ENG 3009G-008: Myth and Culture

Christopher Hanlon

Eastern Illinois University

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2002

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2002/101

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2002 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fall 2002 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.
English 3009G-008: Myth and Culture
Dr. Christopher Hanlon
ej-mail: chanlon@eiu.edu
Office Hours: MW 1-2, 2-3, and by appointment

Fall 2002
Office: Coleman Hall 3811
Office Phone: 581-6302

Required Texts:

Distributed through EIU Textbook Rental System:
Rosenberg, World Mythology, 3rd ed.
Mark Twain, the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony

Additional materials in coursepack available for purchase at EIU Campus Center Copy Services in Martin Luther King Student Union

Course Goals & Rationale:

Our goal this semester will be to explore many mythologies from several historically and geographically removed cultures, and to learn how to take up these mythologies as a certain mode of human intellectual history. As we do so, we will be especially concerned with the ways in which the myths of other cultures still reverberate in the myths of our own. Far from being a dead relic of the past, myth often encapsulates values and anxieties that continue to shape living cultures of the present. And so while part of this course will acquaint students with the mythological traditions of cultures from diverse historical and geographical locales, including Ancient Greece, Babylonia, North America, West Africa, the British Isles, and the Far East, a significant portion of the course will also explore the extent to which many of the mythic narratives these cultures have produced—along with the tensions, problems, and themes that recur throughout these narratives—still exert pressure on the narratives that shape American consciousness in our own day. Thus, our purpose as readers and thinkers will be bifocal: while striving to appreciate and preserve the distinctiveness of the ways in which myth has manifested itself in other societies and eras, we will also attempt to reconcile ourselves with myth as a familiar influence on the American mind.

Course Requirements & Policies:

Weekly writings—ten of them, which means you can miss five weeks (not including Thanksgiving Break). But you must write one a week for the first three weeks of the course. After that, you may space them out as you wish, though I would not recommend putting them off until the end of the semester. (Note: you may also want to relieve yourself of the weekly writing during the weeks of the midterm and when the final paper is due. Plan accordingly.) These will be collected on Wednesdays and will be relatively informal pieces, typed or word-processed and 1-2 pages long, ideally focused on a question, problem, or idea the readings assigned for that day raised for you (for Wednesdays when we are watching a film, you may write about texts we have discussed on the prior class meeting). You should think of these as "position papers" in which you take a stand on an issue or begin to think in terms of a longer essay; in any case, these short assignments should not appear as rambling notes, and they should not merely summarize the text. The writings are intended to promote your engagement with the texts and to generate ideas for discussion in class. I'll read these quickly, will put + marks in the margins by ideas I like, and will put a check mark on the paper if it is satisfactory. If I find it remarkably insightful, or especially smart or daring, I'll mark it with a √+. If you don't seem to have thought profitably about the text, or if you don't seem to have read the text closely, I'll mark it with a √-.
A final paper, about 6-7 pages long, on topics of your choosing. (titled, typed or word-processed, double-spaced, pages numbered after the first, one-inch margins on all sides, on 8 1/2”x11” white paper, no title page necessary. Final essays should argue a specific thesis about a narrative or a pair of closely related narratives and should call upon at least two secondary sources documented on a works cited page. I encourage everyone in the class to speak with me well before the due date in order to discuss possible topics for the final paper, and I will also distribute a set of possible topics during the second half of the course. Note: If such things interest you, I will be more than usually open to alternative projects (websites? hypertext essays?) if they relate to the themes of the course. If you have an idea, speak with me about it well before the due date.

Two examinations, a midterm to be held on October 16 and a final to be held during finals week (date and time TBA). These exams will consist of an objective section and an essay section, both designed to measure the closeness of your reading.

Participation in discussion and attendance: The course will be conducted primarily as a discussion course (with occasional, short lectures from me). As you surely know by now, such a course is only truly successful if a high percentage of students participate; it can be unappealing if the “discussion” turns into a dialogue between the professor and a handful of students. To make the discussion run well: 1) you should plan on participating—at least making a comment or asking a question—every day; 2) you should be careful not to dominate discussion (i.e., those of you who are not shy should give other students an opening to participate); 3) you should participate with tact and civility (take other people’s remarks and questions seriously, don’t interrupt, respond courteously, etc.). The grade for participation will depend upon meeting all these criteria.

Occasional quizzes will be brief, and are designed to encourage everyone to keep up with the reading. Results will factor heavily into participation grades.

Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. You are allowed two unexcused absences, but after these, each unexcused absence incurs a penalty of one-half letter grade deducted from your final grade. In the case of an excused absence (as defined by EIU university-wide policy), your excuse must be made in writing, accompanied by the appropriate documentation, and given to me no later than the first class meeting following the absence. In no case may a student accumulate more than five absences, either excused or unexcused, and still pass the course, the reason for this is that after having missed the equivalent of two and a half weeks, one may not claim to have met the same obligations as one’s fellow students.

Grading: Your work will be weighted as follows:

- Weekly Writings .........................20%
- Midterm Exam ...........................20%
- Final Exam ...............................25%
- Final Paper ...............................25%
- Participation ............................10%

100%

Academic honesty: Students are of course responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism, even if unknowing or accidental, can result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Please note the English Department’s statement on plagiarism:

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism – “The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s own 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 assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to ask me to clarify. Also, please make a point of noting the following: I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty in this course. If I come to suspect misconduct of any kind, I will become dogged about rooting it out, and if my suspicions are confirmed, I will dispense appropriate penalties. That said, let's not allow this to become an issue for any members of our class.

**Lastly:** Some of the assigned texts for this course may be offensive to some people. Please note that the assignment of any text, film, or image does not necessarily indicate an endorsement of the values or ideas therein.
Course Schedule:
(may be altered as semester continues)

Week I
8/26: Introductions
       Course Outline

8/28: from The Book of Genesis (coursepack)

Week II
9/2: LABOR DAY—NO CLASS MEETING

9/4: Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"

Week III
9/9: Sophocles, Oedipus Rex (coursepack)

9/11: Memento (film; in-class viewing)

Week IV
9/16: finish Memento

9/18: Discuss Oedipus and Memento

Week V
9/23: Gilgamesh, tablets 1-6 (coursepack)

9/25: Gilgamesh, tablets 7-12 (coursepack)

Week VI
9/30: Sunjata (coursepack)

10/2: finish Sunjata; "The Creation of the Universe and Ife" (Rosenberg, pp. 510-14); Bakaridjan Kone
       (Rosenberg, pp. 530-65)

Week VII
10/7: The Iliad, books to be announced (Rosenberg)

10/9: The Iliad, books to be announced (Rosenberg)

Week VIII
10/14: The Iliad, books to be announced (Rosenberg)

10/16: MIDTERM EXAMINATION
Week: IX
10/21: Plato, Symposium (coursepack)
10/23: King Arthur (Rosenberg pp. 418-53)

Week X
10/28: Pulp Fiction (film; in-class viewing)
10/30: finish Pulp Fiction

Week XI
11/4: Discuss Pulp Fiction and King Arthur; “Chi Li Slays the Serpent” (Rosenberg, pp. 331-33)
11/6: Sophocles, Antigone (coursepack)

Week XII
11/11: Unforgiven (film; in-class viewing)
11/13: finish and discuss Unforgiven

Week XIII
11/18: Thelma and Louise (film; in-class viewing)
11/20: finish Thelma and Louise

Week XIV
Thanksgiving break—No class meetings

Week XV
12/2: “The Emergence” from Diné bahané: The Navaho Creation Story (coursepack)
12/4: “The Legend of the Flute” (Brule Sioux); “Teaching the Mudheads How to Copulate” (Zuni); “The Fight for a Wife” (Aleut); “Teeth in the Wrong Places” (Ponca-Otoe) “The Stolen Wife” (Tewa); “Tolowim Woman and Butterfly Man” (Maidu); “Apache Chief Punishes His Wife” (Tewa); “The Husband’s Promise” (Tewa) (all readings in coursepack)

Week XVI
12/9: Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony
12/11: finish Ceremony
FINAL PAPERS DUE BEGINNING OF CLASS

***FINAL EXAM DATE AND TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED***