

Anthropology and the Written Word

Spring Term, 2001

CLASS PERIOD--M Hour: T-Th 9:40-11:20

PROFESSOR-- Susan Kus

OFFICE-- 105 Clough

OFFICE HOURS -- M 1-2, T-Th 1-2:30

Course Statement

The written word is powerful. There are sacred texts and political documents that purport to explain the world or, in some cases, change and/or control it. Sometimes the possession of the skills of writing and reading politically empower individuals as in the case of ancient elite Mesopotamian and Chinese scribes. While the writing of a dissertation grants authority to some anthropologists in the form of a degree, anthropologists have also been involved in various literary projects beyond the classic ethnography and the theoretical treatise. There is a tradition in anthropology of biographies and autobiographies of individuals from non-Western societies. Anthropologists have considered such works as important means of conveying a sense of what it is like to be a member of and to live inside an alternative cultural system. Other anthropologists have used poetry and the novel to portray a sense of their understanding of alternative realities and some have even written science fiction to allow them to focus on a specific cultural dilemma or moral crisis that arises in cross-cultural interactions. It is also the case that we have access to the voice of others when they choose to write down their own thoughts and tales in literary texts. Some of these texts conform to Western literary traditions, others speak in different voices with different styles.

Consider the words of Chief Cobb of the Choctaw:

The redman has no books, and when he wants to say what he thinks, he speaks from the mouth, like his fathers before him. He is afraid of writing. When he speaks, he knows what he says. The Great Spirit hears him. Writing is the invention of the palefaces. It gives birth to trouble and fighting. The Great Spirit talks. We hear him in the thunder, in the sound of the wind, and in the water. He never writes.

This course is intended to examine various issues involving orality and literacy and its consequences for ourselves and the others whose lives we wish to understand. We will begin with several important questions: Does it matter to one's thoughts and one's life whether one is raised in a primarily oral culture or a highly literate one? How, when, where and why did writing and recording systems begin? How can writing be used to effectively convey anthropological knowledge both within and beyond the discipline?

Course Requirements

Your grade in this course will be based on assignments and class participation. Late completion of assignments and unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade. In taking this course for credit it is assumed (under the honor code) that you will complete all the reading assignments for the assigned dates.

Should there be any question of "writing style" in the completion of research assignments, refer to the Style Guidelines of the journal, American Anthropologist. A copy of these guidelines is available on the web site of the Rhodes Writing Center. Late papers and assignments will not be accepted except in the case of very extenuating circumstances. Should such a case arise permission to turn in a late assignment needs to be obtained before the due date.

Failure to adequately complete any assignment or to take any exam will result in a failing grade for the course. Unexcused absences and/or failure to participate in class can lower your grade up to one letter grade. In the case of a significant number (3 or more) of unexcused absences a failing grade will be assigned for the course. You are asked to self-report on absences. The self-reporting will take the form of writing in the attendance book under your name the date of the absence and the reason for the absence.

Incompletes are not normally given in this class. In the rare case where an incomplete may be in order, the student must obtain permission from the instructor and complete all paper work for the Registrar before the day of the final exam.

Class participation.....	10%
I--short essays on McTaggart and Ong.....	10%
II--telling a story.....	10%
III--Ancient writing systems & scripts.....	10%
IV--Non-Western autobiography.....	15%
V--short essays on Snyder and Momaday.....	15%
VI--Fiction and anthropological knowledge.....	10%
VII--Final Project.....	10%
Write up on final project.....	10%

COURSE TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENT

(readings are to be completed for the assigned day)

DATE		LECTURE TOPIC	READING
Jan	11	Introduction to course	Begin reading McTaggart finish by Jan 18
Jan	16 18	Speech as act The adventures of McTaggart	McTaggart
Jan	23	Orality and Literacy Autobiographies chosen by today	Ong (Chaps 1-3)
	25	Orality and Literacy cont. (Assign. I: take home questions on McTaggart and Ong)	Ong (Chapts 4-7)
Jan	30	"Angano, Angano" -- Telling of Tales	Begin reading autobiography
Feb	1	Narrative -- we are all tellers of tales	Individual readings to be assigned
Feb	6	Telling our tales (Assign. II presentations) Preparation for final assignment, choosing working groups	
	8	Origins of writing and recording systems	
Feb	13	Origins of writing cont.	
	15	Various scripts -- (Assign III. presentations)	
Feb	20	Implications of writing/ literacy for society	Individual readings to be assigned from Goody
	22	Alternative Realities Updates on final projects	Begin reading Snyder
Feb	27	Autobiographies of "the others" (Assign. IV presentations)	
March	1	What should we be trying to say? How should we say it? "Popularizing" anthropology Discussion of Snyder's <u>Practice of the Wild</u> through page 97.	
March	6 8	RECESS RECESS	Begin reading Momaday
March	13	Continue discussion of Snyder through end of book.	
	15	Native American Authors	Individual readings to be assigned from Ortiz and Coltelli

March 20		Discussion of <u>House Made of Dawn</u> by Momaday (Assign. V - essay questions on Snyder and Momaday)	
	22	Anthropologists speak about themselves	Begin reading LeGuin Individual readings to be assigned from DeVita
March 27		Discussion of <u>Left Hand of Darkness</u> by LeGuin (Assign. VI - Sci-Fi or Fictional short story)	
	29	Saying it. Scientist or poet?	Begin Reading Thomas
April 3		Discussion of <u>Reindeer Moon</u> by Thomas	
	5	Contemporary issues of literacy	
April 10		Reading stories (Assign. VI presentations)	
	12	EASTER BREAK	
April 17		Contemporary issues concerning literacy (cont.)	Individual readings to be assigned from assorted sources
	19	[Society of American Archaeology Meetings -- no class -- replaced by the various take home exams]	
April 29		Final project presentations (Assign. VII)	
May 2		Final project presentations continued & concluding remarks	

Required Texts

TO BE PURCHASED

McTaggart, Fred - WOLF THAT I AM

Ong, Walter - ORALITY AND LITERACY

Snyder, Gary - THE PRACTICE OF THE WILD

Momaday, N. Scott - HOUSE MADE OF DAWN

LeGuin, Ursula - THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

Thomas, Elizabeth M. - REINDEER MOON

Additional readings will be assigned from

Goody, Jack, THE LOGIC OF WRITING AND THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIETY, Cambridge : Cambridge U, 1989.

DeVita, Philip, THE NAKED ANTHROPOLOGIST: TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD, Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth, 1992.

Coltelli, Laura, WINGED WORDS: AMERICAN INDIAN WRITERS SPEAK, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1990.

Ortiz, Simon (ed.), SPEAKING FOR THE GENERATIONS: NATIVE WRITERS ON WRITING, Tuscon: University of Arizona, 1998

Since there are several books to read, decisions to be made about assignment topics and various dates for assignments to be turned in or presented here is a:

LISTING OF DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

Jan 18 Finish reading McTaggart - Wolf that I am

Jan 23 Finish reading chapters 1-3 of Ong - Orality and Literacy
Autobiography chosen by this date

Jan 25 Finish reading chapters 4-7 of Ong - Orality and Literacy

Feb 1 **Assignment I** is due

Feb 6 **Assignment II** presentations; preparation for final project

Feb 15 **Assignment III** presentations

Feb 22 Update on final projects

Feb 27 **Assignment IV** presentations

Mar 1 Finish reading first 1/2 of Snyder -- Practice of the Wild

Mar 13 Finish reading second 1/2 of Snyder -- Practice of the Wild

Mar 20 Finish reading Momaday -- House Made of Dawn

Mar 27 **Assignment V** is due; Finish reading LeGuin - Left Hand of Darkness

April 3 Finish reading Thoma - Reindeer Moon

April 10 **Assignment VI** presentations

April 29 & May 2 **Final project** presentations

YOUR CHOICE OF ASSIGNMENT

ASSIGNMENT III

Choose an early writing system to investigate or one of the alternative topics listed under the description of this assignment



ASSIGNMENT IV

Choose an autobiography of a non-Western individual



ASSIGNMENT VII

Create a final project

ASSIGNMENT I - Literate and non-literate cultures

Due February 1

You will be asked to write a short response (4-5 pages) to a take home question(s) concerning McTaggart's book, WOLF THAT I AM and Ong's book, ORALITY AND LITERACY.

ASSIGNMENT II - Telling a tale

Due February 6

You are asked to recite a tale to the class. This tale can either be a classic story/folk tale (to which you bring a new twist in interpretation) or a story from your own experiences.

ASSIGNMENT III

- Ancient writing and recording systems and scripts

Due February 15

This assignment will give you a chance to become acquainted with an early recording or writing system. Choose a system from the following list.

Egyptian hieroglyphics	Runes/Futhark (Scandinavia)	Elamite
Hebrew script	Arabic script	Canaanite
Aramaic script	Amharic (Ethiopia)	Korean
Cyrillic script (Slavic)	Cuneiform (Mesopotamia)	Berber & Tifinagh
Indus script	Quipu of the Inca	
Maya script and glyphs	Chinese script	
Aztec recording system	Japanese script	
Phoenician & Aramaic script	Linear A and Linear B and Cypriotic script (Crete)	
An Indian script (e.g., Brahmi, Tamil, Tibetan, etc.)		

You should produce a paper of 6-8 typewritten pages and be prepared to give a class presentations of 10 minutes on your research. The paper should contain both an informative/descriptive section and a thought provoking conclusion.

In the former section you might attempt to answer the following questions. When and where do scholars believe the writing system you are investigating was developed? What is the earliest evidence of this system? Has the system been deciphered? If yes, how and by whom? If no, why not? How consistent is the system in its early use? What writing or recording materials were used? Did such materials influence any aspect of the system (e.g., shape of symbols, direction of writing, etc.)? Was or is the system used to record more than one language? How effective is this particular system for recording various languages?

In the latter section of your paper you should discuss some issue that came to mind when you were doing research for this paper that you thought was stimulating and thought provoking, perhaps an issue that would never have crossed your mind had you not done research into a recording system other than Roman script.

ALTERNATIVE THEMES FOR ASSIGNMENT III

(1) Handwriting analysis -- what is it about and how credible is it?

(2) A Cherokee syllabary was invented by Sequoyah. It took 12 years of labor and was completed in 1819. After this writing system was accepted by a group of Cherokee elders, the Cherokee became literate in a few years. By 1880 the Cherokee has a higher level of literacy than the Whites in their immediate area.

ASSIGNMENT IV -- Another life

Class presentations February 27

Anthropologists have generated numerous scholarly texts (ethnographies and ethnologies) on other cultural systems. Yet, for the most part these are works written by **OUTSIDERS** on cultural **GROUPS**. Anthropologists have often encouraged non-Western individuals to write their own life histories so that we might also have texts written by **INSIDERS** on their **INDIVIDUAL** cultural experiences. Choose an autobiography or biography of a non-Western individual (some suggestions are given below) and write a 7-10 page paper on the following theme: the challenge and difficulty of understanding the lives and culture of another. Remember Geertz's remark that we are all born with a capacity to live a 1,000 different lives but we end up living only one.

One might choose to focus on some aspect of perception, emotion/motivation, cognition or the idea of "person" that is involved in the experiencing and understanding of the culture of the individual writing the autobiography and that provides a challenge to someone outside the culture. One might discuss an aspect of "lives as lived" (e.g., chronic hunger, illness, childbirthing, life on a tropical island, etc.) that puts the focus on "experience" versus "intellect" in understanding other cultures. Or one might explore in detail some element of the difference between oral and literate cultures and the nature of belief and understanding in such contexts. Consider, for instance, the following remark of Crick:

Can anthropologists adequately conceive of how rituals, speech, and action form the pattern of meaning in non-literate societies...? Can anthropologists really sense what it is like to think without knowledge being stored in written language? This is an important question.... (Crick 1982:292)

Further details of the assignment will be discussed in class.

A selection of AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Simmons, Leo (ed.)
SUN CHIEF: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A HOPI INDIAN

Momaday, N. Scott
THE NAMES: A MEMOIR

Gatheru, R. Mugo
CHILD OF TWO WORLDS: A KIKUYU'S STORY

Bizarro Upjan, Ignacio
SON OF TECUN UMAN: A MAYA INDIAN TELLS HIS LIFE STORY

Blackman, Margaret B.
DURING MY TIME: FLORENCE EDENSHAW DAVIDSON, A HAIDA WOMAN

Black Hawk, Sauk chief
BLACK HAWK: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Black Elk
BLACK ELK SPEAKS

Crow Dog, Mary
LAKOTA WOMAN and her sequel --- Brave Bird, Mary OHITIKA WOMAN

Shostak, Marjoria
NISA: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF A !KUNG WOMAN

Ongka
ONGKA: A SELF-ACCOUNT BY A NEW GUINEA BIG-MAN

Left Handed
LEFT HANDED, A NAVAJO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Lurie, Nancy
MOUNTAIN WOLF WOMAN, SISTER OF CRASHING THUNDER

Mokgatle, Naboth
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN UNKNOWN SOUTH AMERICAN

Ngabidj, Grant
MY COUNTRY OF THE PELICAN DREAMING

Radin, Paul
CRASHING THUNDER: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN AMERICAN INDIAN

Saitoti, Tepilit Ole
THE WORLDS OF A MAASAI WARRIOR

Savala, Refugio
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YAQUI POET

Said-Ruete, Emily
MEMOIRS OF AN ARABIAN PRINCESS

Sugimoto, Etso
A DAUGHTER OF THE SAMURAI

Fools Crow
FOOLS CROW (Oglala Indian)

Sewid, James
GUESTS NEVER LEAVE HUNGRY: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JAMES SEWID,
A KWAKIUTL INDIAN

Yogananda, Paramhansa
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI.

Mithcell, Frank
NAVAJO BLESSINGWAY SINGER: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FRANK
MITCHELL

Katsu, Kokichi
MUSUI'S STORY: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A TOKUGAWA SAMURAI.

Morning Dove
MOURNING DOVE: A SALISHAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Rojas, Juan
I SPENT MY LIFE IN THE MINES: THE STORY OF JUAN ROJA, BOLIVIAN TIN
MINER.

ASSIGNMENT V -- Momaday and listening to the tales of another; Snyder and the power of poetry.

Due March 27

You will be asked to write a short response to take-home questions on some themes or questions that arose in our class discussion of Momaday, Snyder and related works.

ASSIGNMENT VI -- Write a poem or a tale (Science Fiction or fiction short-story) with an anthropological punch line.

Presentations due April 10

ASSIGNMENT VII

-- Anthropology made available for the young.

Presentations due April 29 and May 2.

You will participate in a group project to create a small book to make available "other ways" (from anthropological insights) and/or "others' ways" of being in the world to a younger audience. More details of the assignment will be offered in class.

Grading will be based on both the finished "book" produced by the group and on an individual written component that accompanies the book.