

HUMA 1315 Assignment Five Response Papers and Discussion Boards

Fairy Tales

I have said it before -- **Humanities is Cray-Cray**, and covers everything. A few weeks ago, things were SURREAL. It was all about things not making sense. Let's go back to finding ORDER, and MEANING in things!

Here are your reading assignments for the next two weeks, some general lecture notes to start you off, with some background. **HERE IS WHAT YOU ARE OBLIGATED TO DO:**

In this module you will write TWO Response Papers, and Participate in Discussion Boards.

What are these all about? – you ask.

You are tasked with reading FOUR Fairy Tales. “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “The Little Mermaid.” First, I’ll give you the links to the individual stories (BELOW). After you get done reading this Assignment sheet, go to these individual links below and read the stories. After you’re done with THAT, then you’ll find I’ve attached a document that is a collection of specific lecture notes for each story.

Read the stories FIRST, then read my Lecture Notes – there’s one attachment for each story. After you’re done with all that. You have Two Response Papers to Write. **THIS IS ONE OF THE BUSIEST, MOST TIME CONSUMING MODULES OF THE SEMESTER, SO BUDGET TIME ACCORDINGLY.**

Response Paper One

Pick ONE Fairy Tale of the Four assigned, and tell me what you think about it? What is it about? What is its message? What do you like about it? – What do you not like about it? Your Response should quote from the story, AND it should somehow relate to things that you read in various lecture notes – you need to show me that you read what I gave you and thought about it.

Response Paper Two

YOU CHOOSE! I want you to find some kind of Fairy Tale that is NOT the “text” I assigned you, but it can be anything that YOU think is a Fairy Tale – for example MOVIES, SONGS, WHATEVER, that are “Revisions” or “Versions” of Fairy Tales. Write about THAT, and tell me what you think about it! So, you could write about “Maleficent” or you could write about “Frozen” or the horror film “In The Company of Wolves” or... I don’t know, the list is endless! The play “Wicked” is something that could count, or the Broadway musical “Into the Woods” or whatever you find. Pick something, and write me a paper telling me why it’s a fairy tale, how it might be different from other tales, or the same, or whatever. Again, you need to quote from the text to get full credit, AND you need to show me that you’re connecting it to lecture notes and this class.

Discussion Boards

Finally, go to the “Discussion Boards” of your Blackboard. I have set up a Forum there. Respond, Create Threads, Talk with your fellow classmates. Give your opinions! I’ve set up

some prompts to get you started. To get full credit, you need to post things, and then check back every few days, see responses, make responses to other people, and participate. I'll then see how much work you've done and how cool it all is, and then I'll grade.

THAT'S IT – Here are your stories to go read!

Little Red Riding Hood

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/perrault02.html>

Sleeping Beauty

<https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/68/fairy-tales-and-other-traditional-stories/5102/sleeping-beauty/>

Beauty and the Beast

<https://www.pitt.edu/~dash/beauty.html>

The Little Mermaid

http://hca.gilead.org.il/li_merma.html

BUT WAIT! BEFORE YOU GO READ THOSE STORIES, AND START YOUR WORK, READ MY GENERAL COMMENTS BELOW

A traditional assumption about Fairy Tales is that they are stories meant for children. This idea is not correct, or at least it was not originally correct. The idea that children are different from adults is relatively recent in world history. Several hundred years ago, Europeans did not consider children particularly “different” from adults. Adults did not censor adult content from their stories. They did not market books specifically for children. They did not conceal sexuality from children in the same ways we do. They didn't have child labor laws. To some degree, they considered children as “little adults.” In fact, some Medieval/Renaissance theories of heredity such as “Preformationism” argued that the sperm or egg of the birthing process actually already contained a fully-formed human being in tiny, tiny form (called a “homonculus”), which would later grow larger. The point is, for people who believed this theory, that children were different in degree perhaps (i.e. size) but not particularly different in kind, from larger people. Certainly no one really thought children were “innocent” until perhaps around the 18th century, and yet today we almost all assume that to be true. What changed? Did children become more innocent? (Likely, no...)

Why do I bring that up? I bring it up in part to explain why at least some different versions of Fairy Tales exist. When people started to write down Fairy Tales (which didn't really begin to occur until the 18th and 19th centuries, more on this in a moment), they frequently altered the tales. They did this in part because the Fairy Tales originally, when they were being told hundreds of years ago, might have had content that would have been considered appropriate for children (because children were no different from adults). But by the 18th century people regularly started to believe children were different than adults, and in need of different treatment. Some authors, then, changed the stories to make them deliberately targeted for children, a trend which has continued since.

Fairy Tales, however, have been around a lot longer than the 18th or 19th century. The majority of the ones that we have written down can be traced back, in some version or another, many hundreds of years, or thousands of years, often coming from cultures and/or

countries that are far away from the location in which they were eventually written down. A sub-class of “folk tales,” many Fairy Tales descend from what was primarily an oral tradition – they were transmitted from town to town, country to country, culture to culture, entirely by spoken word.

This detail makes it all the more amazing that there is such structural consistency in them. That is, you know something curious is going on when a story is told by ten, twenty, even one hundred different people, in different countries and cultures, and yet certain elements of the story not only remain stable and consistent, but seem to be little different from all the other stories told by different people. More on this later...

All you need to know, I think, is that there are a great number of scholars out there who have done work on Fairy Tales, which you might find very interesting. Let me mention an interesting source for tracing the structures of Fairy Tales, the Aarne-Thompson numbering system. A scholar, Antti Aarne, compiled a gigantic index of elements in Fairy Tales, enabling people to cross-reference different events, items, characters, etc., who appear in tales. The list was later expanded by Stith Thompson¹, and then very recently it was expanded yet again by a scholar named Hans-Jörg Uther,² so now the full list is called the “ATU system,” although frankly it is still mostly known by pre-Uther labels. That is, if you call it “the Aarne-Thompson index” then everyone knows what you’re talking about. For a brief look at some of the details of the system, you can look online at Wikipedia. I won’t be testing you on this, so you don’t need to do that work, but I still thought I’d mention all that stuff is out there, and show you the link. What’s useful about the classification system, you might ask? Well, let’s say you wanted to find every instance in a fairy tale where someone had a singing sword? – the index has a list of them. And so forth...

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aarne-Thompson_classification_system

Anyway, the last thing I’d want to say about Fairy Tales is that you should probably just go ahead and forget everything you think about them, because most of what you think is all wrong. They don’t all have happy endings. They weren’t originally written for children. They often have moral lessons that are creepy, sexist, or that come from a medieval class-oriented system that teaches lessons about how you should all stick with your own kind, or sacrifice yourself for your family as the ultimate good, etc.

HOWEVER, it’s not that bad. Even though many of them are, indeed, sexist, it’s not entirely clear that these stories were all created, or even told, exclusively by men. As I said before, they come from an oral folktale tradition (the word “folk” is Germanic in origin – “volk,” i.e. people, tales told by common people). While traveling storytellers would typically have been men, within the local community it might have been *women* who transmitted various stories to the people, depending on the culture and audience.

Mind you, the creepy messages of Fairy Tales are no different than the creepy sexist, agenda-laden messages of our contemporary movies and television shows (*Blade II* teaches you that stem-cell research is **bad**, if you look at it closely enough). So, we should probably cut them some slack.

¹ I wish my name were “Stith.” Isn’t that a cool name? He probably got beaten up at school all the time, though, huh. Children are such savages.

² “Uther” is another cool name, except that Uther doesn’t fare well in the old Arthurian legends, because he’s basically not a nice guy, so I think we can forget about using that name anymore.

Theoretical Terms For You To Consider

As with all the other texts, think about how the theoretical terms apply to the fairy tales and be prepared to discuss your thoughts in the discussion threads. Some of the notes below may touch on one or more of the terms, but I expect you to apply the terms to the texts yourself.

Archetypes – Those images, figures, character types, settings, and story patterns that, according to the Swiss analytical psychologist Carl Jung, are universally shared by people across cultures. Jung believed that archetypes are embedded deep in humanity’s collective unconscious. Examples would include: the snake is an archetypal image/figure, the trickster, the flood, the witch, and the forest (in fairy tales).

Fairy tale/ Literary fairy tale – What’s the Difference? A fairy tale is a narrative intended to entertain or instruct that typically relates fantastic or magical occurrences involving a hero or heroine. Fairy tales are characterized by a number of elements. They often begin “once upon a time” in an unspecified setting, feature flat characters, and involve magic, talking animals, disguises or physical transformations, and prohibitions or taboos. Fairy tales also employ motifs such as cruel stepmothers, fairy godmothers, and prolonged sleeps and address the theme of good versus evil. Unlike “normal” fairy tales, which are oral stories passed down through the generations, Literary Fairy Tales are stories created and written down by one specific person. They can be traced to an exact time (year) and location of their creation. “The Little Mermaid” is an example of a literary fairy tale.

Symbolism – In Greek, the word “symbolism” means basically “to throw together.” Symbols represent or suggest other things or ideas in texts. The use of symbolism, through an object or reference to something else, adds deeper meaning to a story because it provides meaning to the story beyond what is actually being described. Most people read Fairy Tales with this in mind, i.e. we tend to read them “Symbolically” rather than literally.