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**MYTH, FOLKLORE, AND POPULAR CULTURE
ANTHROPOLOGY 234**

**Bates College
Winter 2000
786-6081**

63 Pettengill

Loring M. Danforth

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores various anthropological approaches to the study of folklore, myth, 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.

This syllabus is available online on the world wide web at <http://www.bates.edu/Faculty/Anthropology/Anthro234/>. It can also be reached from the Bates Home Page (www.bates.edu) by clicking on Faculty, then going through Anthropology and Courses Offered. 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

RESERVE READINGS

Achebe, Things Fall Apart
Broome, Aboriginal Australians
Danforth, Modern Greek Funeral Laments
Farnell, "Retire the Chief"

Geertz, Myth, Symbol, and Culture
 Grimm, Grimm's Fairy Tales
 Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked
 Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology I
 Magoun and Krappe, The Grimm's German Folktales
 Middleton, Myth and Cosmos
 Mitchell, "World Music, Indigenous Music and Music Television in Australia"
 Neuenfeldt, "Yothu Yindi and Ganma"
 Nicol, "Culture Custom and Collaboration"
 Robertson, "Pocahontas at the Masque"
 Sapir and Crocker, The Social Use of Metaphor
 Sexton, Transformations
 Sharpe, "Princess Pocahontas, Rebecca Rolfe"
 Stubington and Dunbar-Hall, "Yothu Yindi's Treaty"
 Williamson, "Pocahontas and John Smith"
 Yothu Yindi, "Home Page"
 Zipes, Breaking the Magic Spell
 Zipes, The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood
 Student papers by Cathy Eaton (Beanstalk to Success) and Rebecca Gasior (Nuer Song)

TOPICS AND READINGS

Jan. 10 Organization of the Course

1. CULTURAL STUDIES: THE POLITICS OF BARBIE

Jan. 12 Rand, Barbie's Queer Accessories, pp. 1-92

Jan. 14 Rand, pp. 93-148

Jan. 17 No class

Jan. 19 Rand, pp. 149-195
 Video: Barbie Nation

Jan. 21 Discussion

Jan. 24 Discussion
 Video: Golden Dreams

Web sites: The Distorted Barbie:

<http://www.detritus.net/projects/barbie/>

<http://www.users.interport.net/~napier/barbie/barbie.html>

The Official Barbie Doll Web Site:

<http://www.barbie.com>

2. THE PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH TO FOLKLORE (AND A

MARXIST CRITIQUE)

- Jan. 26 Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment, pp. 1-83
- Jan. 28 Bettelheim, pp. 84-156
- Jan. 31 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)
- Feb. 2 Zipes, The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood, pp. 1-8, and versions by Perrault, Grimm, Thurber, Sexton, Merseyside Fairy Story Collective, Ungerer, and Carter
Bettelheim, pp. 166-183
- Feb. 4 "Sleeping Beauty" (Hawthorn Blossom) in Magoun and Krappe, pp. 182-185
Sexton, Transformations, pp. 107-112
Bettelheim, pp. 225-236

**3. POCAHONTAS AND THE WASHINGTON REDSKINS:
CONTESTED IMAGES OF NATIVE AMERICANS**

- Feb. 7 Farnell, "Retire the Chief"
Video: In Whose Honor?
Fritz, The Double Life of Pocahontas, pp. 9-46
- Feb. 9 Fritz, The Double Life of Pocahontas, pp. 47-85
- Feb. 10 Evening Film: Disney's Pocahontas
- Feb. 11 Williamson, "Pocahontas and John Smith: Examining a Historical Myth" in History and Anthropology
Sharpe, "Princess Pocahontas, Rebecca Rolfe (1595-1617)"
- Feb. 14 Robertson, "Pocahontas at the Masque" in Signs.
Web sites: The Real Pocahontas:
<http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/1001/poca.html>
Powhatan Renape Nation
<http://www.powhatan.org/>
See Pocahontas Myth, History,
Directions, and Frequent Questions

4. METAPHORS IN THE STUDY OF FOLKLORE

- Feb. 16 Fernandez, "Persuasions and Performances" in Geertz, Myth Symbol and Culture, pp. 39-60
Seitel, "Saying Haya Sayings" in Sapir and

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Crocker, The Social Use of Metaphor, pp. 75-82
Achebe, Things Fall Apart, pp. 3-25

Feb. 18 **Mid-Term Exam**

Feb. 28 Basso, Portraits of "The Whiteman," pp. 1-64

Mar. 1 Basso, pp. 65-94

5. **THE POLITICS OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ROCK MUSIC**

Mar. 3 Broome, Aboriginal Australians, Chapters 1, 11, 12, and
Appendices

Mar. 6 Yothu Yindi: Homepage
 <http://www.YothuYindi.com>
 Mitchell, "World Music, Indigenous Music and
Music Television in Australia"
 Video: Yothu Yindi's Treaty

Mar. 6 Evening listening session

Mar. 8 Nicol, "Culture, Custom and Collaboration: The
Production of Yothu Yindi's Treaty Videos

Mar. 10 Stubington and Dunbar-Hall, "Yothu Yindi's Treaty: Ganma in
Music"
 Neuenfeldt, "Yothu Yindi and Ganma"

Mar. 13 Discussion

6. **THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH TO MYTH AND FOLKLORE**

Mar. 15 Introduction to Structural Analysis

Mar. 17 Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" in Lévi-
Strauss' Structural Anthropology, Vol. I, pp. 202-228

Mar. 20 Lévi-Strauss, "Four Winebego 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)

Mar. 22 Lévi-Strauss, "Overture to the Raw and the Cooked" in Lévi-
Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked, pp. 1-18

Mar. 24 Modern Greek Funeral Laments
Slides of Modern Greek Death Rituals

7. GENDER AND FOLKDANCE IN GREECE

Mar. 27 Cowan, Dance and the Body Politic, pp. 1-63

Mar. 29 Cowan, pp. 63-133
Video: Agrapha

Mar. 31 Cowan, pp. 134-187

Apr. 3 Cowan, pp. 188-234

Apr. 5 Discussion

Apr. 7 Discussion

Classes may be held during the optional reading period.

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

Mar. 31 TERM PAPER. Late papers will be graded down.

Apr. 12 TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM (handed out on April 7).
No extensions will be given.

ALL STUDENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR READING AND UNDERSTANDING
THE BATES COLLEGE STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC HONESTY.

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, focussing 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:

I	Introduction	(1 page)
II	Ethnographic description - (text & context)	
(2 pages)		
III	Theoretical orientation	(2 pages)
IV	ANALYSIS	(5 pages)
V	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

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meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, Sesame Street, Tales for Liberated Children from Ms. Magazine, stories from elementary school reading books, Reggae music, etc.