

**English 351:**  
**Topics in Contemporary Literature: Fairy Tale Adaptations**  
 Spring 2015

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**Texts**<sup>1</sup> *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me*, ed. Kate Bernheimer (B)  
 ISBN: 9780143117841  
*The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, ed. Jack Zipes (Z1)  
 ISBN: 9780393976366  
*The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, by Jack Zipes (Z2)  
 ISBN: 9780691159553

**Description and Goals**

Welcome, students, to ENG 351: Topics in Contemporary Literature: Fairy Tale Adaptations. This course aims to introduce students to some of the most iconic fairy tales in the European tradition and some of their non-Western relations. Although fairy tales are often disregarded as merely for kids, the purview of unreality (as in “that’s just a fairy tale!”), my opinion is that fairy tales are about as real as it gets. They can be read as a map for life; they have warnings and suggestions for us in our journeys toward self-knowledge, in our relationships with strangers, friends, and family, and in our personal quests for fulfillment and joy. The current fairy tale boom (seen in TV shows like *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*; the musical *Into the Woods*; and countless novel adaptations and film reboots such as *Maleficent* and this year’s *Cinderella*) is not only a product of Disney’s aggressive marketing, but also a product of our deeply-felt need for both meaning *and* ambiguity.

We shall read and discuss classic fairy tales such as “Sleeping Beauty,” “Snow White,” and “Jack and the Beanstalk,” while also encountering texts you might not be as familiar with, such as tales of Baba Yaga and the medieval incarnation of the dangerous fairy in “La Belle Dame Sans Merci.” In doing this, we shall learn about: fairy and folk tale structure, specifically through the theories of such early morphologists as Propp, Aarne, and Thompson and the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell; common archetypes found in fairy and folk tales, such as “The Trickster” or “The Benefactor”; how fairy tales (both past and present) reflect cultural beliefs and anxieties about power, sex, family, and death; and how modern-day adaptations of fairy tales bend and reshape these tales for new genres, audiences, and rhetorical purposes.

Weekly lectures will involve the analysis of one or more literary texts (often in

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<sup>1</sup> Note on the texts: You must get the editions I specify here, unless they are absolutely unavailable to you by any means. I have chosen the paperback editions and, in most cases, you can find used copies easily. They should also be available through the university bookstore and through Square Books, Oxford’s indie bookstore (which charges no tax on school books).

relation to each other), in combination with student presentations on other historical, artistic, and popular culture materials linked to those texts. Class time will include space for discussion and workshop-style analysis and will always seek to place the literary works in their social and historical context. Students will also learn how to use major research tools to assist their reading, how to formulate research questions in relation to literary texts, and how to evaluate texts through close reading.

### **Objectives**

After successfully completing this course, the student should be able to:

- a. read original fairy tales and fairy tale adaptations with sensitivity and nuance;
- b. comment effectively on the major themes and authorial techniques of particular passages of the selected literary works;
- c. locate and evaluate source materials in relation to the relevant social, historical and cultural frameworks
- d. Respond to literary texts with writing that analyzes, synthesizes, interprets, and assesses meaning and significance.
- e. Produce finished papers which conform to the guidelines of a documentation style manual (MLA) and which conform to standard written American English.

Feedback designed to foster students' writing proficiency will be provided.

### **Grading**

Quizzes (at least one every week): 20%

Class/Group Participation: 15%

Final Portfolio: 40%

Final Exam: 25%

### **Class/Group Participation (And Attendance): 15%**

Your success in this class depends on your own participation and engagement. If you want an A, you should do the assigned reading; this will be graded based on frequent pop quizzes, always at the beginning of class; these cannot be made up. Plan to be on time to class, with paper, pencil, and the required reading in hand. Refrain from distracting others or yourself by using digital devices such as phones, mp3 players, tablets, or laptops. Add something meaningful to the class discussion each day.

Furthermore, you are allowed **2 weeks** worth of class (**6 M/W/F classes**) to be absent for any reason you like. After you have used your absences, I reserve the right to drop your final grade 5% for each subsequent absence. Excessive absences will receive a failing grade. Because walking in late disrupts learning, if you are more than ten minutes late to class three times, I reserve the right to assign you an absence due to excessive tardiness. Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Keep in mind that it is always your responsibility to let me know if you will be absent or late. I am very good about checking my e-mail; that is my preferred method of communication if we can't meet face-to-face. Students who show initiative and who communicate well are much more likely to receive help from me if classes must be missed.

**Quizzes: 20%**

Every week of the semester, I will give a quiz. These will be unannounced and will usually consist of two questions in the form of a short writing prompt. One will be about the previous lecture or presentation, and the other about the day's reading. If you skip class, you cannot make up a quiz. If you skip the previous class, you are still responsible for getting notes on the lecture from a classmate so that you can take the next day's quiz.

**Final Portfolio Description and Format: 40%**

The Final Portfolio (due Friday, April 24) will be a multi-stage collaborative writing project taken on by our entire class. For it, you will write one piece (1500-2000 words) in response to a writing prompt I give you; this first assignment will be due at the end of Spring Break. The writing prompts will range from asking you to research the background of a particular fairy tale; to find and compare different variants of a story across cultures; to writing a short literary analysis of a modern fairy-tale adaptation (film or text); to writing your own fairy tale. You will be allowed to sign up for the type of prompt you are the most interested in.

Your second assignment will be to revise your first piece into a visual, digital form such as a webpage, a digital presentation, a photo or GIF essay, etc. Each of these revisions will be incorporated into a web journal that our class publishes online at the end of the semester. Finally, you will write a short (700-1000 word) reflective essay on the process, talking about how you developed and researched your idea, what changes you made along the way, and how your piece fits into the larger journal we create.

Along the way, there will be shorter assignments to provide scaffolding for you as you work towards finishing these larger writing assignments. Some of these will be in-class writing prompts; others will be short assignments you take home. Each individual will receive one final grade on their participation in the entire project; I will, however, give you lots of feedback along the way, along with tentative grades to let you know how you are doing in the class.

One aspect of this project will be workshopping your piece and revision with your peers in class; this is part of your class/group participation grade.

**Exam: 25%**

The final exam will consist of a quote identification section; a short answer section; and a short essay section asking for sustained analysis, interpretations, and application of major themes and literary critical viewpoints we cover during the semester.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

\* indicates online material hosted on Bb; Z1 indicates collection of tales; Z2 indicates criticism; B indicates modern collection

W 1/21 Syllabus, \*Neil Gaiman's "Instructions"  
F 1/23 "Meaning of Fairy Tale within the Evolution of Culture" (Z2)

**Tricksters**

M 1/26 Fairy Tale Timeline  
W 1/28 Cagliuso/Fortunato (Z1); Rumpelstilzkin (Z1); Jack and the Beanstalk\*  
F 1/30 Angela Carter "Puss in Boots"\*

M 2/2 "With Hair of Hand-Spun Gold" (B); "A Day in the Life of Half of Rumpelstiltskin" (B)  
W 2/4 "A Bucket of Warm Spit" (B)  
F 2/6 "Hair as Pure as Gold" (B), "Granny Rumpel"\*

**Witches**

M 2/9 "Witch as Fairy/Fairy as Witch: Unfathomable Baba Yagas" (Z2)  
W 2/11 Vasilisa the Beautiful\*; Rapunzel (Z1)  
F 2/13 "Baba Yaga & the Pelican Child" (B)  
  
M 2/16 "Citrine"\*; "Like a Red, Red Rose"\*  
W 2/18 "The Sleeper and the Spindle"\*  
F 2/20 Crone poems, history of witch persecution

**Parents and Children**

M 2/23 "Tales of Innocent Persecuted Heroines . . ." (Z2)  
W 2/25 Juniper Tree (Z1); Hansel and Gretel (Z1); Snow White\*; Donkeyskin (Z1)  
F 2/27 "The Color Master" (B); "The Snow Child" Angela Carter\*

M 3/2 "The Brother and the Bird" (B)  
W 3/4 Workshop Day  
F 3/6 FIRST ESSAY DUE; *Once Upon a Time*, "The Stable Boy"

**Spring Break****Sibling Rivalry/Sibling Love**

M 3/16 "Red as Blood" Tanith Lee\*  
W 3/18 Snow Queen\*; Six Swans\*  
F 3/20 Three Brothers (Z1); Diamonds and Toads

M 3/23 Trials and Tests  
W 3/25 "The Swan Brothers" Shelley Jackson (B)  
F 3/27 "His Face All Red" Emily Carroll\*

**Love and Transformation**

M 3/30; \*"Show and Tell: Sleeping Beauty as Verbal Icon ..." Maria Tatar  
W 4/1 Sleeping Beauty (Z1); Beauty and the Beast (Z1); Little Mermaid (Z1)  
F 4/3 Disney adaptations

M 4/6 "The Little Mermaid" Mallory Ortberg\*  
W 4/8 "Three Snake Leaves," Emily Carroll\*; "Lady of the House of Love," Angela Carter\*  
F 4/10 REVISION DUE; Susan Wood presents

**Dangerous Love**

M 4/13 Kaitlyn Wall presents on fairy tales in poetry  
W 4/15 Bluebeard (Z1)  
F 4/17 \*La Belle Dame Sans Merci; Little Red Riding Hood (Z1)

M 4/20 "Bluebeard in Ireland" (B); "And In Their Glad Rags," Genevieve Valentine\*  
W 4/22 "In the Company of Wolves," "Wolf Alice," Angela Carter\*  
F 4/24 "The Hole the Fox Did Make" Emily Carroll\*

**Into the Woods**

M 4/27 "Fairy-Tale Collisions or the Explosion of a Genre" (Zipes2)  
W 4/29 Discuss *Into the Woods*  
F 5/1 FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE

Exam: Monday May 4 @ noon