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ENG 3009C-052: Myth & Culture

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ENGLISH 3009C.52: 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 by using comparative analysis. Prerequisite: English 1002C, or 1092C, or the equivalent.

Course Format: Lecture and discussion, preferably much more the latter, dependent on your willingness and preparation to contribute. Journal writing per the syllabus should provide ample opportunities to develop your ideas for class discussion.

Required Texts:

This latter text will not be used in Intersession 2000.

Course Requirements and Grading: Discussion (participation, reading quizzes as necessary)--10%; journal--20%; three short essays--20% each; and a final essay examination--20%.

Journal: Throughout the term and on a near-daily basis (at least four times a week), you should develop 20-25 pages in which you practice expressive and critical writing. Record responses to readings, however briefly; as a rough estimate, you should respond to one or two topics for each class; the syllabus suggests directions for query, and these should be regarded as assigned journal entries. Responses, of course, will vary; some may be brief and others should be indepth and detailed in the effort to explore ideas and elaborate on associations. (The more of these latter sort, the better.) Try, occasionally, responding to texts and issues both before and after class discussions; reflect on your own experience and explore its significance to the text, or the meaning of the text to your own experience. Generally, I shall expect you to work toward becoming "strong readers," those readers who pursue interpretation beyond the conventional responses that any given text seems to invite. Please, no diaries. Obviously, the journal is rough writing; I shall evaluate it as such.
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 (10%); however, each day in intersession is the equivalent of a week in the fifteen-week semester. Obviously, cuts--the whole two hours or the second hour--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. Exercises and quizzes must be legible as well as handwritten journals.

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 Handbook, pp. 505-518, 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.
ENGLISH 3009C.52: Myth and Culture--Syllabus

May

T  9: Course Introduction: Contexts and Frames
The archetypal approach to myth
W 10: Claude Levi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning (MM):
"The Meeting of Myth and Science"; "'Primitive' Thinking and the 'Civilized' Mind"; "When Myth Becomes History" (Structuralism)
Assignment: Essay #1
R 11: Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth (LM):
F 12: Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge (LK):
"Common Sense as a Cultural System"; "Art as a Cultural System"; "The Way We Think Now: Toward an Ethnography of Modern Thought"; "Local Knowledge: Fact and Law in Comparative Perspective"
Discussion: Comparison of perspectives and methods:
interpretive anthropology (LK), structuralism (MM), archetypal 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?
Writing: Journal responses; working definitions (1-2 pp)

(These 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 second week and complete the Geertz essays over the last 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--and your journals are always available to explore and to clarify your thoughts.)

M 15: Native American mythologies
Poetics of orality and literacy (handout)
Native American mythology (handout)
T 16: "Acoma Pueblo origin myth" (handout)
Assignment: Essay #2; Essay #1 due
W 17: "Winnebago trickster cycle" (handout)
R 18: The Mission (film)
F 19: Discussion: the clash of cultural mythologies
Journals due

M 22: Hindu mythology
"The Mahabharata" (handouts)
T 23: The Mahabharata (film)
Assignment: Essay #3; Essay #2 due.
W 24: The Mahabharata and discussion
R 25: (continued)
F 26: (continued)
M 29: **Memorial Day--no class.**
T 30: **The Mahabharata** and discussion
W 31: (continued)

**June**

R 1: Myth and **Meaning for Postmodern American Culture**
   (Course review and conclusions)
   **Journals due; Essay #3 due.**
F 6: **Final examination.**

I'll attempt to keep us on schedule with the material above, and I'll weave commentary on theoretical material into lecture and discussion of the primary texts. I'll be quite happy, however, to follow your digressions and interests as the course unfolds. I do realize that some of you may find the ancillary reading listed in the first week to be especially challenging, so please don't hesitate to ask questions, if I've not yet addressed what you're reading.