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ENG 3009C-007: Myth and Culture

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Course Description: Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, we will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological, and scientific ways of understanding. We will be reading primary texts of myths as well as secondary criticism, and the class will consist of lecture and discussion based upon these readings.

Course Objectives:
- to break down cultural misunderstandings and barriers
- to recognize similarities among cultures
- to learn what myths are and how they function
- to learn about cultures that may be unfamiliar
- to learn more about our own cultures and mythologies
- to learn different ways of approaching and interpreting cultures and texts

Course Texts:
- Dine bahane: The Navajo Creation Story.
- The Epic of Gilgamesh.
- Erdoes, R. & A. Ortiz, American Indian Myths and Legends.
- Lhalungpa, L. The Life of Milarepa.
- Ovid. Metamorphoses.
- Popul Vuh.

Grading: Unless otherwise specified in class, your grade will be based upon:
- Five short papers on assigned topics, approximately 3-4 pp. each, worth 25 points apiece (125 points)
- A mid-term exam worth 25 points
- A final exam worth 50 points
- Attendance with lively and substantive participation 30 points, possible quizzes or shorter written work and other assignments 40 points, group work worth 30 points

Papers: Must be typed, double-spaced, in MLA style, and must be on the assigned topics. (Consult the Writing Center if you are unfamiliar with MLA style.) Late papers will be penalized with point deductions of 5 points for each class day late.
Responsibilities and policies:
You must turn in ALL assigned writing to pass the course, as well as accumulating sufficient point totals.
Your written work for the course needs to be available as specified in the syllabus which you receive early in the semester.
Class discussion, and quizzes, short discussion-oriented writing, and most shorter exercises cannot be made up, as the sole purpose of most of these is to assure readiness for the discussion that follows. If you're not here for the class discussion, a quiz is pointless.

Ground rules for discussion:
We offer our experience as our truth, and agree to respect the experiences of the others in our class.
We acknowledge that our experience is limited, and that limited experience may cause us to draw shaky conclusions.
We agree to pursue information about the subjects we are studying, to engage in active reading and research, to avoid stereotypes, and to encourage thought.
We agree to share what we think and believe without demeaning or devaluing anyone else's experiences.
We agree to create an atmosphere in which everyone feels safe to discuss the material openly.

Academic honesty, research, written work etc:

Your instructor regards any violation of academic honesty including misappropriation of sources, unauthorized help, cheating on exams etc. with the utmost seriousness and will apply penalties severely. Students who transgress will certainly receive an F for the assignment. Cheating, plagiarism, and faulty documentation on papers and exams will most likely result in an F for the assignment, and probably an F for the course. ANY incident of academic dishonesty will be reported to Judicial Board.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodation, please contact the coordinator of disability services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Course assignments: You will receive an outline of assignments and due dates. Please keep up with it unless otherwise instructed, even if we are discussing something different in class.

PLEASE NOTE: Every effort has been made to spell out policies clearly. Some changes may occur in the normal course of any semester. For any alteration of assignment or policy, an announcement in class will be considered sufficient notice, so take care! Remaining in the course after these policies have been discussed and clarified signals that you have accepted them and agree to abide by them.
Course plan: The course will begin with a general discussion of what the terms "myth" and "culture" mean, and will divided roughly into three units as follows:

1. Near Eastern and European myths and legends, including Gilgamesh

2. Native American, including Mayan, and Navajo

3. Buddhist and Hindu myths and legends.
QUizzes if given will be unannounced, may vary in format from identification to short essay, and may be replaced by brief in- or out-of-class writing due the same day as the reading or other work.

Discussion questions and comments must be relevant and substantive, i.e. they must be about the reading, class material, and connections you are making with it. After the first two class days, discussion of procedural matters will be limited to the last five minutes or so of class. If you need help with a paper, make an appointment with me a reasonable time before the paper is due. If you have a question about a grade on a returned paper, take the paper home, re-read it, read my comments again, and then make an appointment with me.

Groups and teams will be formed for discussion and projects. You may be asked to make a group presentation to the class. All group work is part of the regular class proceedings, and you are as responsible for it as for regular reading and class lecture/discussion. Questions regarding group work may appear on exams and quizzes.

Read the syllabus carefully and pay attention to modifications. Under no circumstances will "I read the wrong material" be acceptable as an excuse. Directions for preparation are quite specific early in the semester, less so as we move on, to allow us to take advantage of the sometimes unpredictable nature of discussion. Please note additional assignments such as short writings and handouts on your syllabus as they are given in class.

Any item on the syllabus, including point distribution and grading weights or the nature of graded assignments, is subject to change if necessary. Generally, what's here goes, but if changes occur, an announcement in class will be considered sufficient notification.

Schedule of classes and assignments for first segment of course:

August 26 Introductions, diagnostic surveys, policies, course outline, brief in-class viewing and writing, introduction to concepts of "mythic and "scientific."
For next time, read Ovid, Metamorphosis, Book One, pages 3-27.
Things to look at particularly carefully:
How is the world created? By whom or what? How is it organized? Compare this creation story with the one you viewed Tuesday. How are they alike? How different? What are the four ages? What are their characteristics? What might they reveal about how an ancient culture looked at its own past? Why does Jove decide to intervene in human affairs? Who was Lycaon and why was he punished?
Does the flood story resemble any other stories you know of? How is humanity restored after the flood? Who are Deucalion and Pyrrha, what do they do, and why is it important?

In the story of Apollo and Daphne, what is Daphne's fate and why? Does it seem unfair to you? Why or why not? Answer the same questions in regard to the story of Jove and Io.

Taken as a whole, what do these stories suggest about the nature of the gods as seen through the eyes of a Roman poet? What do they suggest about relations between gods and humans?

August 28 Quizzes if given may begin on this date and continue throughout semester. Discuss reading, meaning of "oral" and "literate" with respect to myth and culture, myth and science. Specific work on reading.

For Sept. 2, Metamorphoses Book Two, pages 28-56, guidelines for reading to be given in class.