Spring 1-15-2000

ENG 3009C-003: Myth and Culture

Bonnie Irwin
Eastern Illinois University

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ENGLISH 3009C, SECTION 3
Myth and Culture

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Office Hours: M 1-3, Tu 8-9, Th 1-3

Course Description
The catalog describes this course as follows: Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding. You will find, however, as you talk to your peers, that each instructor teaches this course a bit differently, with different texts and emphases. So... what sets this section apart?

In terms of format, I like to see a lively class. I will do whatever I can to keep you awake and involved and interested. Don’t be surprised to see a lot of small group interaction and a variety of activities. I do not want to hear myself talk 150 minutes a week and I doubt you do either. Regarding theme, we will do much of what is outlined in the basic course description, but we’re going to focus on one particular type of text, epic, in order to look at the way violence interacts with the sacred. Many ancient texts, even religious ones, are violent. Why is that? What can the interaction between violence and myth tell us about violence in our own culture? If you find reading about religion, sex, violence, and death particularly disturbing, this may not be the section for you.

Course Objectives
By the end of the semester, I expect you to know...

- What myths are and how they function
- What some of the beliefs and customs of the Hindus, Tibetan Buddhists, Sumerians, Ancient Greeks, Navajos, and Mayans are
- What some of the myths of the Hindus, Tibetan Buddhists, Sumerians, Ancient Greeks, Navajos, and Mayans are
- The significance of similarities and differences among cultural myths and beliefs
- That all people have myths, whether they know it or not

With this knowledge, I expect you to be able to...

- Break down cultural misunderstandings and barriers
- Recognize your own prejudices
- Recognize similarities among cultures
- Be able to read a myth from any culture and draw some tentative conclusions about that culture
- Recognize and be able to analyze your own culture and mythology
- Learn different ways of teaching about cultures and texts
- Enjoy

Dundes, Sacred Narrative
Sandars, Epic of Gilgamesh
Pennick, Warrior Song of King Gesar
Homer, Iliad
Tedlock, Popol Vuh
Zolbrod, Dine Bahane'

Texts
There is a lot of reading in this course, some selections easier than others. Thus, discipline will be rewarded, procrastination will get you into trouble. You will enjoy most of the selections, I hope; the issues they deal with are relevant in our culture today, even if the names are strange.
Films
Mahabharata
Saving Private Ryan

Movies do not mean a day off. Be an active viewer: think about what you see and hear.

Grade Breakdown:

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
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<td>Exam 2</td>
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<td>Exam 4</td>
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<td>Final</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1, Drafts 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Paper 2, Drafts 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revised Paper</td>
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<td>In-Class Writing/Participation</td>
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Course Grade Calculator:

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<tr>
<td>901-1000</td>
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<td>701-800</td>
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<td>601-700</td>
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Words of Advice on Grades: Adequate, average work will earn you a 'C' in this course. If you merely go through the motions, but do so with a certain amount of skill, you are an average (i.e. 'C') student. If you merely go through the motions without much skill, you may very well earn a 'D'; missing deadlines consistently or racking up lots of absences (see absence policy below) may also lead to a 'D'. Good work, i.e. extra effort and good quality product will earn you a 'B'. Excellent work, i.e. going above and beyond the requirements for assignments, using both skill and creativity, should earn you an 'A'.' Keep in mind that doing an assignment is no guarantee of an 'A' or 'B'—you must also do it well. If you are shooting for a particular grade in this course, I advise that you come see me early so we can discuss how you might best achieve that grade. I do not care what grade you need; I will do whatever I can to help you earn the grade you want.

Students with Disabilities
If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 581-6583 (9th St. Hall).

Attendance
I take attendance each class period, but there are no points assigned to attendance itself. Instead, you are allowed three absences with no questions asked. After that, each absence will mean a deduction in 25 points in your course grade. For example, missing a total of 7 classes (3 1/2 weeks or over 20% of the classes) will result in your course grade being reduced by a full grade. Of course, extended illnesses and emergencies will be accommodated, but I also expect you to use your 3 absences wisely. Don't skip class at the beginning of the semester and then expect me to be sympathetic later on if you get sick. You are responsible for taking care of your own absences: getting the notes from a classmate, getting any handouts and assignments from me. It is obviously in your best interest to attend class every time because you will always miss something if you do not. For some of the participation points you will miss by missing class, I will allow you to attend appropriate campus events and report on them.

Exams
There will be four exams on the reading, each consisting of closed-book, short answer and identification questions. The final will be open-book, essay format and comprehensive. I will distribute possible essay topics before the exam.
PAPERS
I will suggest possible topics, but you always have the option of creating your own, subject to my approval. You will note on the syllabus and in the description of grade breakdown that I expect you to do more than one draft of your papers. This will help you to clarify your thoughts and to become a better writer.

How will it work? On a day that Draft 1 is due, you should bring your original and 2 copies to class. I will distribute the copies to 2 of your classmates, who will read your draft and make comments. They will then return the draft and comments to you by the next class. You will then have 1-2 weeks to read through the comments and revise your paper. Keep in mind that you may not agree with all the comments and suggestions. Review the paper based on your own thoughts as well. “Revision” means to see again; you might want to totally dismantle your first attempt and rearrange it entirely. Draft 2 is to be turned in to me, along with Draft 1 and all comments. I will then make comments and suggestions. You can, of course, consult me on Draft 1 also if you wish. When you receive my comments on Paper 2, Draft 2, choose one of your two papers to revise one more time and hand it for your revised paper.

As you can see from the grading, the two preliminary drafts for each paper are together worth 50 points. Earning the full 50 points requires having a serious Draft 1 ready on time. Don’t think you can slap something together without no paragraphs or in one long sentence right before class! Earning the full 50 points also requires you to make comments on other drafts. Read carefully and make thoughtful comments and suggestions! If you lose the comments that one of your classmates wrote on your paper, you will lose the points. I will monitor the situation by having the comments turned into me first to check off in my gradebook. I will get the comments to you the same class I receive them.

The revised paper, worth 200 points, or 20% of your final grade, will be graded like a traditional paper. The quality of your thoughts and writing will be the focus here. You may turn this paper in early; you cannot turn it in late.

Questions??
If I’ve forgotten something or you have questions at any time, please feel free to drop by my office (315K Coleman)
## SYLLABUS

"Myths are other people's religion."  
(Sam Keen)

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<th>JAN 11</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
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<td>TH</td>
<td>JAN 13</td>
<td>WHAT IS MYTH?</td>
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<td>READ: ALAN DUNDES' INTRODUCTION TO SACRED NARRATIVE, LAURI HONKO, &quot;THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING MYTH.&quot; THESE ARE IN SACRED NARRATIVE, PP. 1-3, 41-52.</td>
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"The real point of myth is not to give an objective world picture; what is expressed in it, rather, is how we human beings understand ourselves in the world."

(Rudolf Bultmann, German theologian)

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"Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be expressed in words"

(Ananda Coomaraswamy, Indian philosopher)

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<td>READ: RAFFAELE PETTAZONI, &quot;THE TRUTH OF MYTH,&quot; SACRED NARRATIVE, 98-109</td>
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"Myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the supernatural) into the World. Myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true story,' because it deals with realities. The cosmogonic myth is 'true' because the existence of the World is there to prove it."

(Mircea Eliade, Myth scholar)

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<td>PAPER 1, DRAFT 1 DUE</td>
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"Myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates the inner meaning of the universe and of human life."

(Alan Watts, British expositor of Buddhism to the West)

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<td>TH</td>
<td>FEB 10</td>
<td>WARRIOR SONG OF KING GESAR, PP. 43-75</td>
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"Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends that are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true."

(Robert Graves, British POET AND MYTH SCHOLAR)

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<th>Tu</th>
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<td>FEB 17</td>
<td>WARRIOR SONG OF KING GESAR, PP. 116-138</td>
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"The friend of wisdom is the friend of myth."

(Aristotle, Greek philosopher)
"Myth gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he does understand the universe."
(Claude Levi-Strauss, French anthropologist)

"Myths are the daydreaming of the human race."
(Sigmund Freud, Father of Psychoanalysis)

"These things never happened, yet they always are."
(Saloustios, 4th century Greek scholar)

"There is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer, only we do not perceive it. Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity."
(F. Max Müller, Linguist and scholar of myth)

"Myth explains the why and how of here and now"
(Th. P. Van Baaren, Professor of Science and Religion)

"Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present."
(Carlos Fuentes, Mexican author)
"Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation into life and death."
(Joseph Campbell, Myth Scholar)

Tu  APR 18  EXAM 4
TH  APR 20  POPOL VUH FILM

"Myth is neither conscious poetry nor valid science, but the common root and raw material of both."
(George Santayana, Philosopher)

Tu  APR 25  POPOL VUH, PART 3, PP. 91-142
TH  APR 27  POPOL VUH, SELECTIONS FROM PARTS 4 & 5
        REVIEW

"To create a myth, that is to say, to venture behind the reality of the sense to find a superior reality, is the most manifest sign of the greatness of the human soul and the proof of its capacity for infinite growth and development."
(Louis-Auguste Sabatier, French Protestant Theologian)

TH  MAY 4  8 AM  FINAL EXAM