The Mythology of Literature  
Tuesday/Thursdays 9 a.m.-1 p.m.; Wilson 109  
Nora Peterson, instructor

Office: Marston Hall B020  
Hours: Wednesday, 3-5 p.m. and by appointment  
Email: Nora_Peterson@brown.edu

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course will investigate different kinds of cultural myths, and the disparities and similarities – diachronological, geographical and thematic – that we can observe in different versions. The ways in which these myths are modified and varied throughout time can serve as a lens into values, traditions and the passage of time. Our focus will be myth in French, German and English literature from the medieval period to the twentieth century. Throughout this course, students will be challenged to question the distinction between myth and reality, both in the texts we read and in the cultural implications our discussions will raise. Because of the comparative and interdisciplinary nature of this course (we will cross historical, cultural, literary and scientific frontiers) students will gain skills that will extend beyond the scope of the classroom. By the end of the course, students will have learned to question the things they read in new ways, in ways that lead them to critical insight and enhance their capacity to interpret, discuss and analyze their thoughts, words and writing.

MANDATORY TEXTS (available for purchase at Brown University Bookstore):


*the rest of the texts will be provided by handouts and/or can be found on the course website (when indicated).

COURSE MECHANICS AND GRADING:

This course is largely designed as a seminar experience, with a minimum of lecturing and a maximum of discussion. Discussion questions, which you will prepare and bring to class, and interaction with other students during class are intended to enhance your reading experience and heighten your involvement with the material.

--Readings: Most of the assigned reading will come from the primary texts. When we begin a new text you will also be asked to explore some of the source myths (available to you via the course website at http://tinyurl.com/d8jq85. These readings will provide an excellent point of reference and will enhance your understanding of what changes the authors have made to the “originals.” We will also problematize the extent to which
an “original” myth is possible; thus, having read the selections will broaden your understanding of both the primary readings and the theoretical questions and problems that arise from their mythological origins. Because of the exploratory and subjective nature of this part of the course, we will be dependent on the discoveries of each student to enrich our discussions.

--Discussion questions: Students will prepare two questions on any aspect of the assigned readings to bring to each class. Questions should be written and should reflect your own queries or thoughts on the readings and/or raise issues that you would like to discuss in class. They should be as brief and straightforward as possible, but they should provide enough substance to carry on a class discussion based on the issues that your questions raise.

Requirement and Grading

1. Class attendance, participation: 30% of the final grade.
   Class attendance is mandatory. You are expected to attend and participate actively in each class. Both the quality and quantity of interventions will be taken into account.

2. Short papers (3x2-3 pages): 30% of the final grade.
   Short papers could be longer expositions of one or more of your discussion questions, elaborations of important issues raised during class or could explore areas of interest to you that were not covered thoroughly during our sessions. Short papers should engage primarily with one of the texts listed for each deadline. While allusions to other texts are acceptable if they strengthen your argument, 2-3 pages are not long enough to explore a comparative theme extensively. Your papers should be based on an original question or idea and should go beyond the points made during lecture or discussion. All papers must be turned in to my box in Marston Hall by 4:00 p.m. on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Any extensions must be approved at least a week in advance. Papers should adhere to MLA formatting guidelines (see website for assistance) and should be double-spaced. Any form of plagiarism will not be tolerated.

3. Final paper (8-10 pages): 40% of the final grade
   Your final paper will track one theme of your choosing through several of the texts we have studied over the course of the semester. You must meet with me at least one during the semester to discuss your paper. A good segment of our last session will function as a sort of collective brainstorming/group critique of final paper proposals. More specific details on the final paper will be discussed in class. There may also be a creative option for the final paper; more details will be provided later in the course.
Resources: Dominique Coulombe (Dominique_Coulombe@brown.edu tel 863-9666) or Stephen L. Thompson (Stephen_L_Thompson@brown.edu tel. 863-1721) are available to answer questions about the website, your research and the resources at the library.

The Writing Center is a valuable resource for all of your writing concerns. Make an appointment to get help formulating an argument, polishing your writing or simply to bounce ideas off an additional set of eyes. Writing_Center@brown.edu or 863-3524.
**SCHEDULE** (subject to change)

**Week One**
Session One (6/23):
- Introduction
- Marie de France, *Lais* (the myth)

Session Two (6/25):
- Marie de France, *Lais* (handout)
- Milton, the myth (website)
- Milton, *Paradise Lost* (handout)

**Week Two**
Session Three (6/30):
- Milton, continued (handout).
- 11-12: Library Resource Orientation (Bopp Seminar Room, John Hay Library)
- Iphigenie: the myth (website)

Session Four (7/2):
- The myth of German Romanticism (handout)
- Iphigenie, Acts 1-5
**Short paper #1 due** (Marie de France, Milton or Goethe)

**Week Three**
Session Five (7/7):
- Penthesilea, the myth (website)
- Penthesilea, Scenes 1-14

Session Six (7/9):
- Penthesilea, Scenes 14-24
- Phèdre, the myth (website)

**Week Four**
Session Seven (7/14):
- Phèdre, Acts 1-5

Session Eight (7/16):
- Othello, the myth (handout)
**Short paper #2 due** (Kleist or Racine)
Week Five
Session Nine (7/21):
• Othello, Acts 1-3

Session Ten (7/23):
• Othello, Acts 3-5
• Discuss final paper

Week Six
Session Eleven (7/28):
• The Metamorphosis, the myth (website and handout)
• The Metamorphosis (Kafka)

Session Twelve (7/30):
• Conclusions (no reading assignment),
• propose final paper topics
• Short paper #3 due (Shakespeare or Kafka)

Week Seven
Final paper due: date, time, format TBA