

Thinking About Cultural Mythology

When you are examining *A Thousand Acres* for cultural mythologies, try not to focus too closely on the plot or characters of the film. Look at the background community, the setting in which the story takes place. Cultural mythologies are *community*- specific; therefore you should be looking at the way in which the community operates. The main characters' stories' function within the context of the larger community.

All cultures have mythologies: sets of beliefs about what is "natural" and "normal." The mythological aspect is the belief that a practice or value that is culturally specific is in fact *natural*. These sets of values and beliefs assume a common viewpoint among all members of the society. At their most blinding level, cultural mythologies extend to an assumption of a universal viewpoint, i.e., that cultures that hold different sets of values than "ours" have somehow become sidetracked into mistaken practices and values.

Example: most young people accept as natural the idea that drinking and driving is an aberrant practice or behaviour, i.e, those who do it are not stupid, abnormal, defiant. This is *not* a natural belief. It is the result of 25 years of growing public change in attitudes, reinforced by government p.s.a.'s (public service announcements). Canadian culture of 2001 is not the same as Canadian culture of 1976, and so its mythologies have changed.

Language clues to mythology:

1. "Everybody knows that
2. Any normal person would feel ...
3. "It's only natural ...
4. That's the way life is ...
5. That's the way people are ...

Cultural Mythologies tend to be most focussed on topics of public interest. Issues that produce cultural mythologies in contemporary North American society include:

- equal opportunities
- education
- employment
- gender roles
- sexual orientation
- consumerism
- the "global economy"
- public/ private debt
- environmentalism
- age/ youth
- left wing/ right wing
- public / personal morality
- crime & punishment/ law and order
- health care
- governmental/ corporate responsibility for social issues