Myth, Legend, and Folklore: From Elves to Elvis

Why do little old ladies live in shoes anyway? To answer this and other pressing questions, this course will trace transformations of sacred narratives from the Bible and Norse myth to (mostly) European folktales, German fairy tales, American blues ballads, and the King of Rock & Roll, or “From Elves to Elvis.” Beginning with the “discovery” of folklore in the 19th century (notably by two brothers named Grimm), we will focus on how (and why) much of today’s popular fiction and film—Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings, Rowling’s Harry Potter, and Lucas’s Star Wars—makes use of the medieval Germanic past. With a spotlight on the Christian reinterpretation of pagan Europe, we will follow the fortunes of certain persistent figures (goddesses and gods; heroes and heroines; monsters and outlaws; giants, dwarfs, and elves) of German and Scandinavian folklore, with cross-illuminations from Celtic, Francophone, Italian, and Afro-American traditions. TAUGHT IN ENGLISH. FULFILLS THE CLA CORE REQUIREMENT IN WESTERN HERITAGE. Instructor: Professor Turco jturco@purdue.edu

(GER230/CMPL230/IDIS491)