

Mythology
Session
Time and Days

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Course Overview

It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth...The latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance of Beauty and the Beast, stand this afternoon on the corner of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the traffic light to change. -- Joseph Campbell

This course will explore the role, weight, and significance of the mythic dimension in human psychological life. This dimension is not dead or extinct, but alive and addressing us continually: brave Inanna descending into some contemporary underworld, reductionistic Procrustes dogmatizing ideas into one-size-fits-all beds, Kwan Yin disguising herself like a demon to bring the fiery folk compassion on their own terms, insatiable King Erysichthon cursed for his excessive logging activities into eating his family, his colleagues, and ultimately himself....We will explore the vitality and relevance of myth through discussions, dreamwork, film, and other media, and through exercises intended to invite these perennial presences into the room to mentor us.

Course Objectives

- To detect mythic themes, figures, and stories at work in dreams, daily interactions, unusual situations, and current events.
- To identify and manage various affective and bodily states associated with activated archetypal presences.
- To describe in speech and writing the relationship between the mythological and the archetypal, and to say why both are important to an understanding of the psyche.
- To discuss the basics of how several deep-psychological perspectives hold this relationship, including Freud, Jung, and archetypal psychology (Hillman, Sardello, Watkins, Paris, and others).
- To use reverie and “active imagination” (Jung) to deepen the vividness of direct encounters with mythic and archetypal presences as they “walk into the field.”
- To understand our time through the lens of the tale of impulsive Prometheus, and to describe the spectrum of risk stretching between ignoring such powerful figures and welcoming them in.
- To identify the “life myths” that haunt us, to detect them in various public figures, and see how such myths operate like unconscious forces pushing for recognition.

Required Reading

Leonard, S., and McClure, M. (2003). *Myth and knowing: An introduction to world mythology*. New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities.

Momaday, N. (1977). *The way to rainy mountain*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico.

Shelley, M. (2004). *Frankenstein*. New York: Pocket.

Silko, L. (1998). *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin.

Learning Activities (by % of Class Time)

- Lecture/Discussion/Case Study Examples: 40%.
- Film Exercises (Interpretive): 20%.
- Small Group Exercises and Activities: 20%
- Experiential (Active Imagination, Dreamwork, etc.): 20%.

Note that “lecture” will invite participation at all times, seminar-style, and that the various exercises and activities will overlap as needed.

Grading

Final Paper

Select one of the following options (we will discuss these in class) and email me to let me know which one you plan to write about:

1. Explore your guiding myth in light of what you learned in the course. Give concrete examples of how this myth has impacted you at various levels: your past and present, your goals, your outlook, health, family life, etc. Take that myth and turn it over in the paper as though you were inspecting a jewel from various angles. The aim of this paper is *revelatory*.
2. Take a mythic figure, story, or theme discussed in class and explain how it shows up politically, culturally, or ecologically in contemporary events. Give specific examples of how it does this and discuss the possibilities for applying more consciousness to it (e.g., would Mars be so destructive on the battlefield if more of us probed archetypal levels of human aggression reflectively? What might he look like then?). The aim of this paper is *interpretive*.
3. Using a reflective consciousness, “dream into” a mythic figure and, inviting it to co-write your paper, imagine into and explain how this figure might see itself through the lenses of various psychological perspectives. This paper's aim is *exploratory*.

Some things to note about the final paper:

- Use APA style and at least four references.
- Students who are interested in the possibility of publishing papers should have a conversation with me about it. I was published while still in school and

encourage you to get a start on it now if that's where your goals beckon you.

Class Schedule

Suggested Reading

- Borges, J. (1964). *Labyrinths: Selected stories and other writings*. New York: New Directions.
- Campbell, J. (1972). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton: Bollingen.
- Dalley, S. (1998). *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the flood, Gilgamesh, and others*. Oxford: Oxford Press.
- Downing, C. (1996). *The goddess: Mythological images of the feminine*. London, New York: Continuum.
- Endo, S. (1980). *Silence*. New York: Taplinger Publishing Company.
- Hesse, H. (1999). *Demian*. New York: Perennial.
- Hillman, J. (1997). *The soul's code: In search of character and calling*. New York: Random House.
- Jung, C. (1973). *Answer to Job*. Princeton: Bollingen.
- Leeming, D. (1992). *The world of myth: An anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Meade, M. (1993). *Men and the water of life: Initiation and the tempering of men*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Palaima, T. (ed.) (2004). *Anthology of classical myth: Primary sources in translation*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.

Something always has you in mind. -- James Hillman