the essential beliefs of other cultures and at times their similarities with our own.

Class procedure will consist of very informal lecture and discussion periods, group work, and, when relevant, video. Grades will be based on class participation, occasional surprise reading check quizzes, two short papers, two one-hour exams, and a final.

A Very Tentative Outline for English 3009

“The way to become truly human is to learn to recognize the lineaments of God in all the wonderful modulations in the face of man.”

--Joseph Campbell, American Scholar of Myth

- Wk #1—Mon. Aug. 22—Discussion of course and assignment of texts.
 Wed. “ 24—video, either *The Hero’s Journey*, or, more probably, an episode of either the *X-Files* or *BTVS*
 Fri. “ 26—grappling with the definition of myth, from *Sacred Narrative*, Lauri Honko’s “The Problem of Defining Myth,” pp. 41-52; J. W. Rogerson’s “Slippery Words, Myth,” pp. 62-71.

UNIT #1: MEDETERRANANEAN MYTHOLOGIES

“It’s curious, and should be humbling, that ‘evolution myths’ often foreshadowing the dry ‘scientific findings’ of today.”

--Alexander Eliot, American Art Historian

- Wk #2—Mon. Aug. 29—Begin Near Eastern Mythology: “The Enuma Elish,” pp. 99-113 in *Primal Myths*, quiz? Handouts
 Wed. “ 31—Conclude “Enuma Elish,” handout; begin *The Epic Of Gilgamesh*, pp. 61-96; Remember there’s a Glossary at the back of the book. Group work
 Fri. Sept. 2—*Epic of Gilgamesh*, pp. 97 to 119; conclude group Work. Draw lots for group project.

“A myth contains the story that is preserved in popular memory and that helps to bring to life some deep stratum buried in the depth of the human spirit.”

--Nikolai Berdyayev, Russian Philosopher

- Wk #3—Mon. Sept. 5—LABOR DAY—NO CLASS
 Wed. “ 7—video *Who Wrote the Bible?* Handout on Genesis Distributed.
 Fri. “ 9—Judeo-Christian mythology; Creation stories from *Primal Myths*, pp. 123-126. Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis, video, handouts

“Myth, especially as codified in religion, has been the basis for the morality of a society.”

--J. F. Bierli, American Scholar of Myth

- Wk #4—Mon. Sept. 12—excerpts from Genesis, Chapters 3, 4, 6-9; video?
 Wed. “ 14—Chapter 11 of Genesis; video on parallels between Mesopotamian myth and the Bible
 Fri. “ 16—excerpts from Genesis, the Abraham story, chapters 12-25:8; group work

“In its fullest expression, the case for myth is universal; Myth has a life of its own, and with its own spiritual resources, keeps finding clever ways of using every kind of human making to spread its potency.”

--Sean Kane, American Scholar of Myth

- Wk #5—Mon. “ 19—Abraham story concluded. Quiz?
 Wed. “ 21—group projects due—to be presented in class.
 Fri. “ 23—Paper #1 assigned; Hesiod’s *Theogony* on handout Distributed. Student conferences on essay #1, MTWThF

“...we need myths to determine and to evaluate the various facts presented to us. We need myths to answer the questions, ‘Who am I? How do I fit into the worlds of society and nature? How should I live?’”

--Barbara C. Sproul, American Scholar of Myth

- Wk #6—Mon. “ 26—Graeco-Roman Mythology: excerpts from Hesiod’s *Theogony*, video
 Wed. “ 28—excerpts from Hesiod’s *Theogony*, quiz? Handouts
 Fri. “ 30—Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book I, group work

“And the pervading purposes of our mythmaking ancestors, all down the centuries, has been to awaken us.”

--Alexander Eliot, American Art Historian

- Wk #7—Mon. Oct. 3—Conclude group work on Book I
 Wed. “ 5—excerpts from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, group work; paper due
 Fri. “ 7—FALL BREAK—NO CLASS

“Myth embodies the nearest approach to truth that can be embodied in words.”

--A. K. Coomarswamy, Indian Philosopher

Wk #8—Mon. Oct. 10—Loose ends of Unit #1; Study questions distributed.
 Wed. “ 12—Exam #1 (Mediterranean mythologies)
 Fri. “ 14—Exam returned and discussed.

UNIT #2: EASTERN MYTHOLOGIES (HINDUISM, BUDDHISM)

“Myth, whether Christian or other, is a type of truth
 in the form of a story.”
 --*Encyclopedia Britannica*

Wk #9—Mon. Oct. 17—Paper #1 returned; Introduction to Hinduism, selected myths
 from *Primal Myths*, pp. 179-192, handouts
 Wed. “ 19—excerpts from *The Mahabharata* (MBH), Part I, video
 Fri. “ 21—excerpts from MBH, group work or video

“Myths reveal the structure of reality, and the multiple
 modalities of being in the world; that is why they are
 Exemplary models of human behavior.”
 --Mircea Eliade, American Scholar of Myth

Wk #10—Mon. Oct. 24—excerpts from MBH, group work
 Wed. “ 26—excerpts from MBH, video
 Fri. “ 28—excerpts from MBH, group work

“A myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates in
 Alan Watts’ words, ‘the inner meaning of the
 Universe and human life.’”
 --Andrew Greeley, Priest and Novelist

Wk #11—Mon. “ 31—Paper #2 assigned, student conferences MTWThF
 Wed. Nov. 2—excerpts from MBH, Part III, quiz, video?
 Fri. “ 4—conclude MBH.

“Accordingly, myth is here defined very broadly
 as a narrative (story) concerning fundamental
 symbols that are constitutive of or paradigmatic
 for human existence.”
 --Bernard F. Batto, American Scholar of Religion

Wk #12—Mon. Nov. 7—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, background, video, handouts
 Wed. “ 9—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, group work
 Fri. “ 11—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, video; Study Guide for exam #2
 Distributed.

“Myths are regarded as a random collection of stories; in a culture there is a clear correlation between the distribution of mythical themes and what is considered socially relevant in that culture.”

--Lauri Honko, Finnish Folklorist

Wk #13—Mon. Nov. 14—Loose ends, Hesse’s *Siddhartha*
 Wed. “ 16—exam #2 (Eastern Mythologies)
 Fri. “ 18—exam #2 returned; assignment of first 12 chapters of
 Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, video documentary

THANKSGIVING RECESS—NOVEMBER 19-27—NO CLASS

UNIT 3: MODERN MYTHOLOGIES

“Certainly science, like so many of the earlier myths, appears to explain the natural world around us. But science can only answer how things happen; it is unable to tell us why.”

--J. F. Bierli, American Scholar of Myth

Wk #14—Mon. Nov. 28—*Frankenstein*, graded group work
 Wed. “ 30—Paper #2 due, *Frankenstein*, group work
 Fri. Dec. 2—video, selected scenes

“You are my creature, but I am your master; obey.”

--Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Wk #15—Mon. Dec. 5—*Frankenstein*, graded group work
 Wed. “ 7—Paper #2 returned, *Frankenstein*, group work
 Concluded
 Fri. “ 9—Study Guide for Final distributed.

FINAL EXAMS: DECEMBER 12-16 (emphasis on *Frankenstein*)