Spring 1-15-2002

ENG 3099G-099: Myth and Culture, Honors

Bonnie Irwin
Eastern Illinois University

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English 3099G, Section 099 (Spring 2002)

Myth and Culture, honors

TuTh 8:00-9:15

Dr. Bonnie Irwin
Office: 3871 Coleman
Office Phone: 581-6304 (e-mail: cfbdi@eiu.edu)
Office Hours: M 10-12; TuTh 1-2:30 and by appt.

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.

Because this is an honors class, I make certain assumptions: among these are that you are self-motivated, that you know how to use the library, and that I can trust you enough not to have to give quizzes. There will be times when the subject matter for the course will be based on your outside research. We will not limit ourselves to the text, and we will not always all be reading the same thing.

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 ancient peoples, especially the Hindus, Greeks, Navajos, and Mayans are
- what some of the myths of the Hindus, Tibetan Buddhists, Sumerians, Ancient Greeks, Native North Americans, 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
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.

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

Grade Breakdown:

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response Journal</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentations</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Essays</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective Essay</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Myth</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>1000</td>
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Course Grade Calculator:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>901-1000</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>801-900</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>701-800</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>601-700</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>0-600</td>
<td>F</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 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).

Electronic Writing Portfolio
If you are a sophomore or transfer student who needs a paper from this class for your Electronic Writing Portfolio, please see me for guidelines

English Department Policy on Plagiarism
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"the appropriation 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 immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.
Assignment Summary (More detailed assignment sheets forthcoming)

Group Presentations
Four times during the semester, there will be group presentations on culture: Navajo (Jan 29), Mayan (Feb 14), Hindu (Feb 28), and Tibetan (Mar 26). Groups will be assigned by topic area—geography, math/science, art/music, food/clothing, history—and each group will present on each presentation day. Insofar as possible, I will try to accommodate your preferences in assigning groups. The purpose of these presentations is to give the class a background on the cultures whose myth we will be studying.

Journal
During the semester, you will be expected to write 8,000-10,000 words in a response journal, documenting what you think about the reading, films, discussions. I will pick these up periodically for evaluation purposes as indicated on the syllabus; grades will be based not so much on grammar and style, but on the thought and reflection displayed in the writing. You may start with what you like and don’t like about a particular story or what you find strange, but then take the discussion deeper, trying to interpret the meaning and function of the story, comparing it to other things we read or to theoretical perspectives. Plan on handing in 3-4 typed pages each time for each due date.

Short Essays
Twice during the first half of the semester, you will write short essays. These will be approximately 1000 words in length. The first will be on Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and the second will be comparative. Topics are open, but I will make suggestions to those of you who wish me to.

Reflective Essay
On March 26, you will hand in an essay that demonstrates what you think about the impact that myth has on your own life and the impact you perceive it to have on others. Revision of this paper is required, and that revision will be due on April 18 (2 copies). There will be no final in this class, so this assignment and the class storytelling session are meant to sum up and draw some conclusions from what you have learned. Reading the Life of God and the quotations on the syllabus will help you find a focus your essay.

Class Myth
On Wednesday, May 1, we will assemble and create our own myths and stories. This is a mandatory assignment, but a creative one, in which, now that you all will have a good sense of what myth is, you will become the mythtellers!

Questions??
If I’ve forgotten something or you have questions at any time, please feel free to drop by my office (3871 Coleman)
## Syllabus

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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| Tu  | Jan 8 | Introduction  
Forms of Oral Narrative |
| Th  | Jan 10 | What Is Myth?  
**Choose presentation groups**  
Introduction to Roman Culture |
| Tu  | Jan 15 | *Metamorphoses*, Books 1 and 2  
Th Jan 17 | *Metamorphoses*, pp. 67-87, 129-143  
**Journal due** |
| Tu  | Jan 22 | *Metamorphoses*, pp. 143-167, 181-190, 200-204, 234-237, 239-251  
Th Jan 24 | *Metamorphoses*, pp. 261-265, 367-379  
**Journal due** |
| Tu  | Jan 29 | Presentations on Navajo Culture  
**Dine Bahane**, pp. 35-78 |
| Th  | Jan 31 |  
**Journal due** |
| Tu  | Feb 5 | **Dine Bahane**, pp. 81-99, 113-168  
**Journal due** |
| Th  | Feb 7 | **Dine Bahane**, pp. 171-224 |
| Tu  | Feb 12 |  
**Journal due** |

"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)

"Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be expressed in words"  
(A:anda Coomaraswamy, Indian philosopher)

"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)

"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)

"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)
Tu  Feb 12  |  Dine Bahane, pp. 225-289  
Th  Feb 14  |  Presentations on Mayan Culture  

**Journal due**  
**Short Essay 1 due**

"The friend of wisdom is the friend of myth.”  
(Aristotle, Greek philosopher)

Tu  Feb 19  |  Popol Vuh, pp. 63-74  
Th  Feb 21  |  Popol Vuh, pp. 91-142  
     |  Popol Vuh film

"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)

Tu  Feb 26  |  Popol Vuh, pp. 145-151, 160-162  
Th  Feb 28  |  Presentations on Hindu Culture

**Journal due**

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

Tu  Mar  5  |  Mahabharata (film)  
Th  Mar  7  |  Mahabharata (film)  
     |  Raffaele Pettazzoni, “The Truth of Myth,” Sacred Narrative, pp. 98-10

**Short Essay 2 due**

"Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change.”  
(Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending)

*** Spring Break ***  
*** Spring Break ***

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

Tu  Mar 19  |  Mahabharata (film)  
Th  Mar 21  |  Mahabharata (film)  

**Journal due**


"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)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 26</td>
<td>Presentations on Tibetan culture</td>
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<td><strong>Journal due</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Draft of Reflective Essay due</strong></td>
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<td>Mar 28</td>
<td><em>Life of Milarepa, pp. 7-74</em></td>
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"Myth explains the why and how of here and now"  
(Th. P. Van Baaren, Professor of Science and Religion)

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<tr>
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<td><strong>Journal due</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 4</td>
<td><em>Life of Milarepa, pp. 108-152</em></td>
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"Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present."
(Carlos Fuentes, Mexican author)

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<tr>
<td>Apr 9</td>
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<td>Apr 11</td>
<td><em>Life of God, pp. 5-49</em></td>
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"Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation into life and death."
(Joseph Campbell, Myth Scholar)

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<tr>
<td>Apr 16</td>
<td><em>Life of God, pp. 53-129</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 18</td>
<td><em>Life of God, pp. 150-216</em></td>
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<td><strong>Revised Reflective Essay due</strong></td>
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"Myth is neither conscious poetry nor valid science, but the common root and raw material of both."
(George Santayana, Philosopher)

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<tr>
<td>Apr 23</td>
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<td>April 25</td>
<td><strong>Journal due</strong></td>
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"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)

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1</td>
<td><strong>Class Myth</strong></td>
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