ENG 3009G-005: Myth and Culture

Michael Loudon
Eastern Illinois University

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ENGLISH 3009G.005: Myth and Culture—Syllabus

January

R 15: Course Introduction: Contexts and Frames
Foundational ideas: the word myth as utterly false, as absolute truth
Joseph Campbell, The Hero’s Journey (video BL 304.H45x, 1987)
The archetypal approach to myth

R 22: Discussion of The Hero’s Journey and archetypal approaches
Handouts: “Myth” and “Culture” (Ray Williams)
“Archetype” (Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics)
“Myth” (Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics)
Claude Levi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning (MM): "The Meeting of Myth and Science"; "'Primitive' Thinking and the 'Civilized' Mind"; "When Myth Becomes History" (Structuralist approaches)

R 29: Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth (LM):
"The Place of Language and Myth in the Pattern of Human Culture"; "The Evolution of Religious Ideas"; "Language and Conception"

February

Essay #1 assignment—working definitions (1-2 pp). (These preceding theoretical readings will be introduced in lecture, but you should read them carefully and reflectively. Work through them over the course of the term; for example, finish the Levi-Strauss chapters by the second week, work through the Cassirer book in the third week and complete the Geertz essays over the next two weeks. You can always, of course, go back and forth among the texts and essays as one mythic text or another seems to lend itself to a particular approach.

R 12: Review Discussion: Comparison of perspectives and methods:
interpretive anthropology (LK), structuralism (MM), archetypal (handouts) and symbolist (LM) approaches to myth studies. Assumptions and experience—student premises for developing working definitions of myth, religion, history and science. What world through whose eyes?
Types of myth—ritual, origin, cult, prestige and eschatological concepts. Diffusion and disintegration of myths. Essay #1 DUE

R 19: Native American mythologies
Poetics of orality and literacy (handout)
Native American mythology (handout); essay #2 assignment—analysis of one Native American myth, using perspective in LK, MM or LM—2-3 pp.

R 26: "Acoma Pueblo origin myth" (handout)
"Winnebago trickster cycle" (handout)
March
R 5: The Mission (film); Take-home midterm essay examination assigned; discussion of myth, culture and colonization; Essay #2 DUE


M 16 to F 20: Spring Break—no classes

R 26: Pacific Island Traditions
Patricia Grace, Dogside Story; Essay #3 assignment

April
R 2: (continued)

R 9: Epeli Hau'ofa, Tales of the Tikongs; Essay #4 assignment
Essay #3 DUE

R 16: The Palauan "storyboards" (lecture and handout)
The Bikini Atoll (film); Essay #4 DUE; Essay #5 assignment

R 23: Robert Barclay, Melal

R 30: (continued); Essay #5 DUE

Final Examination: Thursday, May 7, 7:30-9:30 in CH3150
ENGLISH 3009G.005: Myth and Culture

Course Description: Through primary readings of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding myth by using comparative analysis. After some theoretical grounding in Joseph Campbell, Claude Levi-Strauss, Ernst Cassirer and Clifford Geertz, we’ll examine selected Native American mythologies and the film The Mission in order to consider the impact of colonialism on cultural traditions. We’ll conclude with a look at traditions from the Pacific by examining Palauan “storyboards” and the contemporary novel Melal set in the Marshall Islands, in which tradition collides with the modernity of nuclear warfare.

Course Format: Lecture and discussion, preferably much more the latter, dependent on your willingness and preparation to contribute to discussions.

Required Texts:
Delgado, James. Ghost Ships [Not all students will receive this text. Please note explanation in class.]

Course Requirements and Grading: Discussion (participation, reading quizzes as necessary)—15%; midterm essay examination—15%; short essays, five (two 1-2 pp, three 2-3 pp) for a total of approximately 12 typewritten pages—50%; and a final essay examination—20%. Prerequisite: English 1002C, or 1092C, or the equivalent. (General Education Program and Group 2)
General Policies:

Grading Standards: I shall follow the EIU English Department Guidelines, distributed in class. In all cases, I shall use a plus and minus system to distinguish, say, a high B from a low one.

Attendance: I do take roll, and I evaluate attendance only indirectly in the context of your participation in the course (15%); however, each two days is the equivalent of a week in the fifteen-week semester. Obviously, cuts have a direct influence on your participation.

Conferences: These are at your request unless I ask to see you. Please ask for help as soon as you feel you need it; please don't wait until the last few days of class.

Submission of work: Essays should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of the paper only, titled and indicate the following: name, date, course and section number, and assignment number. Exercises and quizzes must be legible.

Late Essays: For each day that the essay is late, the letter grade will fall by one full grade: an A essay due on Friday will be an F by the next Thursday. If difficulties arise, please see me.

Plagiarism: The English Department Policy

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism--"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the 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 assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If I discover an act of plagiarism, I shall exercise the right to the fullest extent possible. (See The Blair Handbook, pp. 242-244, but see also pp. 228-242 for a further discussion of what constitutes plagiarism and how to integrate properly your material from sources.)

Students with Disabilities:

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.