

## **From Homer to Harry Potter A: Legend, Myth and Fairytale in European Storytelling**

**DIS, Fall 2011      ECH 3 Credit Course**

**Class Meetings:** Mondays and Thursdays 10:05-11:25 AM, Vestergade, room 10-D14.

An introduction to the tradition of European storytelling, encompassing myths, fairytales and medieval legends; and how these traditional stories live on in fantasy, movies, role playing and other modern uses of storytelling. As well as introducing the stories in their historical context, the course will explore various theoretical approaches to them.

**Instructor: Bettina Sejbjerg Sommer**

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Bettina Sejbjerg Sommer is mag. art. in the History of Religion, University of Copenhagen 2006. She is a specialist in Folklore and Nordic Religion and has published articles on Nordic Religion in periodicals. She teaches Nordic Mythology at the University of Copenhagen and at DIS. With DIS since 2006.

**Office Hours:** By appointment. Please call between 10 AM and 10 PM or use E-mail.

**DIS Contacts:**

Jakob Lorentzen, ECH Program Director, [jlo@dis.dk](mailto:jlo@dis.dk)

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**Class Format**

Lectures, questions and answers, and class discussion are important to your participation grade. We will have several field studies, two tests, a final exam, and a research paper.

**Course Content:**

This course, taught at the upper-division level, is an introduction to European oral tradition, as expressed in European myth-cycles, legends and fairytales, from the earliest known sources up to and including modern uses of this tradition.

After a brief introduction to the field, we will start with discussing fairy tales and folk tales. We begin with fairy tales to introduce some of the main methods and theories for working with oral narratives, which will be relevant throughout the course. This encompasses the folkloristic methods and theories of Axel Olrik, Alan Dundes and Vladimir Propp.

We will continue with introductions to the main mythologies of Europe: Greek, Nordic and Celtic.

Parallel with the presentation of these mythological traditions, some of the major theoretical approaches will be introduced. These include the psychological theories of Freud and Jung, as well as those of Joseph Campbell, Otto Rank and Lord Raglan, and the structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss.

Theories are presented early on in the course, so that we may be able to apply them to the material presented in the rest of the course. Therefore the beginning of the course will be weighted towards introducing theories, but already from lesson 7 onwards there will be an increased emphasis on introducing the story material within its historical context.

We will continue with the great heroic legend cycles of the medieval age: King Arthur, the Nibelungenlied and the Volsung-cycle.

Finally, the course will move on to modern uses of traditional storytelling. First we will examine how traditional stories live on in modern culture in the form of fantasy literature, movies, role-playing and computer games. Then we will discuss the use of the concept of storytelling in the business world and in organizations, as well as storytelling as a personal life-strategy.

### **Course learning objectives:**

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a familiarity with all the major myth- and story cycles of European tradition
- Demonstrate a familiarity with a variety of major theoretical schools
- Demonstrate an understanding of the historical context of the various myth- and story cycles
- Apply the theories to traditional texts of the type introduced in the course
- Recognize the influence of traditional texts in other, more modern forms of literature
- Apply certain of the theories to these other forms of literature as well
- Compose a research paper which will demonstrate ability to independently identify and analyze a problem-field in traditional literature, using an appropriate theoretical approach

### **Reading Assignments**

The reading for each class meeting is indicated in the attached syllabus. It is assumed that students are prepared and will be active participants in class discussion.

**Please always bring the assigned readings to class along with this syllabus.**

### **Written Assignment**

- The Research Paper (8-9 pages) is **due Thursday Oct. 27<sup>th</sup> at the beginning of class.**

The research paper is on a topic selected by the student together with the instructor. The purpose of this paper is to allow the student to work in-depth on a specific topic of special interest. Individual meetings to discuss the term paper can be arranged.

### **Tests**

- 1 15-minute short answer test (key names, identifications, definitions). For date, see syllabus.
- 1 20-minute test (definitions and a short essay). For date, see syllabus.
- Final two-hour exam (identification and significance, two essays covering the content of the entire course).

**Field Studies**

- Visit to The Open Air museum in Lyngby.

**Wednesday September 21<sup>st</sup>. Meeting time 9.30 AM at Nørreport Station.**

- Screening of relevant movie of our choice.

**Wednesday October 19<sup>th</sup>. Meeting time 9.30 AM in class room at DIS.**

*Please note that participation in all field trips is mandatory. Exams and quizzes will contain questions which have only been addressed on field trips.*

**Grading elements**

Class attendance and participation: 15%

One 15 minute short answer test: 10%

One 20 minute test: 15%

One Research Paper, 8-9 pages: 35%

Final exam: 25 %

PLEASE NOTE: All written assignments, quizzes and exams MUST be completed to pass course.

## General Information

• **Assignments must be turned in on time, which is at the beginning of class on the day due.** Late papers will be penalized by a third of a grade per day, e.g. an A- paper three days late will count as a B- paper.

• **All written assignments must be typed or computer printed with best quality printing on plain, white paper.** Handwritten or handprinted papers, or electronic version, are not acceptable.

• Papers must be written in accordance with the conventions listed in the MLA Handbook (available from DIS reference-library) and the DIS document Writing Papers at DIS: Some general recommendations. Bibliographies and endnotes are mandatory.

**It is important that you read the file on DIS forum: Advice on the research paper.**

## Disabilities

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact Maryn Wells ([mwe@dis.dk](mailto:mwe@dis.dk)) to coordinate this. In order to receive accommodations, students should inform the instructor of approved DIS accommodations within the first two weeks of classes.

## Attendance

You are expected to attend all DIS classes when scheduled. If you miss multiple classes, the Director of Teaching and Learning and the Director of Student Affairs will be notified and they will follow-up with you to make sure that all is well. Absences will jeopardize your grade and your standing at DIS. Allowances will be made in cases of illness, but in the case of multiple absences you will need to provide a doctor's note.

## Academic Honesty

Concerning plagiarism and violating the rules of an assignment: DIS expects that students abide by the highest standards of intellectual honesty in all academic work. DIS assumes that all students do their own work and credit all work or thought taken from others. Academic dishonesty will result in a final course grade of "F" and can result in dismissal. The students' home universities will be notified. DIS reserves the right to request that written student assignments be turned in electronic form for submission to plagiarism detection software. See the Academic Handbook for more information, or ask your instructor if you have questions.

## Laptops

While the use of laptops is welcomed in class for taking notes and for academic purposes, students are expected to refrain from using them for personal purposes such as Facebook, sending of e-mails, etc. The use of laptops for such purposes will jeopardize your grade.

**Required Reading: Text Collection (binder):**

- 1: Zipes, Jack (ed.): The complete fairy tales of the brothers Grimm. Bantam Books, 1987. P.xviii-xxvi; 104-107, 250-268.
- 2: Olrik, Axel: Epic laws of folk narrative.In: Dundes, Alan (ed.): The Study of Folklore. Englewood Cliffs: Prectice-Hall, 1965. P. 129-141.
- 3: Dundes, Alan: The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique. In: Brown, Mary Ellen (ed.): Journal of Folklore Research, Vol. 34, No. 3 September-December 1997. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Folklore Institute, 1997. P. 195-202.
- 4: Lacoss, Jann: Propp applied to Harry Potter. In: Lana Whited (ed.): The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter. University of Missouri Press, 2004.
- 5: Homer: The Odyssey. London, Penguin, 1988. P. 142-154.
- 6: Apollodorus: The Library of Greek Mythology. Book II. Trans by Keith Aldrich. Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1975. P. 34-36, 64-65, 86-90.
- 7: Ovid: Metamorphoses. Trans. by A. S. Kline. From Project Gutenberg: [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)
- 8: Thury, Eva & Margaret Devinney: What is myth? In: Thury, Eva & Margaret Devinney: Introduction to Mythology. Oxford: OUP, 2009. P. 3-20.
- 9: Void.
- 10: Snorri Sturluson: Edda. London, Everyman, 2002. P. 37-52, 59-64.
- 11: The Poetic Edda. Trans. Carolyne Larrington. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Sayings of the High One. P. 14-15, 24-27, 34-38.
- 12: Void.
- 13: Void.
- 14: Thury, Eva & Margaret Devinney: The structural study of myth. In: Thury, Eva & Margaret Devinney: Introduction to Mythology. Oxford: OUP, 2009. P. 280-294.
- 15: Gray, Elizabeth (ed.): Cath Maige Tuired. Irish Text Society, 1982.
- 16: Kinsella, Thomas (transl.): The Tain. OUP, 1970. P. 52-58, 72-84.
- 17: The Mabinogion. Trans. by Sioned Davies. OUP, 2007.  
a: The First Branch of the Mabinogi, p. 3-21; b: Peredur, son of Efrog, p 65-73, 92-102.

- 18: Bricriu's Feast. Trans. by Jeffrey Gantz. Penguin, 1981. P. 221-230, 251-255.
- 19: Preiddeu Annwn: "The Spoils of Annwn". Text and Translation: Sarah Higley.  
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/preideu.html>
- 20: Baile in Scáil: The Phantom's Frenzy. The Cycle of the Kings ed. and trans. By Myles Dillon. Oxford: OUP 1946.
- 21: Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Thirteen Treasures of Britain. Trans. and ed. by Rachel Bromwich. Cardiff: UWP, 1961.
- 22: Malory, Thomas: Le Morte D'Arthur. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Ed. Ltd., 1996. a: Malory p. 1-9, 151-152, 166-170, 178-179, 742-746. b: Malory, p. 563-571, 664-672.
- 23: De Troyes, Chrétien: Perceval. The Story of the Grail. Trans. by Burton Raffel. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. P. 101-105.
- 24: The Saga of the Volsungs. The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer. Introduction and Translation by Jesse L. Byock. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990. P. 55-72; 78-84.
- 25: The Nibelungenlied. Trans by A. T. Hatto. London, Penguin, 1966. P. 17-32, 53-54, 87-93.
- 26: Tolkien, J.R.R.: The Silmarillion. Allen & Unwin, 1977. P. 25-32.
- 27: Shippey, Tom: Tolkien and the appeal of the pagan: Edda and Kalevala. In: Jane Chance (ed.): Tolkien and the Invention of Myth. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004. P. 145-161.
- 28: Burns, Marjorie J.: Norse and Christian gods: the interactive theology of J.R.R. Tolkien. In: Jane Chance (ed.): Tolkien and the Invention of Myth. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004. P. 163-178.
- 29: Sommer, Bettina: Introduction to the Silmarillion. Unpublished.
- 30: Grimes, M. Katherine: Harry Potter – Fairy tale prince, Real boy, and Archetypal hero. In: Lana Whited (ed.): The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter. University of Missouri Press, 2004. P. 89-122.
- 31: Gaiman, Neil: American Gods. Headline Book Publishing, 2001. P. 28-39.
- 32: McAdams, Dan P.: The Stories We Live by. New York: the Guildford Press, 1996. P. 11-15; 102-113; 251-275.

## Course schedule:

### 1. Thursday, Aug 25

Lesson 1: Introduction. Definitions: myth, folktale, legend. The history of myth-study, various approaches to myth.

Readings: Binder text 8: Thury, Eva & Margaret Devinney: What is myth?

### 2. Monday, Aug 29

Lesson 2: Fairy tales, folk tales. The brothers Grimm. Folklore methodology.

The brothers Grimm, their influence on the fairy tale genre. How the fairy tales were collected and edited. Brief introduction to folklore methodology.

Readings: Binder text 1: The complete fairy tales of the brothers Grimm. P.xviii-xxvi; 104-107, 250-268. Binder text 2: Axel Olrik: Epic laws of folk narrative. OPTIONAL: Binder text 3: Alan Dundes: The motif index and the tale type index: A critique.

### 3. Thursday, Sep 1

Lesson 3: Fairy tales, folk tales.

Introduction to Vladimir Propp and his theory of the structure of the wonder tale.

Readings: Binder text 4: Propp applied to Harry Potter. Binder text 5: The Odyssey.

Also: Vladimir Propp: Morphology of the folktale. P. 19-65. **Note: This text is to be found on the DIS forum, to be printed out and brought to class.**

### 4. Monday, Sep 5

Lesson 4: Fairy tales.

Propp continued from last time.

**\*Elect two Class Representatives\***

### ***Short Tour to Western Denmark: Thursday Sep 8<sup>th</sup> – Saturday, Sep 10<sup>th</sup>***

### 5. Monday, Sep 12

Lesson 5: Greek myth. Freud. Jung.

Introduction to Freud and Jung and how they may be applied to the Greek myths.

Readings: Binder text 6: Apollodorus: The Library of Greek Mythology. P. 34-36, 64-65.

Binder text 7: Ovid: Perseus. Also: Thury, Eva & Margaret Devinney: Man and his

Symbols. C.G. Jung. How to perform a Jungian Analysis of a Myth or Fairy Tale. **Note:**

***This text is to be found on the DIS forum, to be printed out and brought to class.***

**15 minute short answer test. NOTE: Does NOT include today's readings.**

### 6. Thursday, Sep 15

Lesson 6:

Continuing with Jungian and Freudian interpretations of myths and fairy tales.

### **7. Monday, Sep 19**

Lesson 7: The Hero-myth as seen by Raglan, Rank and Campbell.

Readings: Thury, Eva & Margaret Devinney: Heroes and Tricksters. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. And: Harry Potter. A Rankian Take on the Hero of Hogwarts. **Note: These two texts are to be found on the DIS forum, to be printed out and brought to class.**

**Wednesday Sep 21<sup>st</sup>: Field study trip to Frilandsmuseet. We meet 9.30 at Nørreport S-train station.**

### **8. Thursday, Sep 22**

Lesson 8: The Hero-myth continued.

Introducing Nordic myth. A general introduction to Nordic mythology and some of the main sources.

### **9. Monday, Sep 26**

Lesson 9: Nordic myth.

Binder text 10: Snorri Sturluson: The Edda. P. 37-52, 59-64. OPTIONAL: Binder text 11: Poetic Edda: Sayings of the High One.

### **10. Thursday, Sep 29**

**Please have your term paper topic, purpose and main sources ready in writing on this day.**

Lesson 10: Nordic myth.

Introducing Claude Levi-Strauss and the theory of structuralism and trying to apply it to Nordic myth.

Readings: Binder text 14: Thury, Eva & Margaret Devinney: The structural study of myth.

**20 minute test. NOTE: INCLUDES today's readings.**

**Long Program Tour – Saturday Oct 1<sup>st</sup> – Sunday Oct 9<sup>th</sup>.**

### **11. Monday, Oct 10**

Lesson 11: Celtic myth.

A general introduction to Celtic mythology. Can we find remains of Celtic pre-Christian ritual and religion in these late, medieval stories?

Readings: OPTIONAL: Binder text 15: Cath Maige Tuired.

**Reading this text beforehand is optional, as it is intended mainly for reference in class.**

**12. Thursday, Oct 13**

Lessons 12: Celtic myth. Continued from last time.

Readings: Binder text 17a: The First Branch of the Mabinogi.

**13. Monday, Oct 17**

**Lesson 13:** Celtic myth.

Introducing the Irish heroes such as Cú Chulainn.

Readings: Binder text 16: The Tain. Binder text 18: Bricrius Feast.

**Wednesday, Oct 19<sup>th</sup>: Movie session. We meet at 9.30 AM in the class room.**

**14. Thursday, Oct 20**

Lesson 14: King Arthur.

The literary evolution of the Arthur legend. The "classic" image of Arthur.

Readings: Binder text 22a: Thomas Malory. P. 1-9, 151-152, 166-170, 178-179, 742-746.

**15. Monday, Oct 24**

Lesson 15: King Arthur.

The historical Arthur, the fact behind the legend? The earliest Arthur traditions.

Readings: OPTIONAL: Binder text 19: Preiddeu Annwn: The Spoils of Annwn. Binder text 20: Baile in Scáil: The Phantom's Frenzy. Binder text 21: The thirteen Treasures of Britain. **Reading these texts beforehand is optional, as they are intended mainly for reference in class.**

**16. Thursday, Oct 27**

Lesson 16: The Grail Legend.

The development of the Grail Legend: a fusion of Celtic and Christian.

Readings: Binder text 17b: Peredur, son of Efrog. Binder text 22b: Thomas Malory: P. 563-571, 664-672. OPTIONAL: Binder text 23: Chretien de Troyes: The story of the Grail p. 101-105. **Have a look at this text, but you do not have to read it.**

**NOTE: Research paper due at the beginning of class.**

**Optional Tours and Travel Break – Saturday Oct 29<sup>th</sup> – Sunday, Nov 13<sup>th</sup>**

**17. Monday, Nov 14**

Lesson 17: Heroic legend: The Volsungcycle.

Introducing the saga of the Volsungs, the Nordic version of one of the most enduring and popular European legends.

Readings: Binder text 24: The Saga of the Volsungs.

**18. Thursday, Nov 17**

Lesson 18: Heroic legend: The Nibelungenlied.

Introducing the German version of the Volsungcycle: the Nibelungenlied and comparing it to the Nordic version.

Readings: Binder text 25: Nibelungenlied.

**19. Monday, Nov 21**

Lesson 19: Myth and fairytale in Fantasy literature: The Lord of the Rings.

The mythology influences on Tolkien: especially Nordic and Finnish.

Readings: Binder text 26: The Valaquenta. Binder text 27: Tom Shippey: Tolkien and the appeal of the pagan: Edda and Kalevala. Binder text 28: Marjorie J. Burns: Norse and Christian gods: the interactive theology of J.R.R. Tolkien. Binder text 29: Introduction to the Silmarillion. NOTE: read text 29 before text 26, as it is a help and introduction to that text.

**20. Thursday, Nov 24**

Lesson 20: Myth and fairytale in Fantasy literature: Harry Potter.

The mythology influences on Rowling: especially classical and Christian?

Readings: Binder text 30: Grimes, M. Katherine: Harry Potter – Fairy tale prince, Real boy, and Archetypal hero.

**Optional Tours – Friday, Nov 25<sup>th</sup> – Sunday, Nov 27<sup>th</sup>:****21. Monday, Nov 28**

Lesson 21: Myth and fairytale in fantasy literature: Continued from last time.

Also Neil Gaiman.

Readings: Binder text 31: Neil Gaiman: American Gods.

**22. Thursday, Dec 1**

Lesson 22: Myth and fairytale in popular culture: Movies, role-playing and computer games. (Post)modern interpretations of the classic tales. Fairy tale movie adaptations and how they reflect our times.

Storytelling today: The growing popularity of the concept of storytelling as a business tool and as a personal life strategy. How the concept of storytelling can be used as a tool for personal development.

Readings: Binder text 32: Dan P. McAdams: The Stories we live by.

**23. Monday, Dec 5**

Lesson 23: Finishing off, talking about the exam.

Schedule is subject to change if necessary with as much notice as possible.