Once upon a time, long before Tolkien, Disney, or Rowling, two brothers named Grimm published a collection of fairy tales that went on to have an immense cultural impact throughout the world. The Grimm fairy tales will be our textual point of departure for a multi-faceted, integrative exploration of this popular and influential genre through time.

We will explore traditional cultural theories of the fairy tale, psychoanalytic and pedagogical approaches, and contextualize this genre in cultural and social history. The focus is on the role that the literary fairy tale by male and female writers assumes in the civilizing process.

Aside from studying some of the tales in depth, we will discuss how the tales were collected, how they changed over time, and how they portray values and ethics of different European cultures. To this end, we will compare different versions of the same tales and look at the different societal and moral codes they promoted. The course explores how the fairy tale has become institutionalized in Western culture as a means to communicate about social and psychological experiences, a mode of socialization, and a way of institutionalizing culture, norms, values, and taste. We will extend our readings to 21st-century fairy tale adaptations and discuss the relevance of these themes for present-day consumers.

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