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## ENG 3009G-003: Myth and Culture

Wharram

*Eastern Illinois University*

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**English 3009G-003: Myth and Culture**

*The Truth about Lies, or, How the Study of Culture is a Myth*

**Fall 2010 / MWF 13:00-13:50 / Coleman Hall 3609**

**Professor: Wharram**  
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**Office: 3010 Coleman, 217-581-6318**  
**Office Hours: MWF 9:30-11:00**  
**Mailbox: 3155 Coleman**

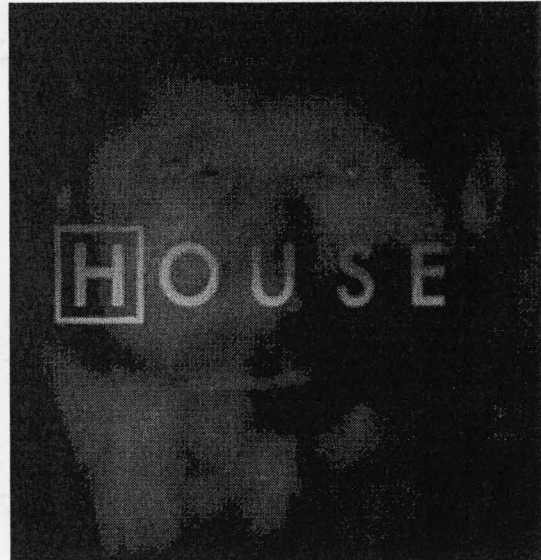
**“The truth begins in lies. Think about it.”**  
**– Dr. Gregory House**

**Course Description**

This class will serve as an introduction to myth, but not as a survey of myths from around the globe. There are some 6000 languages spoken on the earth today, each of which constitutes a relation between a people and their world, a “culture,” if you will. This number, however quickly it may be decreasing, is far too large to imagine covering in this course. As an alternative, we will engage with the development of the study of myths as it arose in the course of the twentieth century. Myth, as an identifiable form of storytelling, was central in the development of what we now call “cultural studies” in the Western tradition. We will trace this development in the thought of Ernst Cassirer and Claude Lévi-Strauss (with a smattering of Sigmund Freud thrown in, just to keep things interesting). We will also examine how a few contemporary writers incorporate the concept of myth in their works.

The other set of texts we will trace stems from the “Western” literary influences of myths about Frankenstein, vampires, and zombies. We will think about how these myths created meaning, how they mean, and, perhaps, how they may come to evolve in the future. The fact that the meaning of myth can change over history implies that culture can define myth in much the same way that myth can define culture. Along the way, we will question some of our received notions about myth—the “myths” about myths—allowing us, I hope, to think about the possibilities for myth in our technology-driven universe. And sometimes we will reflect on why it is that we don’t much think mythically anymore—or, perhaps, why it is that we *think* we don’t think mythically anymore.

Since this course centers on myth, the primary medium of communication will be speech, since myth, in general, implies an oral-based culture. That is, I expect that our class dialogue will be extensive and productive.



## Texts

Austen, Jane and Seth Grahame-Smith. Pride and Prejudice and Zombies.  
Cassirer, Ernst. Language and Myth.  
Coetzee, J. M. Foe.  
Defoe, Daniel. Robinson Crusoe.  
Diamond, Jared. Guns, Germs, and Steel.  
Erdoes and Ortiz. Native American Myths and Legends.  
Neihardt. Black Elk Speaks.  
Lévi -Strauss. Myth and Meaning.  
Shelley. Frankenstein.  
Richardson. Three Vampire Tales.



*Mary Shelley*

## Requirements

Participation	20%
Tests (5% each for 4 Tests)	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Final Writing Project	20%

**\*\*ALL ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS MUST BE COMPLETED TO PASS THE COURSE\*\***

### **Tests (20%, 5% each for four tests)**

The tests will verify your ability to retain important facts about course material—for example, names of significant historical and literary figures, and dates of important events—through identification and short-answer questions. The questions will be of two types: those that ask you to demonstrate that you have retained facts that 1) one *should* know (e.g., When did Gutenberg invent the printing press? What was the “Copernican Revolution?”); and 2) have been significant in our readings and/or class discussions (e.g., What is a “stone-chat?”). This latter set of questions may not be important as “cultural capital,” but they do indicate your level of engagement with the written and oral aspects of the course. All tests are cumulative.

### **Midterm Exam, March 4 (20%)**

The midterm will consist of an in-class exam, which will require you to explicate and analyze passages from our early-semester readings.

### **Class Participation (15%)**

There will be a number of required, yet ungraded assignments throughout the quarter, constituting a substantial portion your class-participation grade. I will expect you to come to class having read the material, and with questions or comments on the readings. While reading the course material, you should pinpoint specific moments of difficulty, and come to class with questions about them. If you attend class without reading the texts carefully and completely, you are unlikely to do well on the tests and your class-participation grade will suffer immensely.

### **Final Exam, required (5%)**

This exam will have the same format as the tests, above, and is required of all students in this class.

### **The Remaining 35%**

#### **Option #1: Final Exam**

You may choose to write a final exam, which will take a form similar to the midterm, and include essay questions asking you to draw significant connections between the course readings.

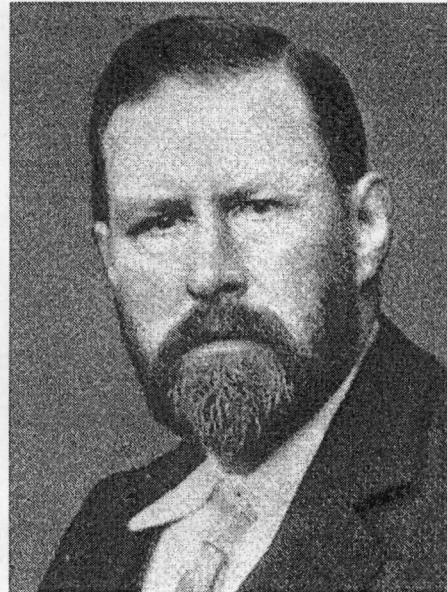
#### **Option #2: Writing Project (minimum five pages)**

Well before the end of the semester, I would like you to select a passage from one of the larger texts in this course on which you would consider writing a detailed close reading. You will thoughtfully select a brief section of the larger work—perhaps one or two paragraphs of prose—in order to analyze closely the significance of your chosen passage as it aids in understanding the larger text from which it is taken. You will use this close reading as a jumping-off point for a larger examination of the text at hand in conjunction with critical enquiry into concepts of myth and/in culture. You may provide evidence of secondary research for this project. More detail is, of course, forthcoming.

**TESTS AND EXAMS:** You cannot make up a test or exam after the class period in which it is administered.

**Academic honesty:** Students are responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism will likely result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Here is 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.



*Bram Stoker*

### **Paper Policies**

Papers—and all other assignments—are due at the beginning of class. **Late papers will not be commented upon, and be marked a half grade lower for every class period late.** Essays turned in a week past the deadline will be given a “zero,” but must nevertheless be submitted in order to pass the course.

Your paper should be stapled and include page numbers. Format: 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.

### Absence Policy

When you are absent—especially when you are frequently absent—two things happen. First, your participation grade drops substantially. Second, you naturally fall behind in understanding course material and neither the class nor the Professor can catch you up on everything missed in a day's class. YOU need to decide when it is absolutely necessary to miss class. Be wise. It bears repeating: you cannot make up missed work and late assignments will be penalized. Whether these are excused or unexcused absences does not matter for this course. Being late for class will be counted as an absence.

### Emailing Policy

I want to get to know you and your work this semester. Thus I ask that you stop by my office during office hours (or scheduled times) so that we can talk. **DO NOT EMAIL ME TO ASK FOR AN "UPDATE" ON MISSED ASSIGNMENTS, OR TO EXPLAIN AN ABSENCE.** You should exchange telephone numbers and email addresses with other students in the class so that you can contact someone for notes, handouts, and/or other missed messages.

### **Wharram / English 3099-099: *Schedule of Classes*—subject to revision**

For each class period, you need to have carefully read and be prepared to discuss the assigned selections in their entirety.

#### WEEK ONE

- M 1/12      **INTRODUCTION:** "myth"; "culture"
- W 1/14      Ernst Cassirer, *Myth and Language* (1-17)
- F 1/16      Cassirer, *Myth and Language* (17-43)

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#### WEEK TWO

- M 1/17      **MLK Day, no classes**
- W 1/19      Cassirer, *Myth and Language* (44-83)
- F 1/21      **(Test #1)**  
Cassirer, *Myth and Language* (83-99)

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#### WEEK THREE

- M 1/24      Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*,  
Introduction and Chapter 1
- Mon. 1/24—Deadline to drop course without a grade**
- W 1/26      Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*,  
Chapters 2 and 3;  
Erdoes and Ortiz, "Rabbit Boy,"  
"The Good Twin and the Evil Twin"
- F 1/28      Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*,  
Chapters 4 and 5

