The Gallatin School of New York University: Fall Semester 20011  
First-UG801 New Student Research Seminar:  
Myths and Fables in Popular Culture

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The Research Seminar 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 central writing project in this course is an in-depth research paper, and writing assignments will help prepare for that assignment and/or use skills developed in the process. The major 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. Other assignments will include, but not be limited to informal commentaries and response. You will also be required to keep a writer’s ideas journal during the first six weeks of class. This may be in any format that works best for you and helps you keep track of your working ideas (and flashes of inspiration).

Our theme is “Myths and Fables in Popular Culture.” Fairy tales are equally important to our investigation, although they are not listed in the course’s title. It is expected that the major 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 here with an enormous area that includes fables, myths, legends, folktales, and fairy tales, including ancient tales, as well as those invented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the modern revisions in theater, films, graphic novels, computer games, 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.
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Required Texts (all are paperback editions and should be at the NYU bookstore)

*Metamorphoses.* Ovid, trans. Rolf Humphries (University of Indiana Press)
*Aesop’s Fables,* ed. Laura Gibbs (Oxford University Press)
*The Golden Ass,* Apuleius (any translation)
*Wonder Tales,* ed. Marina Warner (Ferrar, Straus, Giroux; order on your own, not at the bookstore)
*Selected Fables of Jean de la Fontaine* (Dover thrift edition, $1.50)
*The Bloody Chamber.* Angela Carter (Penguin)
*The Uses of Enchantment,* Bruno Bettelheim (any edition)
*Beginning Theory,* Peter Barry (University of Manchester Press)

Films - Required Viewing: *Pan’s Labrynth* and Cocteau’s *Beauty and the Beast*

Additional Reading assignments will be available online or at the library.

**NOTE THAT THE READING/Writing IS DUE ON THE DAY GIVEN BELOW – ALSO FOR THE FIRST SIX WEEKS, YOU SHOULD BE KEEPING NOTES OF YOUR IDEAS IN THE JOURNAL.**

Sept. 7  An Introduction – myths, fables, the social history of fairy tales

Sept. 12  Ovid’s Greek Myths
Writing Due: The two-hour timed research report on any related topic – See Guidelines for details
Read: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Books I & Book II: “Phaeton” and “The Raven.”

Sept. 14  Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: Book III: Actaeon, Semele, Tiresias, Narcissus & Echo; Book V: Ceres & Perserpina, Book VI: Arachne. Plus one other myth of your choice to retell in your own words to the class.
*Metamorphoses* Translation Comparison Chart Due - (see Assignment Guidelines for details)

Sept. 19  Aesop’s Animal Fables
Writing Due: Adapt one of Aesop’s Fables, but give it a 21st-century type of ending or moral.
Read: introduction and at least two dozen fables. Try to combine the well known with the obscure.

Chart: make a chart showing the title of each fable, the major character, and key words identifying the moral. Bring to class as this will be part of our discussion material.
Sept. 21 French Fables: Medieval
Read selections TBA from Marie de France (library)

Sept. 26 From Fable to Tale: The Wolf
Read: Perrault and Grimm’s versions of Little Red Riding Hood in Zipes 744-51, Thurber and Dahl’s (library); Bettleheim “Little Red Riding Hood,” Angela Carter’s “The Werewolf,” “The Company of Wolves,” and “Wolf Alice” and Marie de France’s “Guigemar” (library)
Chart: five key plot/description/detail points in LRRH as handled in each version, list similarities and differences to LRRH in any one) or all of Carter’s stories.

Sept. 28 Writers Workshop: Formal Paper #1 See Guidelines for details.
BRING YOUR JOURNALS TO CLASS AS OCULAR PROOF

Oct. 3 Writing Due: Formal Paper #1

Oct. 5 Apuelius’s Roman Story: Bridging Myths and Fairy Tales
Read: Cupid & Psyche which is found in the chapters called “the Old Woman’s Tale” in The Golden Ass
List: similarities to fairy tale characters, plots or incidents

Oct. 10 NO CLASS Columbus Day

Oct. 12 Fables French & Wonder Tales
Read: selections from la Fontaine, TBA
Read: Warner’s intro to Wonder Tales & “The Green Worm” pp.189-230
Research Paper Topic Due: Write a one-page abstract describing the topic you are considering for your major research paper


Oct. 24 Research Paper Annotated Bibliography Due: (minimum 8 sources)
Class Meets at Bobst Library: training session for on-line research

Oct. 26 Class Meets at 5th floor of Bobst in the stacks to search for further materials
Read Barry and Write: briefly identify one of the theoretical approaches discussed by Barry that could be useful to you in researching and writing for the topic of your research paper. Tell me why it would be useful for this topic.
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Oct. 31  
The Fairy Tale Film. Guillarmo del Toro’s film *Pan’s Labrynth* & Cocteau’s *Beauty and the Beast*; Research techniques for films

Nov. 2  
**Working Outline Due** – a 2 page- ‘sketch’ of the paper’s plan
Writers Workshop & Reports on Work in Progress

Nov. 7  
**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. 9  
**Research Paper is Due**

Nov. 14  
Transformation Tales:

Nov. 16  
Back to Ovid – Retold and Adapted
Read: Ovid, Book VII all of Medea stories; Book VIII Daedalus, Daedlus and Icarus; Book IV, Pyramus and Thisbe, Book X, Orpheus and Eurydice

Nov. 21  
Contemporary Retellings of Greek Myths
Bring to Class: an image connected to one of the myths
Find: an adaptation or version of anyone of the myths
Post the information on this adaptation/version on Blackboard, Discussion Board.

Nov. 23  
**No Class Meeting – Independent Research Day**

Nov. 28  
Watching and Listening to Adaptations
Read: Julie Sanders, selection from *Adaptation and Appropriation* (library)

Nov. 30  
Writers Workshop – Discussing The “Myth” Paper/Project

Dec. 5  
**The ‘Myth’ Paper/Project is Due**

Dec. 7  
Campbell’s Hero’s Journey – Postmodern Style
Read: review the Campbell selection, Barry on Post Modern theory
Present - Film Clip. See Guidelines

Dec. 12  
As Above - Film Clips

Dec. 14 Final Class  
As Above - Film Clips

*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 Paper #2 paper is 10% of grade; Formal Paper #3 is 15% of grade; Class participation, journal, other writing is 25% of grade.
An Overview of Writing Assignments -

**Journals:** During the first six 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 Discussion:** Some assignments may ask that you post comments on Blackboard’s discussion Board.

**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 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 (four to five 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.

**Optional Texts – Books you will find useful and of interest – others will be posted on Blackboard, Course Documents as we go along**

- *Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams; *Elements of Style*, Strunk & White
- *A Short History of Myth*, Karen Armstrong
- *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Joseph Gibaldi
- *Gilgamesh*, N.K. Sanders’ translation is preferred for narrative

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 is 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:

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)