ENG 3009-002-003: Myth and Culture

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Dr. William Searle

English 3009G—sec. 002—9:00 to 9:50 MWF—CH 3691
English 3009G—sec. 003—10:00 to 10:50 MWF—CH 3609

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The following texts are used for English 3009G:


**ATTENDANCE:** Plan to attend every class. You might glance at page 55 of the 2006-2007 catalog concerning this matter. Obviously, a student seldom does well in a course when he or she cuts class frequently. For that reason, I have established the following attendance policy. For **every five unexcused absences**, your final grade will be lowered one letter grade. If you have **ten unexcused absences**, your final grade will be lowered two letter grades, etc. Late papers (exams, quizzes, etc.) will be accepted only in cases of extreme emergency—severe illness, official university activity, or other urgent reasons.

**DEPARTMENTAL STATEMENT OF PLAGIARISM:** "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, 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 the immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”

**GRADING:** Approximately 20 percent of your grade will consist of class participation (class discussion, group work, etc.) and writing exercises (exclusive of out-of-class papers, like frequent reading check quizzes, etc.). More important, the classroom exercises, discussions, etc. will help you with exams and papers, the other eighty percent of your grade. There will be two one-hour exams, each worth 10 percent, and two short essays of a minimum of 1,000 words (approximately 4 typewritten pages, double spaced) each worth 20 percent. Of course, you are responsible for keeping up with reading and writing assignments, even if you are unable to attend class. In other words, a missed class is not an excuse for not being prepared on your return. Learn the assignment from a classmate or from your instructor. 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.

**CELL PHONES:** Please keep them turned off and out of sight during class. For obvious reasons, please do not consult a cell phone during an exam.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** “Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present,” writes contemporary Mexican author Carlos Fuentes. A constant among all peoples, a shared legacy of ancestral memories, perhaps a part of our very fiber, myth is, in part, the thread that binds a society (and societies) together, that which informs national identities and codes or moral conduct. So crucial are they, in fact, that people, even today, are willing to die for their myths.

Of course, we won’t go to that extent in our class. Our focus will be on the intersection between myth and culture as it is illustrated in some darn good reads. Anthropologists, psychologists, theologians, philosophers, literary theorists, etc. have all grappled with the term myth. So expect some treatment of theory and where appropriate (and accessible) application to Mediterranean, Eastern, and Modern mythologies. Our quest (just couldn’t resist that word) should reveal the essential beliefs of other cultures and at times their similarities with our own.

Class procedure will consist of very informal lecture and discussion periods, group work, and, when relevant, video. Grades will be based on class participation, occasional surprise reading check quizzes, two short papers, and two one-hour exams, and a final.
A Very Tentative Outline for English 3009

"The way to become truly human is to learn to recognize the lineaments of God in all the wonderful modulations in the face of man."

--Joseph Campbell, American Scholar of Myth

Wk#1—Mon. Aug. 20—Discussion of course and assignment of texts
Wed. " 22—video, either The Hero's Journey, or, more probably, an Episode of either the X-Files or BTVS

UNIT # 1: MEDITERRANEAN MYTHOLOGIES

“...It's curious, and should be humbling, that 'evolution myths' often foreshadow the dry 'scientific findings' of today.”

---Alexander Eliot, American Art Historian

Fri. Sept. 31—Epic of Gilgamesh, pp.97-119; conclude group work.

“A myth contains the story that is preserved in popular memory and that helps to bring to life some deep stratum buried in the depth of the human spirit.”

--Nikolai Berdyayev, Russian Philosopher

Wk#3—Mon. Sept.3—LABOR DAY—NO CLASS
Wed. " 5—Video Who Wrote the Bible? Handout on Genesis distributed
Fri. " 7—Judeo-Christian mythology; read chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis And the introductions to those creation stories in Primal Myths, pp. 123-126. Handouts.

“...Myth, especially as codified in religion, has been the basis for the morality of a society.”

--J.F. Bierlien, American Scholar of Myth
Wk#4—Mon. Sept. 10—excerpts from Genesis, chapters 3, 4, 6-9; video?
  Wed. “  12—Chapter 11 of Genesis; video on parallels between Mesopotamian myth and the bible.
  Fri. “  14—excerpts from Genesis, the Abraham story, chapters 12-25:8; group work.

"In its fullest expression, the case for myth is universal; myth has a life of its own, and with its own spiritual resources, keeps finding clever ways of using every kind of human making to spread its potency."
  --Sean Kane, American Scholar of Myth

Wk#5—Mon. Sept. 17—Abraham story concluded, quiz? Handout
  Wed. “  19—Paper #1 assigned; Hesiod’s Theogony Distributed.
  Fri. “  21—Graeco-Roman mythology: excerpts from Hesiod’s Theogony, video

"...we need myths to determine and to evaluate various facts presented to us. We need myths to answer the questions, ‘Who am I? How do I fit into the worlds of society and nature? How should I live?’"
  --Barbara C. Sproul, American Scholar of Myth

Wk#6—Mon. “  24—excerpts from Hesiod’s Theogony, quiz? Handouts
  Wed. “  26—Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Book I, group work.
  Fri. “  28—Conclude Book I

“And the pervading purposes of our mythmaking ancestors, all down the centuries, has been to awaken us.”
  --Alexander Eliot, American Art Historian

Wk#7—Mon. Oct.1—excerpts from Ovid ’ s Metamorphoses, group work, Paper #1 due.
  Wed. “  3—Conclude group work on excerpts from Ovid
  Fri. “  5—Loose ends of Unit #1; study questions for exam #1 distributed.
UNIT #2: EASTERN MYTHOLOGIES (HINDUISM, BUDDHISM)

"Myth, whether Christian or other, is a type of truth
in the form of a story."

--Encyclopedia Britannica

Wk#8—Mon Oct. 8—Introduction to Hinduism, selected myths from
Primal Myths, pp. 179-192; handouts
Wed. “10—Exam #1 (Mediterranean Mythologies)
Fri. Oct 12—FALL BREAK—NO CLASS

"Myth embodies the nearest approach to truth that
can be embodied in words."

--A. K. Coomarswamy, Indian Philosopher

Wk#9—Mon. Oct. 15—Exam #1 returned and discussed
Wed. “17—Paper #1 returned; excerpts from The Mahabharata (MBH),
Part I, video?
Fri. “19—excerpts from MBH, group work or video

"Myths reveal the structure of reality, and the
multiple modalities of being in the world;
that is why they are exemplary models of human
behavior."

--Mircea Eliade, American Scholar of Myth

Wk#10-Mon. Oct. 22—excerpts from MBH, group work
Wed. “24—excerpts from MBH, video
Fri. “26—excerpts from MBH, group work

"A myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates in
Alan Watts’ words, “The inner meaning of the
universe and human life.”

--Andrew Greeley, Priest and Novelist


Student conferences for paper #2 in my office,
CH 3371, MTWThF for several weeks

Wed. Oct. 31—excerpts from MBH, Part III, quiz, video
Fri. “2—Conclude MBH
“Accordingly, myth is here defined very broadly as a narrative (story) concerning fundamental symbols that are constitutive of or paradigmatic for human existence.”

--Bernard F. Batto, American Scholar of Religion

Wk#12-Mon. Nov. 5—Hesse’s Siddhartha, background, video, handouts
   Wed. “  7—Hesse’s Siddhartha, group work
   Fri. “  9—Hesse’s Siddhartha, video, Study Guide for exam #2 distributed.

“Myths are regarded as a random collection of stories; in a culture there is a clear correlation between the distribution of mythic themes and what is considered socially relevant in that culture.”

--Lauri Honko, Finnish Folklorist

Wk#13-Mon. Nov. 12—Loose ends, Hesse’s Siddhartha
   Wed. “ 14—Exam #2 (Eastern Mythologies)
   Fri. “ 16—Exam #2 returned; assignment of first 12 chapters of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, video documentary

THANKSGIVING RECESS—NOV 17-25—NO CLASS

UNIT #3: MODERN MYTHOLOGIES

“Certainly science, like so many of the earlier myths, appears to explain the natural world around us. But science can only answer how things happen; it is unable to tell us why.”

--J.F. Bierlien, American Scholar of Myth

Wk#14-Mon. Nov. 26—Frankenstein, graded group work
   Wed. “ 28—Paper #2 due, Frankenstein, group work
   Fri. “ 30—video, selected scenes

“You are my creature, but I am your master, obey.”

--Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein

Wk#15—Mon. Dec. 3—Frankenstein, graded group work
   Wed. “  5—Frankenstein, group work concluded
   Fri. “  7—Study Guide for the Final Exam distributed

FINAL EXAMS; DECEMBER 10-13 (EMPHASIS ON LATER WORKS)