

MYTH, FOLKLORE, AND POPULAR CULTURE

ANTHROPOLOGY 234

Bates College
Fall 2008

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Course Description

This course explores various anthropological approaches to the study of myth, folklore, and popular culture. It focuses on the interpretive strategies anthropologists use to answer the following questions: What do comic books, folktales, folksongs, proverbs, jokes, myths, movies, toys, dolls, and television shows mean? What can we learn about a culture from studying its folklore, myths, and popular culture? The general assumption that will guide us in our attempts to answer these questions is that all these "texts" can be understood as symbolic or expressive forms through which people communicate important messages about their culture both to themselves and to others as well. More specifically this course will concentrate on theoretical approaches such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, reader response criticism, cultural studies, and feminism in order to analyze a variety of material including Barbie dolls, Grimm's folktales, Disney films, Ibo proverbs, Apache jokes, ancient Greek myths, modern Greek funeral laments, modern Greek dance, Native American myths, and Australian Aboriginal rock music. There are links from the web site containing the syllabus to other web sites where required readings for the course can be found.

This syllabus is available online on the world wide web at <http://www.bates.edu/Prebuilt/anth234fall08.pdf>. There are links from the web site containing the syllabus to other web sites where required readings for the course can be found.

Required Books

Basso, Portraits of "The Whiteman"
Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment
Cowan, Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece
Fritz, The Double Life of Pocahontas
Rand, Barbie's Queer Accessories
Course Packet

Reserve Readings

Student papers by Rebecca Gasior (Nuer Song), Elle McPherson (Babar The King), and Katherine Marshall (Between Man and Earth).
Williamson, "Pocahontas and John Smith," on reserve.

ALL READINGS NOT LISTED UNDER REQUIRED BOOKS OR RESERVE READINGS CAN BE FOUND IN THE COURSE PACKET.

Topics And Readings

Sept. 3 Organization of the Course

1. Cultural Studies: The Politics of Barbie

Sept. 5 Rand, Barbie's Queer Accessories, pp. 1-92

Sept. 8 Rand, pp. 93-148

Sept. 10 Rand, pp. 149-195
Video: Barbie Nation

Sept. 12 Discussion

Sept. 15 Discussion
Websites:
The Distorted Barbie:
<http://www.detritus.net/projects/barbie/>
Barbie Bazaar:
<http://www.barbiebazaar.com/>
The Visible Barbie Project:
http://www.trygve.com/visible_barbie.html

2. The Psychoanalytic Approach to Folklore (and a Marxist Critique)

Sept. 17 Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment, pp. 1-83

Sept. 19 Bettelheim, pp. 84-156

Sept. 22 Zipes, Breaking the Magic Spell, Chapters 1, 2, and 6
Grimm's Tales #15, 21, 116 in Magoun and Krappe. (Hansel and Gretel, Ash Girl, The Blue Lantern)

Sept. 24 Zipes, The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood, pp. 1-8
Versions by Perrault, Grimm, Thurber, Sexton, Merseyside Fairy Story Collective, Ungerer, and Carter
Bettelheim, pp. 166-183

Sept. 26 "Sleeping Beauty" (Hawthorn Blossom) in Magoun and Krappe, pp. 182-185
Sexton, Transformations, pp. 107-112

3. Pocahontas and the Washington Redskins: Contested Images of Native Americans

- Sept. 29 Video: In Whose Honor?
Farnell, "Retire the Chief"
Clark, "'Indian' Mascots and the Pathology of Anti Indigenous Racism" in
Bass, In the Game, pp. 137-165
- Oct. 1 Discussion
Evening Film: Disney's Pocahontas. Olin 105, 8:00pm
- Oct. 3 Fritz, The Double Life of Pocahontas, pp. 9-85
- Oct. 6 Williamson, "Pocahontas and John Smith: Examining a Historical Myth" in
History and Anthropology. On Reserve
Sharpe, "Princess Pocahontas, Rebecca Rolfe (1595-1617)"
- Oct. 8 Robertson, "Pocahontas at the Masque" in Signs
Websites:
Native Opinions on Pocahontas:
<http://www.kstrom.net/isk/poca/pocahont.html>
Powhatan Renape Nation:
<http://www.powhatan.org/> *See Pocahontas Myth, History, Directions, and Frequent Questions*
- Oct. 10 Krech, The Ecological Indian, pp. 14-28, 211-229
- Oct. 13 **MID TERM EXAM**

4. Metaphors in the Study of Folklore

- Oct. 20 Fernandez, "Persuasions and Performances" in Geertz, Myth Symbol and Culture, pp. 39-60
Seitel, "Saying Haya Sayings" in Sapir and Crocker, The Social Use of Metaphor, pp. 75-82
Achebe, Things Fall Apart, pp. 3-25
- Oct. 22 Basso, Portraits of "The Whiteman," pp. 1-64
- Oct. 24 Basso, pp. 65-94

5. The Politics of Australian Aboriginal Rock Music

- Oct. 27 Broome, Aboriginal Australians, Chapters 1, 11, 12, and Appendices
Evening listening session: Yothu Yindi's Tribal Voice
- Oct. 29 Yothu Yindi: Homepage
<http://www.YothuYindi.com>

Mitchell, "World Music, Indigenous Music and Music Television in Australia"
Video: Yothu Yindi's Treaty

- Oct. 31 Nicol, "Culture, Custom and Collaboration: The Production of Yothu Yindi's Treaty Videos"
- Nov. 3 Stubington and Dunbar-Hall, "Yothu Yindi's Treaty: Ganma in Music"
Neuenfeldt, "Yothu Yindi and Ganma"
- Nov. 5 Discussion

6. The Structural Approach to Myth and Folklore

- Nov. 7 Introduction to Structural Analysis
- Nov. 10 Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" in Lévi-Strauss' Structural Anthropology, Vol. I, pp. 202-228
- Nov. 12 Lévi-Strauss, "Four Winnebego Myths" in Middleton, pp. 15-26
Leach, E., "Genesis as Myth" in Middleton, pp. 1-14
Structural Analysis of Grimm's Tales #103, 109, 117 and 194.
(Sweet Porridge, The Little Shroud, The Wayward Child, The Ear of Grain)
- Nov. 14 Modern Greek Funeral Laments
Slides of Modern Greek Death Rituals
- Nov. 17 Discussion

7. Gender and Folkdance in Greece

- Nov. 19 Cowan, Dance and the Body Politic, pp. 1-63
- Nov. 21 Cowan, pp. 63-133
Video: Agrapha
- Dec. 1 Cowan, pp. 134-187
- Dec. 3 Cowan, pp. 188-234
- Dec. 5 Discussion

Course Requirements

1. Class attendance and participation in class discussion. Regular and valuable contribution to class discussion will raise a student's grade. Poor attendance will lower it.
2. Mid-term exam (20% of the final grade).
3. Term paper involving original analysis of some body of folklore, myth, or popular culture. See the last page of the syllabus for further information (40% of the final grade).
4. Take-home final exam (40% of the final grade).

Schedule of Due Dates

Dec. 1 **TERM PAPER.** Late papers will be graded down without a written excuse from the Dean of Students' Office.

Dec. 9 **TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM** (handed out on Dec. 5). No extensions will be given without a written excuse from the Dean of Students' Office.

Term-Paper

The term-paper for this course should be an original analysis of some text or group of texts that can be considered myth, folklore, or popular culture. If you have doubts about the appropriateness of your planned topic, please see me. However, I interpret the terms "myth," "folklore," and "popular culture," as well as the term "text" very broadly. The important questions are not "Is it folklore?" and "Is it a text?," but "Can you analyze it in an interesting manner?" and "What does it mean?"

In your paper you should make use of one of the theoretical approaches that we have discussed in class. You need to "get beneath the surface" of the texts and offer some interpretation of them that is not immediately obvious and that would not have been available to you without the use of a theoretical approach. Do not simply summarize the text. Analyze and interpret it. If you choose a text that is from American culture, you might consider doing fieldwork and asking people who know or use the text what it means, but fieldwork is certainly not a requirement. You are also encouraged to consider texts from other cultures written in other languages.

Your paper should include: an introduction, a brief description of the texts you will analyze and their ethnographic context, and a clear and explicit statement of the theoretical perspective you plan to adopt in which you define clearly the important terms and concepts you use. (The order of these two parts of your paper may obviously be reversed.) The most important part of your paper is the actual analysis itself. (Its relative importance should be reflected in its relative length.) Here you should apply the theory to the texts in order to offer an interpretation of what the text means. Think also about what we can learn from the text about the culture of which they are a part. What, for example, does Babar tell us about relationships between the first and the third worlds?

What does *Sleeping Beauty* tell us about the role of women in American culture? Here you need to do close textual analysis, focusing on specific words, images, and events.

A possible format for the term paper (which should be about 10-12 pages long) would look like this:

Introduction	(1 page)
Ethnographic description – (text & context)	(2 pages)
Theoretical orientation	(2 pages)
ANALYSIS	(5 pages)
Conclusion	(1 page)

Possible topics include: Passamaquoddy folktales, Pueblo origin myths, Yanomamo love stories, Norse myths, Navaho healing chants, Aesop's fables, illustrations of native Americans from sixteenth century voyages of discovery, Franco-American folktales, the tales of Uncle Remus, Harlequin Romances, Superman comic books, narratives from women's consciousness raising groups or meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, Sesame Street, Tales for Liberated Children from Ms. Magazine, stories from elementary school reading books, Reggae music, etc. You are encouraged to draw on study abroad experiences, and other languages you know in choosing a topic for your paper.

Please Note:

1. All students are responsible for reading and understanding the Bates College Statement on Academic Honesty. If you have any doubts or questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.
2. Please bring your copy of the assigned readings to class. Readings should be completed before class on the date indicated.
3. There will be several evening film screenings. Attendance is required.
4. Your fellow students and I would appreciate it very much if you would arrive in class on time, refrain from getting up and leaving the room during the class hour, and turn off your cell phones. Thank you.