

# ***Fairy Tales and Fantasy***

CMLT 350

Professor: Thomas Leek

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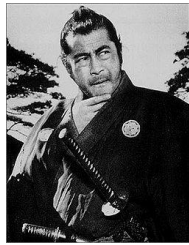
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Office Hours: Mondays 11:00-12:00, Thursday 9:00-9:55

Meeting Times: Monday/Wednesday, 3:30-4:45 PM

## I. Course Description

Meeting Place: CBB 135



The international phenomena of fantasy worlds and of fairy tales indicates a persistent modern fascination with the ancient and medieval worlds, most evident in depictions of an imagined world. We like telling stories with vaguely medieval elements: castles, princes, mythical creatures, witches, wizards, and dark forests. While the “Middle Ages” constitute a distinctly European manner of describing history, consumers from Finland to the United States to Japan have been entertained by a variety of stories set in pseudo-medieval and pseudo-historical worlds. In this course, we will examine fairy tales, fantasies, and the imagined worlds they inhabit and ask: why are we doing this? These are rather strange stories and we are very attached to them. Why?

It is expected that you will be at every class period, having completed the necessary readings, writings, or other homework, and that you take part in class discussion.

## II. Learning Outcomes for this Course:

- Learning Outcome 1: To describe the literary and academic dialog about and with the medieval period [Humanities LO# 1]

Assignments: Course readings, in-class discussions, and short reaction texts to the readings and films.

- Learning Outcome 2: Describe the similarities and differences between primary sources on ancient and medieval culture and modern, fantastical representations of medieval culture. Analyze the development of fantasy culture from folkloristics [Historical Perspectives LO#1]. Assignments: Course readings on early folkloristics, in-class discussions, and the description of a folktale collection.]

- Learning Outcome 3: To examine perennial questions concerning the human condition, and how humans understand their place in history using tools like literary fantasy and academics. Assignments: In-class discussion, short essay on folktales. [Humanities LO#1 and LO#2]

- Learning Outcome 4: Describe the differences between medieval and modern social identities and the ways these are demonstrated and analyzed in fantasy culture as opposed to academic history. What do the different approaches to culture bring to our understanding of the medieval world and how we relate to history? [Historical Perspective LO#4]. Assignments: Course readings, in-class discussion, and the final group project analyzing a fantasy world.

### III. Assignments:

Much of this seminar involves reading, discussing, and writing short reaction essays to the material we have discussed. These are the homework assignments you must complete:

- Readings: Read the listed primary source or article before the next class period in which we will be discussing the listed readings.
- Online reactions: Write half a page to a page of reaction to a reading/discussion and submit via D2L.
- Films: Towards the end of the semester, we will lighten up on the reading so as to give you more time to complete your final projects and presentations. Instead, you will watch two films outside of class and we will discuss these in class. One film is short enough to view in class in the final week. I will also include an assignment for a fantasy film of your choice, for which you will write a review and briefly explain in class.
- Final Project: pick a fairy tale that has appeared in different versions, be it in text, film, or other media. Compare the versions, describe the differences, and analyze why the artistic choices were made. While we are reading and discussing our examples throughout the semester, you are to choose this fairy tale (or a story similar to a fairy tale like a legend or myth) to report on and present at the end of the semester.

Below is a list of possible works of fairy tale literature you may choose to report on. You may choose something else with my approval. You may not choose the examples we use throughout the semester: *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Grimms' Tales*, *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Game of Thrones*, or *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

In your report and presentation, you are to offer a summary (visual aids are welcome) of the fairy tale, discuss the historical and pseudo-historical dimensions of the work, and describe the historical or science fiction discourse at work in the material. Are any myths of history debunked? Created? Do the various figures in the material reflect on history or

on a contemporaneous vision of history? How does this artistic rendering of history compare to an academic approach to history?

#### IV. Grading Structure

Participation in Discussions – 20  
Online Reactions – 18  
Midterm (short bluebook essays) – 12  
Final Paper – 20  
Presentation – 15  
Final Exam – 15

#### V. Texts

##### **Required Primary Texts to be found online:**

*Der arme Heinrich (Poor Henry)*

*The Book of Emperors*. Ed. and Trans, Henry Myers. Morgantown, West Virginia, 2013.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. “Preface to the Second Edition of the Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm (1819).”

[http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=348](http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=348)

Herodotus. *The Histories*:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0126>

“Puss in Boots”, site with texts from Straparola, Basile, and Perrault.

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0545Blit.html>

##### **Articles and Book Chapters available online:**

Bottigheimer, Ruth. “*Fairy Godfather*, Fairy-Tale History, and Fairy-Tale Scholarship: A Response to Dan Ben-Amos, Jan M. Ziolkowski, and Francisco Vaz da Silva”.

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/396117/summary>

Cobb, Paul. “Is Islamic History in Danger of Becoming Irrelevant?”

<https://blog.oup.com/2014/08/irrelevance-of-islamic-history/>

Cook, Simon J. “Lord of the Rings as English Mythology”.

<http://yemachine.com/tolkien/lord-of-the-rings-as-english-mythology/>

Elliott, Andrew B.R. “A Vile Love Affair: Right Wing Nationalism and the Middle Ages”.

<https://www.publicmedievalist.com/vile-love-affair/>

Nichols, Catherine. "The Good Guy/Bad Guy Myth."

<https://aeon.co/essays/why-is-pop-culture-obsessed-with-battles-between-good-and-evil>

Rahman, Aamer. "Daenerys' Whole Storyline on *Game of Thrones* is Messed Up."

<https://io9.gizmodo.com/daenerys-whole-storyline-on-game-of-thrones-is-messed-513189766>

Sayer, Duncan. "Why the Idea that the English Have a Common Anglo-Saxon Origin Is a Myth."

<https://theconversation.com/why-the-idea-that-the-english-have-a-common-anglo-saxon-origin-is-a-myth-88272>

Ziolkowski, Jan. "A Fairy Tale from before Fairy Tales: Egbert of Liège's "De puella a lupelis a seruata" and the Medieval Background of 'Little Red Riding Hood'".

[http://www.jstor.org/stable/2863656?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2863656?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

#### **Books on Reserve:**

Geary, Patrick. 2000. *The Myth of Nations: The Origins of Medieval Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition*.

Smith, Anthony. 1994. *Theories of Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### **Films on Reserve:**

*Alexander Nevsky*. (Eisenstein) 1938. (Also available on YouTube)

*Das Zaubermännchen* (Engel) 1960.

## VI. Schedule

### Week I:

Wednesday, Sept. 7 - *Course Introduction*:

Leading Question: What are stories and why do we tell them?

What is a fairy tale and what are the boundaries of fantasy culture/literature? Is it international? Have we always had it? What's distinctive about modern fantasy?

What's distinctive about fairy tales?

Discuss syllabus, assignments, final assignment.

Homework:

- Watch Yuval Harari, "Why Humans Run the World":  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzj7Wg4DAbs&t=909s>
- Read *Herodotus*, first half: Book I
- Think about a fantasy world you're interested in. Choose by week III.
- Write an online reaction (#1) on fantasy culture.

### Week II:

Monday, Sept. 12 - Discussion: *History and fantasy*:

Leading Question: Why is any of this important? (Yuval Harari discussion)

What is Herodotus doing here? History or fantasy and what's the difference?

How can we describe the superficial commonalities between fantasy literature and religion? Do the superficial connections point to anything deeper?

Homework:

- Read: Herodotus, second half: Book I
- Read: any fairy tale from this list. What makes it a fairy tale?
- Write an online reaction (#2) on historical writing and fantasy.

Wednesday, Sept. 14 - Discussion: Finishing up Herodotus discussion.

Introduce *Poor Heinrich*.

Leading Question: Did the Middle Ages have fantasy literature similar to our own?

Homework:

- *Poor Heinrich*: page 93-116,
- ~~Write an online reaction to Laszkiewicz (#3).~~

### Week III:

Monday, Sept. 19 - Discussion of *Poor Henry*

Leading Question: How can we interpret the interaction of magic and religion in this medieval tale?

Homework: *Poor Henry*: 116-134.

Wednesday, Sept. 21 - Discussion of *Poor Henry*. Introduce Ziolkowski.

Leading Question: Is this a fairy tale or fantasy in the sense that we are familiar with fairy tales? Were there fairy tales in the Medieval period?

Homework:

- Read: Ziolkowski article, “A Medieval Little Red Riding Hood”.
- Write an online reaction to *Poor Heinrich*.
- Read “Puss in Boots” from Straparola and Basile;
- Choose a fantasy world you’re interested in.

Week IV:

Monday, Sept. 26 – Discussion of Ziolkowski and the medieval “Little Red Riding Hood”. Is the connection credible? What are the differences? What are the similarities?

Homework:

- Bottigheimer article.
- Write an online reaction to Ziolkowski.
- Zipes chapter (introduction) in *Why Fairy Tales Stick*.
- Write an online reaction on international aspects of folktale plots.

Wednesday, Sept. 28 – Discussion of Bottigheimer and Straparola tales.

Leading Question: Can the medieval “Little Red Riding Hood” credibly be connected to the “Little Red Riding Hood” that we know? What are the differences? What are the similarities?

Leading Question: What differences do we find between medieval tales and modern fairy tales? Do these differences involve details, worldview, or genre? Who is more correct about fairy tales: Ziolkowski or Bottigheimer?

Homework:

- Write a reaction to Bottigheimer.
- Read: *The Little Mermaid*
- Watch the Disney Film: *The Little Mermaid*
- Read: Nichols Article, “Good Guy/Bad Guy”.

Week V:

Monday, Oct. 3 - Discussion of Nichols article. *The Little Mermaid*.

Leading Question: How do the moral universes and worldviews of traditional folktales contrast to the worldviews presented in modern fantasies like *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* or *Game of Thrones*?

Homework:

- Read Gellner/Smith on nationalism.
- Write an online reaction to Nichols article.

Wednesday, Oct. 5 – Discussion of nationalism in congruence with folkloristics and its assumptions. How did Gellner and Smith define nationalism and what relevance would that have for fairy tales and folklore?

Homework:

- Read the preface to the Grimms' Tales.
- Write a reaction to Gellner and Smith

Week VI:

Monday, Oct. 10 – Discussion of Grimms' Preface to the Children's and Household Tales.

Leading Question: What motivated the Grimms to collect tales from the "Volk"? What standards did they set for themselves as collectors?

Homework:

- Read Grimms' tales, 1st and 7th editions (Maiden Without Hands / Rapunzel / Children who Played at Slaughter)

Wednesday, Oct. 12 – Leading Question: What changes did the Grimms make to the later editions of their tales. Do these changes fit with their vision for the collection of folktales?

Homework:

- Write an online reaction to the Grimms' tales, differences between the first and later editions.

Week VII:

Monday, Oct. 17 – Review for Midterm

Wednesday, Oct. 19 – Midterm

Homework:

Read: Article from Cook "English Mythology"

Week VIII:

Monday, Oct. 24 - Discussion of nationalism and fantasy

Leading Question: Tolkien discussion.

Homework:

- Read article from Sayer "Common Ancestry".
- Excerpts from Tolkien.

Wednesday, Oct. 26 – Discussion of Sayer

Week IX:

Monday, Oct. 31 – Tolkien and D&D: Role up AD&D characters and discuss the experience.

Leading Question: How do we experience the creation of Tolkienesque characters? How does race work in character creation and world-building? Does this correspond to racial stereotypes in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century societies?

Homework: Write a reaction to Tolkien and related articles.

Wednesday, Nov. 2 – D&D Part II. In popular culture then and today.

Week X:

Monday, Nov. 7 – Introductory discussion to Game of Thrones.

Leading Question: What are our subjective impressions – no matter our level of exposure – what is appealing about GoT? What is controversial about it?

Homework: Explore some online discussion of the GoT series. What is controversial? How are the violence and sexuality on the show criticized or defended? (Any student who does not wish to expose themselves to this material may ask about an alternative assignment).

Read: “Game of Thrones: Worst Finale Ever?”

<https://newrepublic.com/article/153947/game-thrones-worst-finale-ever>

Wednesday, Nov. 9 – Why did GoT Start to Suck? Discussion of the beginning and the end.

Leading Question: Did the writers come up with a satisfying ending to the show? In what ways are different myths supported or created?

Homework:

- Rahman article, “Daenerys’ Whole Storyline”.
- Write an online reaction to Daenerys Targaryen as a figure and heroine.

Week XI:

Monday, Nov. 14 – Discussion of the Daenerys Targaryean figure.

Leading Question: Is the figure of Daenerys Targaryean anachronistic? An imperialist cliché? How do we project our own ideologies onto ancient worlds through fantasy?

Homework:

- Cobb article “Islamic History”.
- Write an online reaction to the questions surrounding the Daenerys figure.



Wednesday, Nov 16 – Guest speaker: Dr. Edgar Francis: Is Islamic History in Danger of Becoming Irrelevant? (Or: Were the Middle Ages particularly cruel and why do many modern people play dress-up and reenact this supposed cruelty? “Are you not entertained?”)

Homework: Read Elliott, “A Vile Love Affair”.

Week XII:

Monday, Nov, 21 – Discussion of nationalism, history, and fantasy.

Leading Question: Why do ethnocentric and nationalist movements appeal to history and folktales?

Homework: Read Geary, “Introduction”.

Wednesday, Nov. 23 – Discussion: Geary and the connection between bad history, fantasy, and nationalism.

Homework:

Write an online reaction to Elliott and Geary.

Week XIII:

Monday, November 28 – Discussion: Return of the Strong Gods (R.R. Reno)

Leading Question:

Wednesday, November 30 -

Homework: Watch *Alexander Nevsky* (Eisenstein)

Week XIV:

Monday, December 5 – Alexander Nevsky (Russian Film) discussion.

Leading Question: What ideological and nationalist elements can we identify in Eisenstein’s film?

Homework: write a reaction to *Alexander Nevsky*.

Wednesday, December 7 – Discuss *Das Zaubermännchen* and *Alexander Nevsky*.

Homework: write a reaction to *Das Zaubermännchen*

Week XV:

Monday, December 12 – *Presentations*

Wednesday, December 14 – *Presentations*