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ENG 3009G-006: Myth and Culture

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ENG. 3009: MYTH AND CULTURE

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Fall 2004
Phone: 581.6302

Required Texts
Sophocles, The Theban Plays
Homer, The Iliad
Homer, The Odyssey
Rosenberg, World Mythology
Coursepack available at Copy X on Lincoln Avenue

COURSE GOALS

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 these societies have organized their understandings of the world around various and often idiosyncratic understandings of sexual difference. As we read some of the foundational narratives of Ancient Greece, Britain, Babylonia, the Mandinkan Empire, and the Navaho Nation (among many others), we will read with an eye toward understanding how various people from various cultures have described, accounted for, invented, fretted over, and re-constructed sexual differentiation as one of the most fundamental components of the human condition. We will continually ask how these understandings intersect with our own views of gender and sexuality, examine how the narratives developed by geographically and temporally distant cultures intersect with narratives developed by our own culture.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES:

Final Grades will be determined in accordance with this formula:

Myth analysis..............................20%
Exam #1 ....................................20%
Exam #2 ....................................20%
Final Essay ....................................20%
Participation ....................................20%

First, an analysis of a contemporary myth. Part of the emphasis of this course is that if myths are narratives through which a community affirms its values in some way, all cultures generate their own myths. So for this assignment students must locate and dissect one such myth from our own time and place. Such myths may be relayed through the media music, film, TV, contemporary literature, the graphic novel, advertising, fashion, video games ... the possibilities are practically
limitless. Further, the medium through which you relay your analysis, moreover, is up to you—since
this is a general education course, I will be unusually open to alternatives to the standard
academic essay: Web site? Hypertext essay? Video? The project will be due on November 12,
and unless you opt to write your analysis in the form of a standard academic essay (5 pages or
1250 words long, typed; double-spaced), I ask that you talk to me about your idea at least a week
in advance.

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.

Two examinations to be held on in class on November 14 and during finals week (date and time to
be announced). Each of these exams will consist of an objective section designed to assess the
closeness of your reading, along with an essay section requiring you to write extended, well-
crafted answers to pointed questions concerning the materials we study in class. The final exam
will be cumulative.

Participation in discussion: I expect students to model strong class citizenship in this course, working
hard to make our discussion run well. To make the discussion run well; (1) you should read, and as
you read you should form ideas, draw connections, raise problems, and take notes; (2) you should
plan on participating—at least making a comments or asking a question—every day; (3) 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), and 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. I will tend to lavish encouragement on
students who engage as strong class citizens. I will tend to become annoyed with students who
never have anything to offer or who seem feckless.

One last note on participation: Participating well doesn’t simply mean talking a lot—it means
frequently making comments, and responses to the comments of others, showing that you are
engaged in a process of careful, close reading. idle talk—the kind that simply does not indicate
close engagement with the materials we’ll be studying—does not help move the conversation
forward, and hence does not qualify as participation.

I want to be utterly clear about this: Good participation does not require you to come to class
knowing all the "answers," but it does require you to understand certain things about the texts
under discussion. For instance, one cannot participate competently if one does not understand
the events that make up the plot of a work of fiction, the gist of a poem, or the literal argument of
an essay. Many of the readings we will take on this semester will difficult, and on some occasions
you won’t know quite what to make of what you’ve read. That’s perfectly acceptable. But I will
expect you to come to class after having fought to understand as much as possible. The key to
success in this class will lie in your refusal to become frustrated when faced with difficult
concepts—instead, become challenged and engaged.

If given, occasional reading quizzes will be brief, designed to encourage everyone to keep up
with the reading, and will also help me to determine participation grades.
**Attendance will be taken for each class.** With three absences, students will be considered overcut. Overcutting may result in the reduction of the final course grade by a grade or more, depending upon frequency. 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 – if illness or other extenuating circumstances cause you to miss more than five classes, you should petition for a withdrawal.

One last word related to attendance: I ask that students who have not read the text on the day it is to be discussed not bother coming. Such students cannot contribute anything valuable to the discussion, and in any case it is dishonest for them to benefit from the efforts of others by listening in on their conversations. Always read the assigned materials carefully, but if for some reason you have not, don’t bother showing up.

Students who habitually show up for class a few minutes after it’s started should find a professor who’s into that and take their course instead. This professor is insulted by it and reacts badly.

**Late assignments:** Weekly writings cannot be handed in late, except in the case of a documented, excused absence (see above on attendance policy). Late final papers will be penalized for their lateness. If they are very late, they may not be accepted at all. I am not unbending in this policy in the case of extreme circumstances, but in order to be granted an extension, students must contact me, with a compelling case to make, at least two days before the final paper’s due date.

**Academic honesty:** Students are of course responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations and policies 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.

**Students are responsible for reading all of the material on this syllabus on the date assigned whether or not the work is actually discussed on that date.** Students are cautioned that many of the readings are lengthy, as is appropriate for a university-level course. I urge you to begin these readings as soon as possible. Occasionally, I will pass out brief, photocopied materials not represented on the syllabus; these are to be read by the next class.
You are not welcome to e-mail me while you are a student in this course. When you have a question, problem, or concern, I want to sit down with you and talk for as long as you need. That's why I keep office hours. I also want to talk with you about interesting ideas you have this semester, just as I want to talk with you—personally—about the readings we take on. But too many students these days use e-mail as a way to avoid sitting face-to-face with their professors. I am totally uninterested in enabling this practice. Besides, too few students understand how to write an e-mail that doesn't reflect badly on them (hint: you're e-mailing your professor, not your employee). When you need to communicate with me, attend my office hours, call me at my office (581.6302), or if it's very important and the other avenues have not worked, call me at home (348.6144). We'll talk.

Reading Schedule

Introduction: Masculinities and Femininities

Tuesday 8/24: Introductions, course outline
The Book of Genesis (handout)

Thursday 8/26: Plato, Symposium (coursepack)

Ancient Greece

Tuesday 8/31: Sophocles, Oedipus Rex

Thursday 9/2: Memento (in-class screening)

Tuesday 9/7: finish Memento

Thursday 9/9: Sophocles, Antigone

Tuesday 9/14: Homer, The Iliad books 1-3, 6, 9

Thursday 9/16: The Iliad books 16, 18, 22, 24

Tuesday 9/21: Homer, The Odyssey books TBA

Thursday 9/23: The Odyssey books TBA

Tuesday 9/28: O Brother, Where Art Thou? (in-class screening)

Thursday 9/30: finish O Brother, Where Art Thou?
The Middle East: Gilgamesh, the First Hero

Tuesday 10/5: Gilgamesh (coursepack), tablets 1-6
Thursday 10/7: Gilgamesh tablets 7-12
Tuesday 10/12: Myth analysis due
Thursday 10/14: Midterm Examination

The British Isles: The Anglo-Saxon Epic, Arthurian Legend, and Getting Medieval

Tuesday 10/19: Beowulf (coursepack), pp. 32-68
Thursday 10/21: finish Beowulf
Tuesday 10/26: Sir Thomas Mallory, King Arthur (Rosenberg pp. 421-53)
Thursday 10/28: no class meeting
Tuesday 11/2: Pulp Fiction (in-class screening)
Thursday 11/4: finish Pulp Fiction

North America: Native American Tribal Mythology

Tuesday 11/9: Navajo, “The Emergence” from Diné bahanè (coursepack)
Wednesday: "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)

"Lodge-Boy and Thrown-Away" (Rosenberg, pp. 622-24); "The Woman Who Fell From the Sky" (Rosenberg, pp. 627-33); "Rave and the Sources of Light" (Rosenberg, pp. 635-36); "Sedna" (Rosenberg, pp. 638-41) "The Creation" (Maya) (Rosenberg, pp. 596-99); "The Creation Cycle" (Rosenberg, pp. 602-08); "Quetzalcoatl" (Rosenberg, pp. 610-13)
West Africa: The Mandinkan Oral Epic

Tuesday 11/16: Sunjata (coursepack)

Thursday 11/18: finish Sunjata
“The Creation of the Universe and Ite” (Rosenberg, pp. 510-14)

11/22-26: Thanksgiving Recess

The Far East, the Subcontinent

Tuesday 11/30: “The Creation of the Universe and Human Beings” (Rosenberg, pp. 325-29); “Chi Li Slay the Serpent” (Rosenberg, pp. 331-33); Kotan Utunnai (Rosenberg, pp. 341-48)

Thursday 12/2: In-class screening: sequences from Kill Bill. vols I-II; Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon; Thelma and Louise

Tuesday 12/7: no class meeting: conferences in my office

Thursday 12/9: “The Ramayana” (Rosenberg, pp. 299-321)
Final papers due