

**The Gallatin School of New York University: Spring Semester 2008:  
K10:0639 Writing Seminar II: Myths and Fables in Popular Culture**

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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)**

*A Short History of Myth*, Karen Armstrong

*The Golden Ass*, Apuleius

*Metamorphoses*. Ovid, Rolf Humphries trans.

*The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm*, ed. J. Zipes  
*Grimm's Fairy Tales*, ed. Joyce Crick (pub. Oxford World's Classics)

*The Bloody Chamber*. Angela Carter

*Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Joseph Gibaldi

Course Packet – available at the NYU bookstore in Feb. (Carol Ann Duffy & Mary Zimmerman)

*The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim **This book will have to be bought second hand**

**Optional Texts – Books you will find useful and of interest**

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

**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 here is to give you material you can draw upon later in your writing. Journals will be reviewed during writers workshop class sessions.

**1) Written Reflections & 2) Discussion Point:** 1) a 1-2 page reflection on the reading. It should be a useful combination of summary and your own observations. 2) an observation, question, or point you want to make about the assignment that might be incorporated into our class discussion. **These are due for almost every reading assignment. Check the Syllabus.**

**Blackboard Discussion:** Some assignments will ask that you post comments on Blackboard's discussion Board. **Check the Syllabus.**

**Informal Assignments:** the Timed-Research Project and, possibly a performance review. These will generally be two to 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 of the draft that is handed in, 3) a writing conference with the instructor, 4) a final revision, which is graded. Each paper will address an area of specific concern in academic writing. The first formal paper, four-pages in length, will focus on integrating critical sources into your analytical writing. The second formal paper, five to seven pages in length, will focus on formulating and presenting your own interpretations or theories, but may also contain a more open, creative element, such as a writing or art project, followed by a rationale (3-4 pages) discussing the project. The third paper, a twelve-page research paper (approximately 5,000 words) will be the product of intensive research during the final six weeks of the semester. This research project will also be the topic of your report to the class. One of the major goals in all three papers is to help you maintain your own voice as a writer. A letter grade will be given to each of these papers.

MISCELLANY

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.

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

[www.bartleby.com/196/](http://www.bartleby.com/196/) - 39k

[www.gutenberg.org/etext/3623](http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3623) - 14k

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*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.**

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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.

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Writing Seminar II: Myths and Fables in Popular Culture**

- JAN 23                    *Introduction* – Taxonomies & Definitions
- JAN 28                    **Read:** Karen Armstrong, *History of Myth* pp. 1-78  
**Write:** Reading Response & Discussion Question.
- JAN 30                    **Read:** James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*. A copy is on Reserve in Bobst Library – Read: Preface xxxi-xxxiii; “The King of the Wood,” pp. 1-7; and at least one other section, of your choice, which you will discuss with the class today.  
**Write: Blackboard Discussion Board Posting:** tell us about the section, ritual, or myth you will be talking about in class.
- FEB 4                     **Write: Informal Writing Assignment:** Report on Timed Research Project - (see Assignment Guidelines for details)
- FEB 6                     **Writers Workshop: First Formal Paper**  
BRING YOUR JOURNALS TO CLASS
- FEB 11                    FIRST FORMAL PAPER DUE – (5:00 PM DEADLINE)**
- FEB 13                    *Ovid and the Greek Myths*  
**Read:** Selections from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: The stories of the Flood, Deucalion and Pyrrha, Apollo and Dapne, Phaethon, Tiresias, Echo and Narcissus, Orpheus and Eurydice  
**Write:** Reading Response & Discussion Question
- FEB18                    Presidents Day No NYU Classes
- FEB 20                    **Read:** Continue with *Metamorphoses*- your choice of stories, which you will discuss with the class today.  
**Write:** Comparison chart of translations
- FEB 25                    **Read:** modern adaptations of *Metamorphoses* including Carol Ann Duffy and Mary Zimmerman in course packet.  
**Read:** Barry, “Postmodernism” in *Beginning Theory*
- FEB 25                    Representations of *Metamorphoses*  
**Bring to Class and Discuss:** a picture of an artist’s interpretation of one of the myths or mythic characters.

**To Be Scheduled: A myth-related field trip outside of class time will be scheduled during the last half of February.**

- FEB 27                    *Transition from Myth to Fairy Tales*  
**Read:** Apuleius's story of Cupid and Psyche in *The Golden Ass*, the chapters called "The Old Woman's Story."  
**Write:** Reading Response focused on connections between this story and fairy tale plots
- MARCH 3                    **Writers Workshop for Second Formal Paper (the Myth Project Paper)**
- MARCH 5                    SECOND FORMAL PAPER DUE (5:00 PM DEADLINE)**
- MARCH 10                    **Class Meets at Library:** Workshop on Research Techniques  
**Read:** Jack Zipes "Cross-Cultural Connections and the Contamination of the Classical Fairy Tale" in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition* (845-869)  
**Write:** Reading Response & Discussion Question (for March 12)
- MARCH 12                    Discussion of Vladimir Propp's classification of the basic components of tales  
**Read:** "Clever Thieves," "Incestuous Fathers," "The Revenge and Reward of Neglected Daughters," "Magic Helpers," "Faithful Sisters," and "The Fruitful Sleep," in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*.  
**Written Reflection:** A Discussion Question plus a chart detailing variations in three different details or plot points in one of the story groups above.
- MARCH 17                    SPRING BREAK  
MARCH 19                    SPRING BREAK
- MARCH 24                    **Read:** Joyce Crick's "Introduction" to *Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: Selected Tales*  
**Write:** Reading Response & Discussion Question **focused on** cultural and personal influences on Grimm's versions of stories.
- MARCH 26                    INDEPENDENT WORK – There is no Class Meeting today, but there are assignments.  
**Read:** Lewis Seifert, "The Marvelous in Context: The Place of the *Contes de Fées* in Late Seventeenth-Century France" in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, 902-933.  
**Write:** Reading Response **focused on** Seifert's argument about the historical/cultural influences on the stories.

- MARCH 31**                    **RESEARCH PAPER TOPIC DUE:** Write a one-page “abstract”  
**Read:** Bruno Bettelheim, pages 1-55, plus one other section of your choice & Peter Barry: “Psychoanalytical Criticism” in *Beginning Theory*.  
**Write:** Reading Response & Discussion Question
- APRIL 2                        **Class Meets at Library** for further exploration  
**RESEARCH PAPER ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE:** (minimum 8 sources) **Please also post this on Blackboard Discussion Board.**
- APRIL 7                        **Read:** Angela Carter – “The Bloody Chamber,” “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” & “The Tiger’s Bride” “Bloodthirsty Husbands” and “The Beast as Bridegroom” in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*,  
**ALSO:** Barry, “Feminist Criticism” in *Beginning Theory*  
**Write:** Reading Response & Discussion Question
- APRIL 9                        Student Reports on Research
- APRIL 14                      Student Reports on Research
- APRIL 16                      Student Reports on Research
- APRIL 21                      **Writers Workshop – Research Paper**
- APRIL 23**                      **Writers Workshop – Research Paper**  
**WORK IN PROGRESS VERSION OF FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE (5:00 PM deadline)**
- APRIL 28**                      **FINAL VERSION OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE (5:00 PM deadline)**  
Discussion: Films – Myths & Fairy Tales (see Assignment Guide)
- APRIL 30                      Discussion: Films – Myths & Fairy Tales
- MAY 5                          Discussion: Films – Myths & Fairy Tales
- MAY 14:                        The April 28 version of your research paper, should be the final step. However, if there is a major problem and a revision is requested by the instructor, FINAL DATE for revised Research Paper is May 14.

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

**Due Feb. 4: 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.***

### Formal Paper I: Assignment and Guidelines

- Process:**
- February 6 - Writers Workshop with working drafts.  
Bring 3 copies of something your group can read.
  - February 11 Hand In Paper & Schedule Individual Conference
  - February 13 – 25 Individual Conferences Held to Review the Paper
  - February 20-March 3 Revised Papers Are Due One Week After Conference

**Goal:** This 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.
- 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. 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 on myths and rituals. For instance you might discuss a single myth 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 four 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 suggests 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 2: Assignment and Guidelines The Myths Project

<b>Process:</b>	March 3	Writers Workshop with working drafts. Bring 3 copies of something your group can read.
	March 5	Hand In Paper & Schedule Individual Conference
	March 10-13 & March 24	Individual Conferences Held to Review the Paper
	March 24 – April 2	Revised Papers Are Due One Week After Conference

**The Assignment:** This assignment is called the ‘myths project’ because it is somewhat different from a standard paper assignment. This assignment has two parts: your myth-related project and a rationale that provides an analytical discussion of that project.

**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](mailto: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)*

