

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES PROGRAM IN FOLKLORE AND MYTHOLOGY

November 15, 2011

Dear Colleague:

I look forward to welcoming 16 NEH Summer Scholars to Harvard University and to the greater Boston-Cambridge area for a four-week seminar on literature for children. Our classroom sessions will be augmented by informal conversation over lunch, as well as by meetings with guest scholars. We will have a chance to visit sites in the greater Boston area as well as to explore Harvard's own rich library collections. Our shared experience of teaching, as much as our diverse experiences and backgrounds, will go far toward binding us together as a group committed to creative intellectual work.

Scope and General Approach

Our focus will be fairy tales and fantasy fiction, two genres often dismissed as escapist entertainments. We will explore how imaginative literature leads children into possible worlds, enabling them to engage in mind-reading and to explore counterfactuals—the great “what if?” Our point of departure will be the primal power of fairy tales, their connection with myth, and their attractions for both adult and child. In the second part of the seminar, we will turn to fantasy literature, reading Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* to understand the power of worlds created by words—the precincts in which children learn about the transformative energy of stories. J.K. Rowling and others will be our guides as we seek to develop a better understanding of strategies used by writers to create possible worlds and to draw children into them. What happens to children when they read?

Project Faculty and Staff

My interest in children's literature has deep roots in my childhood reading experience. I earned my degree in Germanic Languages & Literatures at Princeton University and turned to the Brothers Grimm as a research project while teaching a class on German Romanticism at Harvard. Since then, I have written several books about the Grimms' fairy tales, as well as about Hans Christian Andersen's stories and J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. In Harvard's Program in Folklore and Mythology, I have had the chance to work with colleagues from a variety of disciplines, each with a very different approach to storytelling.

Jerry Griswold is a specialist in American Literature and Culture and in Children's Literature. He is the author of the prize-winning *Audacious Kids*, *Feeling Like a Kid*, and *The Meanings of "Beauty and the Beast."* He served as Director of the National Center for the Study

of Children's Literature at San Diego State University in San Diego, California, until 2011. Professor Griswold's presentation will focus on fantasy literature and how we define it.

Donald Haase is Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Wayne State University. His publications include: *The Reception of Grimms' Fairy Tales*, *Fairy Tales and Feminism*, and *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*. He is the editor of *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*. Professor Haase's presentation will lead us into an understanding of translation, trans-nationalism, and transculturation as it affects fairy tales.

Daniel Conti, a teacher of English at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School in Sudbury, Massachusetts, will serve as a resource and a guide to literary sites in the greater Boston-Cambridge area. Dan participated in the NEH summer seminar for teachers on Dante, held in Italy, and he has served as a consultant on three previous NEH seminars for teachers at Harvard.

A Graduate Student Assistant, Christina Phillips (a Ph.D. Candidate in Comparative Literature at Harvard), will be available to assist with seminar administration and individual research projects.

The Project Manager, William Holinger, is Director of Secondary School Programs at Harvard Summer School. Bill is the contact person for administrative and logistical matters that may arise before the seminar begins.

Meetings and Assignments

We will meet four times a week: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Wednesdays will be unstructured, providing seminar participants ample opportunity for individual study and research. On days the seminar meets, our sessions will begin at 1:00 with a group lunch in Annenberg Hall, where free-wheeling literary talk can take place. After lunch, we will move to a seminar room and continue our conversation (2:00-5:00). NEH Summer Scholars will have an opportunity to shape the daily discussion: each afternoon meeting will include space for problems or questions that arise as participants prepare the reading. Scholars will have a chance to make short presentations on specific passages or themes, as well as to develop and share lesson plans and pedagogical resources. And they will have the opportunity to meet on a designated daily basis with the instructor.

Our first textbook, *Classic Fairy Tales*, will enable us to study canonical tales as well as to read variants from other cultures. We will explore multiple disciplinary approaches to fairy tales (psychological, historical, structural, and anthropological) and apply that knowledge to tales that give us the simple expression of complex thought. "Little Red Riding Hood" will take us into the fairy-tale woods and lead us to stories about family conflict, marital conflicts, and rites of passage. Our fairy tale unit will conclude with a case study of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* will draw us into the cult of childhood innocence and lead us into the question of how we make sense of nonsense texts. J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* will enable us to continue our discussion of a seismic shift in children's literature in the 19th century, with its sudden interest in play, imagination, and fantasy. With J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, we will explore the new mythologies developed by contemporary authors of children's literature.

Please also see the daily seminar schedule posted on this seminar website.

Academic Resources

NEH Summer Scholars will have full access to the Harvard Libraries and Museums. We will plan to explore together some of the rich resources available at Harvard's Houghton Library, focusing in particular on fairy-tale illustration.

Additionally, we will take advantage of several of the many places with literary associations in and around Boston, with a field trip to the Eric Carle Museum in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Stipend

The stipend for the four-week seminar is \$3,300. The NEH stipulates that stipends "are intended to help cover travel expenses to and from the project location, books and other research expenses, and living expenses for the duration of the period spent in residence. Stipends are taxable." For full details, please see the NEH document, "Application Information and Instructions," on this seminar website.

Professional Development and Academic Credit

The seminar will provide a certificate to participants that can be used to obtain continuing-education units. For those desiring graduate academic credit, extra work in the form of three short critical papers (5 pp.) or one longer research paper (15pp.) will be expected so that a letter grade can be assigned. The papers must all be submitted within one week of the end of the Summer Seminar. There will be no extra charge for academic credit.

Participant Status at Harvard in the Summer, and Cultural and Recreational Resources

Through the Harvard Summer School, NEH Summer Scholars will be issued a Harvard ID card granting them access to the myriad resources of the Cambridge campus of Harvard University, including libraries, museums, computer rooms, shuttle buses, athletic buildings (and swimming pool), tennis courts, etc. In effect there will be no restrictions on the facilities we may use. For further information about the cultural and recreational resources available at Harvard during the summer, including links to information about Boston and Cambridge, visit the Harvard Summer School website: www.summer.harvard.edu.

Lodging and Meals

Accommodations in Harvard Yard (in student housing) will be available at a reasonable cost to participants, who are invited to dine with Harvard Summer School faculty, staff, and students in Annenberg Hall at no additional charge. We encourage all participants to live on campus because the opportunity for informal exchange is an important part of the seminar experience. Further details concerning on-campus housing will become available as the summer approaches.

Application and Selection

It is my hope that the NEH Summer Scholars will bring back to their schools a new sense of curricular possibility and that they will be eager to share ideas from the Seminar in curriculum-development posts within their own school system. Classroom experience teaching literature will of course be helpful to applicants, as will a passion for stories. We invite applications from teachers who use literature in the classroom. We especially invite minority applicants. It is likely that preference in the admissions process will be granted to full-time teachers, although up to two spaces in the seminar may be filled by current full-time graduate students who intend to pursue careers in K-12 teaching. The Selection Committee will include me, as well as Dan Conti, a teacher of English at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, and project manager Bill Holinger.

Further details and instructions on how to apply to the seminar are available on this seminar website. Please read carefully the NEH document, "Application Information and Instructions," posted on this seminar website.

I hope this letter has answered many of your questions about the seminar. If you would like further information about the seminar itself, do check the seminar website, where you will find the seminar schedule, details on how to apply, and information about the resources of Harvard University and the surrounding area. If you have questions about the administrative side of things (living arrangements, travel, and so on), don't hesitate to contact Bill Holinger at 617.998-8515, or *william_holinger@harvard.edu*.

I look forward to working with you in Cambridge this summer.

Sincerely,

Maria Tatar
John L. Loeb Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures
Chair, Program in Folklore and Mythology