Summer 6-15-1997

ENG 3009-051: Myth and Culture

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1. Course Objectives

To learn better the meanings of "myth"; to study and compare mythologies of different cultures; to discover how myth informs cultural values; to explore the differences between myth and science; and, most importantly, to realize more about yourself by better understanding the myths you do and don't live by.

2. Course Content

Popular mythologists such as Joseph Campbell and Alan Watts; philosophical discussion of myth; creation myths (e.g. Genesis); Greek myths (esp. Dionysus, Apollo, Orpheus); Black Orpheus (a Brazilian film, on reserve); Siddhartha (a novel influenced by Buddhism and Taoism); Woman in the Dunes (a Japanese film, on reserve); The Tao te Ching (the Taoist "bible"); selections from Dine Bahane and Black Elk Speaks (Native American mythologies); selections from Wisdom of the Mythtellers (includes references to Native American, Australian, Celtic, and Greek myths); selections from The Swimmer as Hero.

(This content is flexible and can be altered according to the needs/desires of the class. Other texts can be included or substituted.)

3. Writing Requirements

Nine quizzes; unannounced; factual and interpretive questions.

A term paper, 2500-3000 words. Topic: Referring (in at least some detail) to most of the texts we have studied, show what "myths" you do/don't live by, and why your life is/isn't purposeful, is/isn't meaningful.

A journal. At least 1000 words weekly for 13 weeks; at least 3 entries a week; clearly dated; typed or written legibly every-other-line (illegible journals will be graded F). Dreams--your own or others' (if you remember your dreams, they can become a major part of your journal). Detailed interpretive responses to texts (readings and films) both before and after class discussions; but focus especially on (parts of) texts not discussed in class. Connections between texts and personal/social/political experience. The journal, of course, will be "rough" writing (spontaneous thoughts, feelings, memories, and associations recorded without worrying too much about organization or the mechanics of writing). Nevertheless, it should be considered a major work, a treasure. Criteria for evaluation: regularity, fullness, variety, thoughtfulness (originality) concreteness (detailed references to texts). The journal will be due ____.

4. Grading

The exams and term paper will be graded using a + / - system (e.g. B+, B- etc.). Criteria for evaluation: concreteness (detailed references to texts), clarity of thought and focus, grammar and other formal concerns, proofreading. The grade for the quizzes will be curved at the end of the semester.
5. **Final grade**

The final grade will be determined by weighing the various requirements as follows:

- Quizzes: 25%
- Term paper: 30%
- Journal: 30%
- Class participation: 15%

6. **Attendance**

For every class missed a 500-word paper will be required (see me, for topics).

7. **Late papers**

Late papers will be accepted if the student has a reasonable excuse. Quizzes, however, can not be made up, unless the absence is officially excused.

8. **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.

9. **Since mythologies worship the primordial power and wonder of sex/creation, in this class we will discuss sexually explicit matters.** To cite just one (surprising?) example, we'll discuss the scholar John Allegro's point that "The name Jesus/Joshua (the greek and Hebrew forms) means 'the semen that heals' or 'fructifies,' the god-juice that gives life. To be smeared with this powerful liquid, above all to absorb it into his body, was to bring the worshipper of the 'Jesus' into living communion with God, indeed, to make him divine."