

CMNS 387: Summer 2007
Special Topics: MYTH & MEDIA
COURSE SYLLABUS & GUIDELINES

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Website at: <http://www.sfu.ca/~roman/index.html>,

Recorded lectures: http://cgi.sfu.ca/~lectures/pub_html/cgi-bin/index.php

-- Course Description:

As Raymond Williams points out, the term "myth" is both very significant and highly problematic in communication and cultural studies methodologies, critical vocabularies and discourses. The term appears to refer to stories shared in oral societies, to stories of gods and heroes passed on through the Western Humanist inheritance, as well as a short hand for any deception, lie, deployment of ideological instruments, or obfuscation.

In the wake of the profound influence exerted by British cultural studies & French critical structuralism in the 70s and 80s on communication studies in Canada, Roland Barthes' book *Mythologies*, particularly the concluding essay in the collection "Myth Today," have become grounding texts in the discipline.

This course combines communication history, methodology, and theory with resources drawn from related disciplines, to assess Barthes' continuing influence, and the contribution upon which it is based, against a background of broader systematic inquiries into the nature, uses, and social communication roles of myth.

-- Required Texts:

1. Atwood, Margaret. *The Penelopiad, The Myths*. New York: Canongate, 2005. (ISBN: 1841957178)
2. Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. (ISBN: 080901369X)
3. Gardner, John. *Grendel*. 1989 ed. New York: Vintage, 1971. (ISBN: 0679723110)
4. Martin, Peter, J. *Myths of the Ancient Greeks*. New York: Penguin, 2003. (ISBN: 0451206851)
5. Courseware, and also available at (<http://www.sfu.ca/~roman/CMNS%20387%20SYLLABUS/page98.html>)
6. Media screened in classes also part of the course requirements.

-- Course Requirements:

1. Survey assignment 15%
2. In-class midterm 30%
3. Final assignment 35%
4. Tutorials, 20%.

A. Course Schedule:

WEEK	READINGS	MEDIA	ASSIGNMENTS
1 May 10	Courseware [CW] (I. Introduction, 1-11; VII, Media, 1)	<i>Ghost Dog</i>	
2 May 17	Barthes (pp. 109-126); CW: (II MythCrit: 6- 5; VII, Media, 2)	<i>Mephisto</i>	
3 May 24	Barthes (pp. 127-159); CW: (II MythCrit: 2-5 VII, Media, 3)	<i>Dark City</i>	Briefings begin in tutorials
4 May 31	Martin (pp. 1-19; 257- 323) CW: (III: 1-3; VII, Media, 4)	<i>Troy</i>	Survey Assignment due
5 June 7	CW: (III: 7-8; VII, Media, 5)	<i>Trojan Women</i>	
6 June 14	Atwood (pp. 1-196) CW: (III: 4; VII, Media, 6)	Excerpts: <i>Alexander</i> (the gods; Gaugamela), <i>Odyssey</i> (the homecoming)	
7 June 21	Martin (pp. 229-256) CW: (III: 5-6; VI: 3- 4; VII, Media, 7)	Oedipus Rex	
8 June 28	In Class midterm (3 hours) – No tutorials, readings or screenings.		
9 July 5	Gardner CW: (V: Beowulf & Grendel No's 1-5; VII, Media, 9)	<i>13th Warrior</i>	
10 July 12	Gardner CW: (V: Beowulf & Grendel No's 6-9; VII, Media, 10)	<i>Beowulf & Grendel</i>	
11 July 19	(IV: 3-5; VII, Media, 11)	<i>Pan's Labyrinth</i>	Thesis statement due

12 July 26	Barthes (VII, Media, 12)	<i>Musa</i>	
13 August 2	(CW: VI: 1-4; VII, Media, 13)	<i>Wag the Dog</i>	
14 August 9			Final Due

B. Course Requirements and Guidelines:

I. Survey assignment: 15%. The assignment is in TWO (2) PARTS:

Part ONE: 2-3 pages (750 words +/-, double-spaced; concision is an asset) In light of what we've learned to date, would you include McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* in a course on myth and media? Explain why or why not and support your position through course media and readings.

Part TWO: Biographic sketch: 150-word biography (3rd person)

This is a statement about you serving as an introduction or a "publishable thumbnail" or bio, you write about yourself in the 3rd person, not "I," but rather "he" or "she". It should contain something about your past, about what you think you'd like to get out of this course and/or why you've enrolled in it/or what attracts you to the study of communication, and something about your plans for your future.

NOTE: Handing in the assignment:

Parts 1 and 2, in the form of an integrated document, *in hard copy*, are to be handed in to your TA. "Integrated" only means that the document you hand in should contain both parts rather than handing in the two parts in separate documents ("under separate covers," or "two one room houses"). The *content* of the two parts should be kept separate – two rooms, but under the same roof (or staple, as the case may be).

The biographical statement, Part 2 only, is to be sent to me (roman@sfu.ca) by e-mail, **not as an attachment**, but in the message field. The "SUBJECT" field of the e-mail should contain "CMNS 387."

Proper academic form is expected in the first assignment, and all those thereafter. In broad terms, the following elements are factored into grading:

1. Clarity and explicitness of the organization of discourse,
2. Clear point of departure and flow of argument
3. Succinctness and intelligence of writing,
4. Correct use of citations and bibliographies,
5. Robust, well-integrated introduction and conclusion, framing clear arguments supported by the research data,
6. Fulsome reporting on research

7. Overall presentation, elegance, use of infographics and tables etc.
8. In addition to course-informed vocabulary and *copia* (depth/breadth; "erudition," "proof of purchase"), "something extra."
9. Overall, anticipates and answers the question: "So . . . ?"
10. Where appropriate, abstract, TOC, etc.

II. Tutorials (20%):

Briefing: documentation and presentation, 10%; participation/attendance, 10%.

Tutorials are provided so that literature, ideas, as well as questions and problems, arising out of the learning process can be explored with greater depth than can be done in the lecture hall. In addition to briefings and discussion, vocabulary and concepts arising from readings and lectures are reviewed weekly. Attendance is taken.

Briefing And Documentation (10%), Tutorial Participation (10%): Briefings begin in tutorials in **Week 3.**

Briefings involve a student-prepared handout of approximately 2 pages and a five to ten (5-10) minute oral introduction to the document and briefing on its contents.

The briefing note, or "documentation"/handout (500 +/- words: approx. 2 sides of a standard letter-size sheet of paper), should be comprised of a synopsis statement of the author's key argument (s), supported or illustrated by a set of properly cited key quotes drawn from the reading and – the student's assessment of the arguments or questions the article raises. The note will have a proper title, your "name & number," the TA's name and tutorial section, and provide correct bibliographic data on the article.

Any of the academic styles is acceptable (e.g. APA, Chicago etc.), so long as it's used consistently. Where appropriate, you're strongly encouraged to organize the briefing around an infographic or chart. Your briefing note should end on a conclusion that sets up some form of discussion – either a question or questions, perhaps a hypothesis (an educated hunch or guess based in the readings that you feel needs discussion or testing) or a thesis (a position you take, an assertion, a critique, or interpretation you are willing and able to support/defend). Some time will be available for Q & A after briefings.

The briefing is not meant to be a full-blown presentation; you basically "speak to" what you've already written & people have before them (it is important that they have it before them. In effect, having made their reading notes on an article for them, you're just "walking" your colleagues and TA through the material you've just handed out. Neither drama or show, nor production required nor desired; just effective "show and tell."

III. In class midterm exam: (Week 8; 25%)

There will be an in-class closed-book midterm exam composed of 3 questions each weighted 10%. A set of study questions, characteristically 6, will be posted a week in advance. These will be reduced to 4 by lot on the morning of the exam, and you will write 3. Three hours will be allocated for the midterm. The midterm is based on all literature, media as well as in-class discussions up to and including Week 7.

Exam questions will be drawn from the following aspects of studies in mythology:

1. Myth in contemporary cultures, manifestations, and applications
2. Influence and interpretations of Classical/historical myth on contemporary forms of expression.
3. Applied mythoclastics (Barthesian method on one of the films or novels)
4. Critical assessment of the Barthesian method in broader mythological context
5. Comparative assessment of a myth across media platforms
6. Myth, orality, literacy and the mass media
7. Critical and generative mythopoesis.
8. Myth and social movements
9. Myth, technology and technique
10. Myth, media and the unconscious

IV. Final Assignment (Weeks 11 & 14: 35%)

You will have a choice of one of two broad themes for the final assignment. Both require external research – *no less than* three published sources either in book or juried scholarly journal article form; web and periodical press may be used so long as the minimum scholarly requirement is met. The assignment is in two parts.

Part 1: Thesis Statement/Abstract (150-250 words; 5%: Due Week 10, July 19th)

This is the “point of departure,” for your paper, and the reader’s point of entry. As such, this usually involves a thesis statement – an assertion or affirmation that you will support through research and discourse, and which you are willing and able to defend.

A thesis is a position established, proven, and/or maintained and defended. A hypothesis – i.e. an assertion, although made on limited evidence – can also serve as a point of departure; in this case you’d be testing an idea or a hunch to see if the evidence supports or refutes it. You can also begin from a question, or being clear about something you will explain.

Regardless of the entry and framing – thesis, hypothesis, or question – you will be writing and abstract for a paper you'll still be working on. This paragraph will set up your discussion in your finished paper and should – in addition to a clear statement of “what this is about” – provide some idea of why and how you will go about arguing, proving, testing or explaining it.

In broad terms, this paragraph answers the following questions:

- i. What is this about; what is the point you'll be making? (Point)
- ii. Why, and to whom, including the author, does/should it matter? (Context & significance)
- iii. How will the argument unfold and conclude? (Map & destination/point made)

Part 1 will be returned with comments in advance of the paper deadline to help you “optimize” your time and efforts completing and refining your papers.

Part 2: (2,000-3,000 words; 30%: Due Week 14, August 9th)

You may choose one of the two following topics. Alternative topics, may be negotiated with your TA.

2.1. Drawing on at least two different mythological traditions (in the strict sense of the term), and using *one* of the films or novels in the course, assess the strengths and limitations of the Barthesian approach to mythology in media.

2.2. A mythologist might say that CMNS 387, since it appears to have a narrative structure and a “message” is itself a kind of myth. Based on outside sources and course literature (perhaps in aggregate) discuss and assess this claim.

Arrangements for handing in and then retrieval of the final assignment will be posted to the class website on Week 13.

The School expects that the grades in this course will bear some reasonable relation to established university-wide practices with respect to both levels and distributions of grades. The School follows Policy T10.02 with respect to “Intellectual Honesty” and “Academic Discipline” (see SFU Calendar, General Regulations).

PAGE ASSETS

RESOURCES:

[The Greek Mythology Link](#)

[Encyclopedia Mythica](#)

The [Theoi Project](#): Guide to Greek Mythology

[Greek and Roman Materials](#), The Perseus Digital Library

[Wikipedia](#)

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

READINGS:

Readings not specified in the Course Schedule are supplementary; recommended, not required. Links specified in the course schedule constitute the courseware for our inquiries.

I. INTRODUCTION: MYTH & SPEECH

1. [Mythology, Mytheme](#)
2. [Mythography](#)
3. James Frazer (1854-1941), [The Golden Bough](#)
4. Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928)
5. Margaret Alice Murray (1863 - 1963)
6. [Sigmund Freud](#) (1856-1939), [Oedipus complex](#)
7. [Carl Jung](#) (1875-1961), [Archetype](#)
8. Robert Graves (1895-1985), [The White Goddess](#)
9. Joseph E Campbell (1904-1987), [The Hero with a Thousand Faces](#), [Monomyth](#)
10. Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), [The Eternal Return](#)
11. [Axial Age, Myth and ritual](#), [Religion and mythology](#)

II. MYTHCRIT: GENESIS

1. [Urban Legends](#)
2. [Marshall McLuhan](#) (1911-1980)
3. *The Mechanical Bride*, [Introduction](#)
4. From *The Mechanical Bride*: [Freedom American Style](#)
5. [Geert Lovink](#) on *The Mechanical Bride*.
6. [Roland Barthes](#)
7. David Chandler's [Semiotics for Beginners](#)
8. [Semiotics](#) & [Semiosis](#)
9. Faust
10. Herman Northrop Frye (1912 - 1991), [Anatomy of Criticism](#)

III. MYTH & TRAGEDY

1. [Homer](#)
2. [The Iliad](#)
3. [Troy](#) (2004)
4. [The Odyssey](#)
5. [The Odyssey](#) (1997) (TV)
6. [Alexander](#)
7. [Sophocles](#) (495 BC - 406 BC)
8. [Oedipus Rex](#)
9. [Edipo re](#) (1967)
10. [Euripides](#) (c. 480-406 BC)
11. [The Trojan Women](#)
12. [The Trojan Women](#) (1971)

IV. MYTH & INTERPRETATION

1. [Euhemerus](#)
2. [Interpretation](#)
3. [Hermeneutics](#)
4. [H G Gadamer](#) (1900-2002)
5. [Paul Ricoeur](#) (1913 – 2005)
6. Ernesto Grassi (1902-1991)

V. BEOWULF & GRENDL

1. [Vikings](#)
2. [Sagas](#)
3. [Ahmad ibn Fadlan](#)
4. [Norse Mythology](#)
5. [Germanic paganism](#)
6. [Anglo-Saxon polytheism](#)
7. [Beowulf](#)
8. [Grendel](#)
9. [Pagan](#)
9. Revivals: [Volkish](#), [Viking](#) & [Celt](#), [Neopaganism](#) or Neo-Paganism

VI. AT THE EDGE

1. Marija [Gimbutas](#) (1921 – 1994)
2. [Goddess](#)
3. [René Girard](#) (1923 – 2005)
4. [Scapegoat](#)
5. [Eric Gans](#) (1941 -)
6. [Generative anthropology](#)
7. [Mimetic Paradox](#)
8. [Chronicles of Love and Resentment](#)

VII. MEDIA

1. [Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai](#) (1999)
2. [Mephisto](#) (1981)
3. [Dark City](#) (1998)
4. [Troy](#) (2004)
5. [Trojan Women](#) (1971)
6. Excerpts [Alexander](#) (2004) and The [Odyssey](#) (1997)
7. [Edipo re](#) (Oedipus the King; 1967)
8. Midterm: No screenings
9. [The 13th Warrior](#) (1999)
10. [Beowulf & Grendel](#) (2005)
11. [Pan's Labyrinth](#) (2006), [Magic realism](#)
12. [Musa](#) (2005)
13. [Wag the Dog](#) (1997)