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ENG 3009G-001: Myth and Culture

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Dr. Wm. J. Searle

English 3009—sec.001—9:30 to 10:45—MTWThF—CH 3170

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The following texts are used for English 3009G:


**ATTENDANCE:** Plan to attend every class. You might glance at page 19 of the 2007-2008 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 ON PLAGIARISM:** "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 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 80 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 double spaced) 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.

CELL PHONES: Please keep them turned off and out of sight during class. For obvious reasons, please do not consult or answer a cell phone during an exam.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: “Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present,” writes 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, Eastern, and American mythologies. Our quest (just couldn’t resist that word) should reveal the essential beliefs of other cultures and 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 3009G

“A myth contains the story that is preserved in the 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 #1—Mon. June 14—Introduction of course and assignment of texts; video, either an episode of the X-Files or Buffy, The Vampire Slayer.

Tues.  “  15—Group work on the video and grappling with the definition of myth, from Sacred Narrative, Honko’s “The Problem of Myth,” pages 41-52.

Unit #1: Mediterranean Mythologies

“...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 world of society and nature? How should I live?”

--Barbara C. Sproul, American Scholar of Myth


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

--Sean Kane, American Scholar of Myth


Tues.  “  22—From Genesis handout, chapters 3, 4, 6-9, and 11; quiz? optional reading, from Sacred Narrative, Fraser’s “The Fall of Man,” pages 72-97. Assignment of theme #1.Student Conferences in my office 11:00 to 12:30 and 3 to 4 PM.


Thurs.  “  24—Graeco-Roman mythology, video, handouts, etc.

Fri.  “  25—Loose ends of Hesiod’s Theogony

“A myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates in Alan Watts’ words, ‘the inner meaning of the universe and of human life.’”—Andrew Greely, priest and novelist
Wk #3—Mon. June 28—Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book I, graded group work; perhaps video on Greek/Roman myth;
Tues. “ 29—excerpts from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*
Wed. “ 30—Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*;
Thurs. July 1—Conclude Ovid; study guide for exam#1 distributed

Unit #2: Eastern Mythologies (Hinduism and Buddhism)

“And the pervading purposes of our mythmaking ancestors, all down the centuries, has been to awaken us.”—Alexander Eliot, American Art Historian

Fri. “ 2—Theme #1 due; extra credit for all turned in early or on time; Questions on exam #1 addressed and discussed. Video on the *Mahabharata*

“Myth embodies the nearest approach to truth that can be stated in words.”
--A.K. Coomarswamy, Indian Philosopher

Wk #4—Mon. July 5—NO CLASS—INDEPENDENCE DAY OBSERVANCE

Tues. “ 6—Exam #1 (on Mediterranean Mythologies); Theme #1 Returned.
Wed. July 7 ----MBH, group work or video

Thurs. “ 8 —MBH, graded group work
Fri. “ 9---Theme #2 assigned: conferences on student Papers from 11:00 AM to 12:50 PM and/or 3:00 to 4:30 for the next several days

“Myths are regarded as a random collection of stories. In a culture there is a clear correlation between the distribution of mythic themes and what is considered socially relevant in that culture.”
--Lauri Honko, Finnish Folklorist

Wk #5—Mon. July 12—Conclude MBH
Tues “ 13 —Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, video, handouts, Study Guide for Exam #2 distributed.
Wed. “ 14—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, graded group work
Thurs. " 15—Hess’s *Siddhartha*, quiz?
Fri. " 16—Exam #2 (on MBH and *Siddhartha*)

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. Bierlien, American Scholar of Myth

Wk #6—Mon. July 19—Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*
Tues “ 20—Theme #2 due—one point extra credit for all essays turned in early or on time; graded group work on Shelley’s novel

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

--from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Thurs. “ 22—Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*
Fri. “ 23—FINAL EXAM—EMPHASIS ON *FRANKENSTEIN*