



Exchange programme Vrije Universiteit

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam - Exchange programme Vrije Universiteit - 2020-2021

Religious Myths and Rituals

Course Code	G_BATRSPC105
Credits	6
Period	P4
Course Level	100
Language Of Tuition	English
Faculty	Faculty of Religion and Theology
Course Coordinator	dr. L. Minnema
Examiner	dr. L. Minnema
Teaching Staff	dr. L. Minnema
Teaching method(s)	Seminar, Lecture

Course Objective

- * students acquire knowledge of myths worldwide and detailed knowledge of some well-known myths (and fairy tales) in particular
- * students acquire insight into the shared functions of rituals and myths
- * students acquire insight into the academic debate in myth and ritual studies and can apply some mythographic approaches to specific myths
- * students are able to compare myths worldwide within the respective frameworks offered by each of the classical schools of myth interpretation

Course Content

Cultures worldwide transmit stories about the origin of the cosmos at large, of humankind, of specific customs and institutions, of natural phenomena, of evil and suffering, stories about the problems involved in growing up and living together. These stories are felt to be meaningful beyond just entertaining their audience, if these stories are considered to express how things are deep down at any time, how things are basically meant to be. Myths express how things are fundamentally intertwined with the community that experiences these stories as of crucial value to their own way of life and identity. Myths are binding stories even to the point of the community ritualizing the form in which they are told and performed.

The puzzling thing for scholars is that across cultures, narrative motifs and plots in myths, legends, and fairy tales, but also social and psychological functions of myths seem strikingly similar, that is to say, sometimes and somehow but not all the time and not everywhere, and it is very hard to pin down when and where exactly.

The same thing can be said of rituals. Why do people all over the world perform rituals? Does ritual behaviour have the same functions everywhere and all the time? What are the links between myth and ritual? Do myths, legends, fairy tales, and rituals perform the same functions?

The main focus of this course will be on the classical interpretations of myths and fairy tales but attention will also be paid to the scholarly understanding of ritual and how myth and ritual are related. One mythographic school of interpretation approaches ritual as the enactment of mythical stories, an approach that is contested by scholars who consider ritual as a type of behaviour that is done for its own sake, not primarily for storytelling. Narrative theories analyse the structure of plot patterns in terms of problem solving heroes with a quest who overcome challenges and reach heroic goals. Other schools of interpretation apply Freudian or Jungian psychoanalysis. Structuralist theories also look for underlying patterns in the arrangement of narrative motifs but primarily along nature-culture lines. Classical and Renaissance philosophies embraced allegorical interpretations, whereas contemporary approaches stress the ideological function of myth and ritual in society and politics, in particular legitimizing power relations and nationalist inventions of tradition.

Teaching Methods

lectures, class room sessions, presentation, self-study

Method of Assessment

Written assignments (35%), presentation (30%) and paper (35%)

Entry Requirements

no prerequisites

Literature

articles and capita selecta (to be announced in due course via the course manual or Canvas and made available via VU library or Canvas)

Target Audience

For Bachelor and Premaster students in the Humanities

Explanation Canvas

The detailed course manual will be made available via Canvas