

**The Gallatin School of New York University: Fall Semester 2009: K10:0639
Writing/Research Seminar II: Myths and Fables in Popular Culture**

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appointment

Office: Room 608, 715 Broadway
Office Hours M/W 4-4:50 and by
appointment

Writing Seminar II focuses on developing writing and research skills needed in the academic environment. This includes learning to work with critical source material and the scholarly apparatus of footnotes, endnotes, and bibliographies. Good research requires an inquisitive mind, but the skillful researcher must also develop criteria for assessing a variety of resources and know how to evaluate critical writings. We will work collaboratively as a group to consider the relative value and usefulness of primary and secondary sources, formal and informal materials, books, articles, films, and internet sites. The move from writing to research and back to writing requires the integration of research material into our own work in ways that support and deepen our ideas but allow our individual voices as writers to remain strong. The final writing project in this course is an in-depth research paper, and all writing assignments will help prepare for that assignment. The final research paper will be written in stages and there will be incremental assignments that will help to build the paper and to clarify its components. Although there are only three formal papers, including the final one, you will actually be writing a great deal. There will be short, informal commentaries in brief papers and a journal.

Our theme is “Myths and Fables in Popular Culture.” Fairy tales are equally important, although they are not listed in the course’s title. It is expected that the final research paper will grow out of our discussions and class readings and be an in-depth critical exploration related to some aspect of this broad topic. We are concerned with an enormous area that includes fables, myths, legends, folktales, and fairy tales. Our interests here include ancient tales, as well as those invented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the modern revisions in theater, films, graphic novels, and comics that continue the earlier traditions.

Much of classroom discussion will focus on the sources, themes, and cultural uses of myths, and fairy tales. Many of the stories we will read, discuss, and write about over the next three-and-a-half months have their roots in the ancient world where they were preserved through oral story telling long before cultures had written languages sophisticated enough to capture the versatility of the human imagination. However, some of our stories are the work of professional writers. Story telling for the market place continues today when the screen replaces the flickering hearth as the place where stories are told. Part of the fascination of this material is watching the reappearance of themes and memes time and time again. It is worth noting that much of the exploration of fairy tales and myths has been done by psychologists and anthropologists. This seminar’s title includes “. . . in Popular Culture,” but the truth is that fables, myths, and fairy tales have always been a part of “popular” culture because, above all, these stories were told then – and now -- as a means of entertainment, but also as a place to speak about fundamental human concerns. Now, we will continue that discourse in our own voices.

Required Texts (all are paperback editions and should be at the NYU bookstore)

Beginning Theory, Peter Barry

The Bloody Chamber. Angela Carter

The Golden Ass, Apuleius

The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm, ed. J. Zipes
Metamorphoses. Ovid, Rolf Humphries trans.

The Uses of Enchantment, Bruno Bettelheim **Currently out of print, but second hand copies are plentiful . Required Viewing: *Pan's Labyrinth* and Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast***

Optional Texts – Books you will find useful and of interest

Glossary of Literary Terms, M.H. Abrams; *Elements of Style*, Strunk & White

A Short History of Myth, Karen Armstrong

Grimm's Fairy Tales, ed. Joyce Crick (pub. Oxford World's Classics)

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Joseph Gibaldi

Gilgamesh, N.K. Sanders translation preferred

Writing Assignments -

Journals: During the first four weeks of classes keep a journal in which you write your own comments on the readings. This might include summaries of points of interest or importance, links and connections, notes on possible use in the research paper. The goal is to give you material you can draw upon later in your writing. Journals will be reviewed during writers workshop class sessions.

Blackboard/Blog Discussion: Some assignments will ask that you post comments on Blackboard's discussion Board.

Discussion Topics: For each class two students will be asked to present topics for class discussion.

Informal Assignments: there will be several informal assignments used as part of our discussions, they will include the Timed-Research Project and, possibly a performance review. These will generally be between one and three pages in length, but may be longer if you want. They do not receive a letter grade.

Formal Papers (1, 2 & 3): These papers will be expected to follow academic conventions in the use of quotations, references, citation, and bibliographic material. They will also go through intensive development and revision process. There are four steps for each of the three formal papers: 1) an in-class workshop on the first draft working with peer editors, 2) a revised and polished version that is handed in, 3) a writing conference with the instructor, 4) a final revision, which is graded. The first formal paper, four-pages in length, will focus on integrating critical sources into your analytical writing. The second paper, a twelve-page research paper (approximately 5,000 words, the length of an academic conference paper) will be the product of intensive research during the middle weeks of the semester. The third formal paper (the "Myth" paper), can be either an academic paper, five to seven pages in length, that focuses on formulating and presenting your own interpretations or theories about myths, OR it may focus on your own creation in any media of a myth, such as fiction writing or art project, followed by a rationale (three to four pages) discussing the project. One of the major goals in all three papers is to help you maintain your own voice as a writer working with critical sources. A letter grade will be given to each of these papers.

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- Sept. 9 An introduction to fables: Aesop's and others.
- Sept. 14 Animal Fables
Read: Bettelheim on the Three Little Pigs; Peter Barry, chapter 5
"Psychoanalytic Criticism"; (See Assignment Guidelines for on-
line and viewing assignment)
- Sept. 16 Read Barry, chapters 4 & 6, "Postmodernism" and "Feminist
Criticism"; Little Red Riding Hood (See Assignment Guidelines
for on-line and viewing assignment)
- Sept. 21 *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*. Sections titled: "Clever Thieves,"
"Incestuous Fathers," "The Revenge and Reward of Neglected
Daughters", "Magic Helpers,"
Informal Writing Assignment: Report on Timed Research Project -
(see Assignment Guidelines for details)
- Sept. 23 *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*. Sections titled: Faithful Sisters,"
and "The Fruitful Sleep"; Jack Zipes on The Social History of
Fairy Tales
- Sept. 28 Writer's Workshop: Formal Paper #1
Sept. 30 First Formal Paper Due; Visit to Fales Collection, Bobst Library
- Oct. 5 Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber* – "The Bloody Chamber,"
"The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" & "The Tiger's Bride"
The Great Fairy Tale Tradition, Sections titled: "Bloodthirsty
Husbands" and "The Beast as Bridegroom"
- Oct. 7 Apuleius's "the Old Woman's Tale" (Cupid and Psyche) in *The
Golden Ass*
- Oct. 12 **Research Paper Topic Due:** Write a one page abstract describing
the topic
- Oct. 14 Class meets in library for further exploration of the book stacks
- Oct. 19 **Research Paper Annotated Bibliography Due:** (minimum 8
sources)
Bobst Library: training session for on-line research sources
- Oct. 21 Guillermo del Toro's film *Pan's Labyrinth* & Cocteau's *Beauty and
the Beast*; Research techniques for films

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Oct. 26	Working Outline Due – a 2 page- ‘sketch’ of the paper’s plan
	Writers Workshop & Reports on Work in Progress
Oct. 28	Writers Workshop & Reports on Work in Progress
Nov. 2	A Copy of the Work in Progress is Due (there should be at least 3 pages written); Writers Workshop & Reports on Work in Progress
Nov. 4	Writers Workshop & Reports on Work in Progress
Nov. 9	Research Paper is Due
Nov. 11	Ovid’s <i>Metamorphoses</i> : The stories of the Flood, Deucalion and Pyrrha, Apollo and Daphne, Phaethon, Tiresias, Echo and Narcissus, Orpheus and Eurydice,
Nov. 16	Further selections from <i>Metamorphoses</i> to be announced, plus your choice of stories
Nov. 18	<i>Metamorphoses</i> Translation Comparison Chart Due - (see Assignment Guidelines for details)
Nov. 23	Contemporary Retellings of Greek Myths
Nov. 25	TBA
Nov. 30	Writers Workshop – The “Myth” Paper
Dec. 2	Writers Workshop – The “Myth” Paper
Dec. 7	The ‘Myth’ Paper is Due
Dec. 9	Student Presentations - Film Clips
Dec. 14	Student Presentations - Film Clips

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Note: Changes may be made to the syllabus by the instructor.

Grades are based on the following: Formal Paper # 1 is 15% of grade; the Research Paper #2 is 35% of grade; Research/prep work for final paper is 10% of grade; Formal Paper #3 is 15% of grade; Class participation, journal, other writing is 25% of grade.

Assignment Guideline: Timed Library Research Project: An “Informal” Paper

Process: Spend two hours – no more and no less – researching any subject related to our seminar theme. It is better to be specific if possible.

Restriction: At least one hour of the two-hour research time must be spent in the library.

Goal: To gain an estimate of a) how much material is available on your choice of subject; b) how much time it may take to conduct certain types of research

Writing: Write up a report of your research “adventure.” Choose your own way of telling us about this mythic confrontation with the library stacks, how you went about your search, what worked, what was a challenge, what took the least – or the most time. In other words, this is about the process of research and not, necessarily what you learned about the actual subject. Please be very clear about this: I am not looking for a report on the subject, but want, instead, a report on your personal experience with the research process. Of course, you may want to include some of the information you found, but remember that is not the central point of your report.

Resources: While in the library it is expected that you will look at books in the appropriate section of the general collection, but also, if there is time, you will check current journals covering the topic (these are in the periodicals section). Of course, part of your research may be done on-line, either from home or in the library.

The ground floor of the library has a research section. This is often the best place to start. This is where you will find the research volumes that can often send you in the right direction. AND even more important, this is where you will find the Research Librarians who are almost always very, very helpful and who can often be an invaluable aid in getting started. The library also has printed copies of information on materials in various fields of study. These are also in the reference section.

Remember, the Research Librarian is your friend.

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Grades are based on the following: Formal Paper # 1 is 15% of grade; Formal Paper #2 is 20% of grade; Research/prep work for final paper is 10% of grade; Class report on research is 5% of grade; Formal Paper #3 is 25% of grade; Class participation, journal, other writing is 25% of grade.

Useful Websites:

A full text of *The Golden Bough* is available on these sites.

www.bartleby.com/196/ - 39k

www.gutenberg.org/etext/3623 - 14k

This is typical of the type of website useful in comparing folk and fairy tale.

Antii Aarne's book The Types of Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, was revised and enlarged by Seth Thompson. They categorized and catalogued all the motifs in folktales.

Note, also, that this is a university website.

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html>

Three Little Pigs and other folktales of Aarne-Thompson type 124

edited by



D. L. Ashliman

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Contents

1. The Story of the Three Little Pigs (England).
2. The Three Little Pigs (England).
3. The Awful Fate of Mr. Wolf (African-American, Joel Chandler Harris).
4. The Story of the Pigs (African-American, Joel Chandler Harris).
5. The Three Goslings (Italy).

Links to related tales.

Definition: a *meme* is a literary term that is obscure but useful for our discussions. It refers to a repeated pattern in story telling, such as a plot that involves a person who is punished and/or banished by being set adrift on the sea.

Basic On-Line Research Sources Available through NYU Homepage:

Bobst Library

Proquest

JStor

MLA Bibliography

Formal Paper I: Assignment and Guidelines

Process:	Step 1:	Writers Workshop with working drafts. Bring 3 copies of something your group can read.
	Step 2:	Hand In Paper & Schedule Individual Conference
	Step 3:	Individual Conferences Held to Review the Paper
	Step 4:	Revised Papers Are Due One Week After Conference

Goal: This 4-page paper is an exercise in incorporating your own ideas into a discussion that also uses source material.

- In other words, you will be doing what you normally do in a research paper, except – and this is a big exception – you are discussing your own thesis about some aspect of the material, instead of simply reporting on what others have said about it.
- You will be expected to have at least 5 sources in your research. Remember, sources are important as discussion springboards, support, differing views, authoritative information. They can be agreed with, argued against, used to give weight to your argument or ideas. Use them, but don't let them dominate. Don't make your paper a patchwork of other people's ideas.

Topic: A list of possible topics will evolve from our class discussions. The topic is very open. You may want to explore more about some of the fairy tales or dig deeper into one of the critical theories about them. There might be a book, film, or even television series that you want to examine in terms of the traditional structure of myth archetypes, such as the hero's journey.

Even so, the biggest difficulty with this topic is that while it is very open, a four-page paper needs to be closely focused. Although you may choose any subject related to the course material for this paper, it would be useful to stay focused tales and myths rituals. For instance you might discuss a single tale or a mythic character in terms of your idea of the material in terms of someone like mythographer Joseph Campbell and/or James Frazer's discussions. You can take any story, film, video game, comic books, songs, cultural rituals – nearly anything that might connect to our material explore it in depth. You may find your paper topic in our class discussion topics and/or the reading assignments. As with all papers, you will need to establish a thesis which is then explored and developed in the body of the paper. Your discussion might draw upon historical context, critical approaches (i.e., psychological, feminist, popular culture), and/or a close reading of the text itself that considers the method of story telling, plot structure, as well as what is included and what is left out.

Sources: your research should include at least five academically reputable secondary sources. Wikipedia may be useful, but does not count as a legitimate reference sources at this level of academic writing (though some of the articles it links to might be). There are excellent on-line research sources, but chose carefully. **Length: Maximum 4 pages (approximately 1,132 words), plus footnotes or endnotes, illustrations, and a Works Cited page.** Follow MLA guidelines for in-text citations, footnotes/endnotes, and the MLA bibliography style for the texts listed in works cited.

After you've chosen your topic, here is the next hard part: I want to hear your own voice strong and clear in this writing. The paper should be a mix of research and your own analysis. Don't just tell me what your critical sources think about the material. Tell me what **you** think and want to say. The other writers are not only springboards, support, or voices to argue against, they are also an important part of your writing because as a writer you are now part of a dialogue with these writers and the ideas and theories they represent.

Formal Paper 3: Assignment and Guidelines A Myth-Related Research Paper or Project

Process: As with Paper 1

The Assignment: This assignment is called the ‘myths project’ because it is somewhat different from a standard paper assignment. You have a choice to either do a traditional research paper on one of Ovid’s myths or Cupid and Psyche, either exploring the original story, variations of the story, or any adaptations of it, or even its relevance in other fields. This would follow the guidelines for Paper 1, but would be between 10 and 15 pages in length. OR you may do a project as described below. The project assignment has two parts: your myth-related project and a rationale that provides an analytical discussion of that project.

Project Assignment: Part I: The Project may be a work in any medium you choose. The main requirement is that it relates to a myth or myths, preferably those in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* or Apuleius’s “Cupid and Psyche.” You can do an adaptation or use the story as springboard for your own version. This can take many forms; you can write a story, “direct” a theater adaptation, do a series of photographs, make a collage, write a song, write a screen treatment for either film or television, invent a computer game, design a children’s book – in other words rethink or retell a myth in any way you want. If it is a written project, it is something that you should be able to cover in a dozen pages or less. That is why these guidelines suggest a short story, but only a “treatment” for a film, something where you describe the plot, the general film style, things like that, but do not, necessarily, write all of the dialogue. The same is true of a computer game. You could develop the concept of the game, but not actually write the computer program. If you are in doubt, talk to me or email me at pl35@nyu.edu.

Part II: The Rationale is the theoretical component in this writing assignment. This should be approximately 5 pages, more or less. For the rationale you need to step back and discuss the “project” in terms of the choices you made relative to the myths. This should really be a discussion of the myth, its themes, its images and the ways they influenced your adaptation. The “voice” here can be personal, as in “I decided to do” or you can even use a more neutral voice, as in “The x and y of this story focus on” The choice is yours. Just remember to be consistent.

That is basically it. Have fun with this project and feel free to contact me if you have any questions about what you plan to do.

If the words of poets have any truth or worth, they give this hope to me, who wrote them – that I shall become them, and live. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. David R. Slavitt)

