

Fall 8-15-2003

ENG 3009G-006-007: Myth and Culture

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30096-006
-007

Dr. William J. Searle

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The following texts are used for English 3009G:

William Buck. Trans. *Mahabharata*. New York, New York: Penguin/Meridian, 1987.

Alan Dundes. Editor. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley, California: U. of Cal Press, 1984.

Richard Erdoes and Alfonse Ortiz. Editors. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York, New York: Random House/ Pantheon, 1984.

Hermann Hesse. *Siddhartha*. Trans. by Gilda Rosner. New York, New York: Bantam, 1951, rpt. 1971.

John Neihardt. *Black Elk Speaks*. Lincoln, Nebraska: U. of Nebraska Press, 1932, rpt. 1979.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. by Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana U. Press, 1953. Rpt. 1983.

Nancy K. Sandars. Trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York, New York: Penguin, 1960, rpt. 1972.

Mary Shelley. *Frankenstein*. New York, New York: Signet, 1831, rpt. 1963.

Barbara C. Sproul. *Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World*. San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 1991.

ATTENDANCE: Plan to attend every class. You might glance at page 53 of the 2003-2004 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. Later papers (exams, quizzes, etc.) will be accepted only in cases of extreme emergency—severe illness, official university activity, or other urgent reasons.

DEPARTMENTAL 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 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, and perhaps a group project or two) and writing exercises (exclusive of out-of-class papers, as 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) each worth 20 percent, and a final 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.

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 of 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 American 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 lectures and discussion periods, group work, and, when relevant, video. Grades will be based on class participation, occasional surprise reading check quizzes, two short papers, two one-hour exams, and a final.

A Very Tentative Outline for English 3009G

"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. 25—Discussion of course and assignment of texts
Wed. " 27—Video, either *The Hero's Journey*, or, more probably, an episode of either the *X-Files*, or *Buffy*, the *Vampire Slayer*
Fri. " 29—Grappling with the definition of myth, from *Sacred Narrative* Lauri Honko's "The Problem of Defining Myth," pp. 41-52; J. W. Rogerson's "Slippery Words, Myth," pp. 62-71.

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

- Wk#2—Mon. Sept. 1—LABOR DAY OBSERVANCE—NO CLASS
Wed. " 3—Begin Near Eastern Mythology: "The Enuma Elish," pp. 91-113 in *Primal Myths*, quiz? Handouts
Fri. " 5—Conclude "Enuma Elish," handout; Begin *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, pp. 61-96; Remember there's a glossary of names and terms in the back of the book. 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 depths of the human spirit.”

--Nikolai Berdyayev, Russian Philosopher

Wk#3—Mon. Sept. 8—*Epic of Gilgamesh*, pp. 97-117; conclude group work; draw lots for Group project.

Wed. “ 10—video *Who Wrote the Bible?* Handout on Genesis distributed.

Fri. “ 12—Judeo-Christian mythology; creation from *Primal Myths*, pp. 123-126, Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis, video? 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. “ 15—Excerpts from Genesis, chapters 3, 4, 6-9; video?

Wed. “ 17—Chapter 11 of Genesis; Video on parallels between Mesopotamian Myth and the Bible.

Fri. “ 19—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. “ 22—Abraham story concluded. Quiz?

Wed. “ 24—Group Projects due—to be presented in class.

Fri. “ 26—Paper #1 assigned; Hesiod's *Theogony* on handout distributed. Student conferences on essay #1: MTWThF

“... we need myths to determine and to evaluate the 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. “29—Graeco-Roman Mythology: excerpts from the *Theogony*; video

Wed. Oct. 1- excerpts from Hesiod's *theogony*, quiz? Handouts

Fri. “ 3—Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book I, Group Work

“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.” 6—Conclude Group Work on Book I

Wed. “ 8—Excerpts from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, group work

Fri. “ 10—Conclude group work, paper #1 due

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

--A. K. Coomarswamy, Indian Philosopher

- Wk#8—Mon. “ 13—loose ends on Unit #1; study guide distributed.
Wed. “ 15—Exam #1 (Mediterranean mythologies)
Fri. “ 17—FALL BREAK—NO CLASS

Unit#2: Eastern Mythologies—Hinduism and Buddhism

“Myth, whether Christian or others, is a type of truth in the form of a story.”

--*Encyclopedia Britannica*

- Wk#9—Mon. “ 20—Paper #1 returned; Introduction to Hinduism, selected myths from *Primal Myths*, pp. 179-192. Handouts
Wed. “ 22—Excerpts from the *Mahabharata* (MBH), Part I, video
Fri. “ 24—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. “ 27—Excerpts from MBH, group work
Wed. “ 29—excerpts from the MBH, video
Fri. “ 31—excerpts from the 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

- Wk#11—Mon. Nov. 3—Paper #2 assigned; student conferences on paper #2 MTWThF
Wed. “ 5—Excerpts from MBH, part III, quiz? Video?
Fri. “ 7—Conclude MBH; study guide for exam #2 distributed.

“Accordingly, myth is here defined very broadly as narrative (story) concerning fundamental symbols that are constitutive of or paradigmatic for human existence.”—Bernard F. Batto, American Scholar of Religion

- Wk#12—Mon. “ 10—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, Background, video, handouts
Wed. “ 12—Exam #2(Eastern Mythologies)
Fri. “ 14—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*; group work

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

--Lauri Honko, Finnish Folklorist

- Wk#13—Mon. “ 17—Hesse’ *Siddhartha*
Wed. “ 19—loose ends of *Siddhartha*; if time permits, workshop on paper #2
Fri.. “ 21—Assignment of first 12 chapters of *Frankenstein*, video documentary on *Frankenstein*

THANKSGIVING RECESS—NO CLASS—Nov. 22—Nov. 30

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. Bierliien, American Scholar of Myth

Wk#14—Mon. Dec. 1—*Frankenstein*, graded group work
Wed. “ 3—PAPER #2 due, *Frankenstein*, group work
Fri. “ 5—video, selected scenes

““You are my creator, but I am your master; obey.””
--Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Wk#15—Mon. “ 8—*Frankenstein*, graded group work
Wed. “ 10—Paper #2 returned; *Frankenstein* group work concluded
Fri. “ 12—Study Guide for the final distributed

FINAL EXAMS: December 15-19 (Emphasis on *Frankenstein*)