Spring 1-15-2003

ENG 3009G-001: Myth and Culture

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Eastern Illinois University

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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.

There may be times when the subject matter for the course will be based on your outside research. We will not limit ourselves to the texts, 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
- the role of myth in shaping community and individual identity
- what some of the beliefs and customs of ancient peoples, especially the Tibetans, Navajos, and Mayans are
- what some of the myths of the Tibetan Buddhists, 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
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 appear strange.

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

Grades

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 need a paper from this class for your Electronic Writing Portfolio, please inform me at the beginning of the semester and 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.
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.

Assignment Summary (More detailed assignment sheets forthcoming)

1. Papers
Because the quizzes, exams, and class discussions will cover the reading in some detail, we are going to use the papers to reflect on these same themes on a more personal level. In other words, what relevance does all this have on your life?

a. Place Essay
Most myths are centered around a particular place, often a scared space. This essay will reflect the role of place and home in your life.

b. Teacher Essay
Much of The Life of Milarepa turns on the protagonist’s relationship with his teacher or spiritual guide. In this essay, you will reflect upon the important teachers in your own life. These may include, but are not limited to, school teachers.

2. Exams
Exams will be mostly short answer and essay-based. The final will contain comprehensive essay questions, but short-answer questions will only concern material after the midterm. Essays are open-book, open-note, and you will usually be furnished with topics in advance. Thus, if you are doing the reading, paying attention in class, and thinking about what we’re studying, you should do well.

3. Quizzes
There will be frequent quizzes on the reading. These are primarily to keep you accountable. If you do the reading, you will do all right on the quizzes. Expect at least one a week.

4. Participation
A passing grade in participation means showing up and being prepared for class. Higher grades are based on your level of engagement in discussion, group work, and presentations. Much of the class work in this course will be done in groups. We will try to maintain the same groups all semester, and part of your grade will be based on how well you contribute to your group’s work.

Questions??
If I’ve forgotten something or you have questions at any time, please feel free to drop by my office (3871 Coleman)
"Myths are other people's religion." (Sam Keen)

Tu  Jan 14  Introduction
    Forms of Oral Narrative; What is Myth?

Th  Jan 16  How do we interpret myth?
    "Living by Wonder." (e-reserve)
    *Wisdom of the Mythtellers*, pp. 14-25
    Introduction to Navajo culture
    *Dine Bahane*, 35-78

    "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)

Tu  Jan 21  *Dine Bahane*, 81-142

Th  Jan 23  *Dine Bahane*, 142-168
    *Wisdom of the Mythtellers*, pp. 27-51

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

Tu  Jan 28  *Dine Bahane*, 171-224

Th  Jan 30  *Dine Bahane*, 224-289

    "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)

Tu  Feb 4  "The Long Walk to Bosque Redondo," (e-reserve)
    "Telling the Holy." (e-reserve).
    *Saanii Dahataal*, pp. 7-10
    Film: *Rocks with Wings*

    Paper 1 Workshop

    "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)

Tu  Feb 11  Introduction to Mayan Myth and Culture
    Film: *Spirit of the Jaguar*
    Paper 1 due

Th  Feb 13  *Popol Vuh*, parts 1 & 2
"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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<td>Tu</td>
<td>Feb 18</td>
<td><em>Popol Vuh</em>, Part 3</td>
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<td>Feb 20</td>
<td><em>Popol Vuh</em> film</td>
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"The friend of wisdom is the friend of myth."
(Aristotle, Greek philosopher)

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<td>Th</td>
<td>Feb 27</td>
<td><em>Popol Vuh</em>, Part 4, pp. 145-161</td>
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<td>&quot;The Fall of the Maya.&quot; (e-reserve)</td>
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"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)

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<td><em>I, Rigoberta Menchu</em>, chapters I-VII</td>
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"Myths are the daydreaming of the human race."
(Sigmund Freud, Father of Psychoanalysis)

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

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"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)

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<td>Th</td>
<td>Mar 27</td>
<td>Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism</td>
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"Myth explains the why and how of here and now"
(Th. P. Van Baaren, Professor of Science and Religion)
"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  Feb 20  Popol Vuh film

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(Aristotle, Greek philosopher)

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Th  Feb 27  Popol Vuh Part 4, pp. 145-161
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(Claude Lévi-Strauss, French anthropologist)

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Th  Mar 6  I, Rigoberta Menchu, chapters I-VII

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(Sigmund Freud, Father of Psychoanalysis)

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(F. Max Müller, Linguist and scholar of myth)

Tu  Mar 25  I, Rigoberta Menchu, chapters XXVIII-XXXIV
"Towards an Active Utopia" (e-reserve)
Th  Mar 27  Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism
Life of Milarepa, pp. 9-35

"Myth explains the why and how of here and now"
(Th. P. Van Baaren, Professor of Science and Religion)
Tu  Apr 1  Life of Milarepa, pp. 39-74
"Essential Commitment" (e-reserve)

Th  Apr 3  Life of Milarepa, pp. 75-152
(You may skip the poems.)
"Your Cell Will Teach You Everything." (e-reserve)

"Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present."
(Carlos Fuentes, Mexican author)

Tu  Apr 8  Life of Milarepa, pp. 153-197
(You may skip the poems.)
"Elimination of Desires" handout
Paper 2 Workshop

Th  Apr 10  "Dalai Lama's Dilemma." (e-reserve)
"Why Buddhism, Why Now?" (e-reserve)
Films: Dalai Lama: Soul of Tibet, Kundun
Paper 2 due

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

Tu  Apr 15  "An Old Nun Tells Her Story." (e-reserve)
Wisdom of the Mythtellers, pp. 131-148

Th  Apr 17  Wisdom of the Mythtellers, pp. 165-180

"Mythology is the womb of mankind’s initiation into life and death."
(Joseph Campbell, Myth Scholar)

Tu  Apr 22  Wisdom of the Mythtellers, pp. 183-212
Paper 2 revision due

Th  Apr 24  No Class

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

Tu  Apr 29  Wisdom of the Mythtellers, pp. 215-256

Th  May 1  Review for Final Exam

"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)

Tu  May 6, 8:00am  Final Exam