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ENG 5061-001: The Oral Tradition in Literature

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English 5061, Section 1

The Oral Tradition in Literature

Dr. Bonnie Irwin
315K Coleman, 581-6304, cfbdi@eiu.edu
Office Hours: TuTh 10-11, W 1-3

M 3:30-6:00
Coleman 305

This seminar is designed as a discussion of the oral, traditional provenance of some of the great works of world literature. We will be reading ancient and medieval texts primarily, but will also look at contemporary oral traditions and the works of verbal art that they produce. Our discussions will be informed by critical works of the last 40 years, starting with Albert Lord's *Singer of Tales* (1960). We will grapple with one central question: What difference does a work's orality and traditional character make to its interpretation by a highly literate culture such as ours? We will look at the oral origins of many texts now called "literary": *Iliad*, *1001 Nights*, *Beowulf*, the Bible. We'll also discuss how modern literary authors make use of their knowledge of oral traditions in their own writings.

Required Texts:

- Homer. *The Iliad*
- Harper-Collins Study Bible*
- Arabian Nights*
- Hurston. *Mules and Men* (I will provide this one)
- Naylor. *Mama Day*
- Silko. *Ceremony*

Grading

Term Paper	550 pts.	
Journal	200 pts.	901-1000 pts. = A
Presentation 1	100 pts.	801-900 pts. = B
Presentation 2	50 pts.	702-800 pts. = C
<u>Participation</u>	<u>100 pts.</u>	
Total	1000 pts.	

Information for Students With Disabilities:

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

Paper:

There will be only one paper required for this course: a 20-page researched term paper. Each of you will design your own paper topic with assistance from me. As I'm sure you know, getting started early is preferrable. You *will* need to make use of interlibrary loan to write a satisfactory paper for this class, as Booth Library's holdings are not the best. The paper is due no later than April 26, and I will return them on May 3. A research proposal is due on March 1. More information will be forthcoming.

Journal:

You will be expected to keep a response journal in which you record your thoughts about the reading. These should be kept on loose leaf paper (or computer printed) in a folder which will be turned in at the end of each class. Try to write at least 500 words a week. Your responses will be evaluated based on the quality of the ideas rather than their form. Use complete sentences, but don't worry about style as much as content.

Presentations:

Each of you is responsible for two class presentations. The second of these will be in April or May and will consist of a report on your research paper. We will be discussing your projects along the way, but the presentation is an opportunity for you to make a more formal report to the class on your findings.

The first presentation will be scheduled at a time appropriate to its topic. For this assignment, you will read a secondary source and present the author's major arguments and critical approaches to the class. These will be chosen the first week of class and the presentations will begin on February 1.

Participation:

I expect to run this class as a seminar, which means that we'll all be talking every week. A seminar thrives on discussion and questions--come prepared to provide both! Your participation is required along with your attendance.

Course Objectives

- to learn more about the way oral traditions work--
- to investigate differences and similarities between oral and literate verbal art--
- to consider not just author and content, but audience, performance, context, and tradition--
- to enjoy--

SYLLABUS

- Mon Jan 11 Introduction
- Mon Jan 18 **MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. HOLIDAY -- NO CLASS**
- Mon Jan 25 *Iliad*
Books I - XVI
- Mon Feb 1 *Iliad*
Books XVII - XXIV
Critical Presentations: Lord, Havelock
- Mon Feb 8 Bible, Old Testament
Genesis, Deuteronomy, Ruth, Proverbs, Ezekiel, Jonah, and, time permitting, an additional book of your choice
Critical Presentations: Ong
- Mon Feb 15 Bible, New Testament
Matthew, Mark, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, and, time permitting, an additional book of your choice
Critical Presentations: Kelber
- Mon Feb 22 *Arabian Nights*
pp. 1-150
Critical Presentations: Bauman, Stock
- Mon Mar 1 *Arabian Nights*
pp. 206-295
Research Proposals due
Critical Presentations: Irwin
- Mon Mar 8 African traditions
Handouts and reserve readings
Critical Presentations: Finnegan
- Mon Mar 15 **SPRING BREAK -- NO CLASS**
- Mon Mar 22 *Mules and Men*
Part 1: Folk Tales
Critical Presentations: Rosenberg, Abrahams
- Mon Mar 29 *Mules and Men*
Part 2: Hoodoo
- Mon Apr 5 *Mama Day*
Research Presentations begin
Critical Presentations: Dance

Mon Apr 12 Native American Traditions
Handouts and reserve readings
Critical Presentations: Swann, Tedlock

Mon Apr 19 Native American Traditions
Handouts and reserve readings
Critical Presentations: Hymes

Mon Apr 26 *Ceremony*
Critical Presentations: Silko
Paper due

Mon May 3 **Summary and Conclusions**
Note special Finals Week class time: 5:15 - 7:15