

Folk Narrative for Writers: An Introduction



Who am I?





Webinar Topics

- What is folk narrative?
- What is a folklore genre?
- What is a myth?
- What is a legend?
- What is a fairy tale?
- What is a fable?
- What genre of folk narrative is this?
- Writing a Myth
- Writing a Legend
- Writing a Fairy Tale
- Writing a Fable
- Participant Questions and Comments
- Following the *Folklore & Fiction* Project

What is folk narrative?

- Folklore is artistic communication in small groups.
- Folk narrative is this definition applied to storytelling.
 - Local communities had their own favourite versions of oral folk tales.
 - Each performance of an oral folk tale was different from the others.
 - Even when these oral folk tales were collected and written down, collectors like the Grimm Brothers sanitized and recombined them.
- The transition from oral to written tale is the point at which we came to believe there were official versions of folk tales.
- We're allowed to play with these tales. In fact, I would argue that we're supposed to play with these tales.



What is a folklore genre?

- Genres are academic systems of classification for various kinds of folklore.
- The idea of genre is both helpful and problematic.
- These are a few examples of folklore genres/classification systems:
 - *Beliefs*: Myths, Religions, Rituals, etc.
 - *Customs*: Celebrations, Dances, Games, Occupational Practices, etc.
 - *Material Culture*: Foodways, Pottery, Quilts, Vernacular Architecture, etc.
 - *Narratives*: Ballads, Fables, Legends, etc.
- Folklore genres can be slippery, but this is good for our purposes as writers.



What is a myth?

"A myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form." - *Alan Dundes*



What is a legend?

“Legend is a conversational narrative whose reported events are set in historical (as opposed to myth’s cosmological) time and whose telling makes possible debate concerning the “real world” occurrence and/or efficacy of the events, characters, folk beliefs, and/or folk customs described.” - *The Encyclopedia of Folklore and Literature*



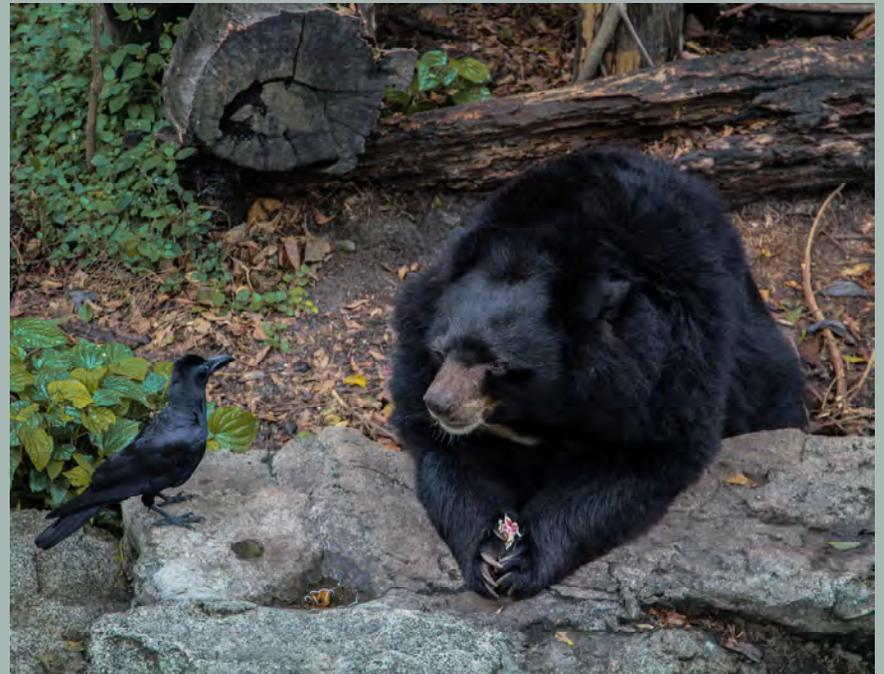
What is a fairy tale?

The German word "märchen" and the phrases "fairy tale" and "wonder tale" all refer to the same genre of short prose narratives, in which supernatural beings and other storytelling elements intervene in the everyday lives of people and in which the good are rewarded while the wicked are punished.



What is a fable?

"The Greek fable is a brief and simple fictitious story with a constant structure, generally with animal protagonists (but also humans, gods, and inanimate objects, e.g. trees), which gives an exemplary and popular message on practical ethics and which comments, usually in a cautionary way, on the course of action to be followed or avoided in a particular situation." - *Christos A. Zafiropoulos*



What genre of folk narrative is this?

1/4

A dog lay asleep in front of a farm building. A wolf pounced on him and was going to make a meal of him, when the dog begged him not to eat him straight away:

"At the moment," he said, "I am thin and lean. But wait a little while; my masters will be celebrating a wedding feast. I will get some good mouthfuls and will fatten up and will be a much better meal for you."

The wolf believed him and went on his way. A little while later he came back and found the dog asleep on top of the house. He stopped below and shouted up to him, reminding him of their agreement. Then the dog said:

"Oh, wolf! If you ever see me asleep in front of the farm again, don't wait for the wedding banquet!"

What genre of folk narrative is this?

2/4

It was during the time that Cronus was reigning over the gods that men were first created, and this was called the Golden Age. In the Golden Age it was always springtime, and beautiful flowers blossomed the whole year round in the woods and meadows. It was not necessary for men to labour at tilling the ground, for the earth brought forth of itself everything they could possibly require. Apples and melons and grapes and other fruits grew wild everywhere, and in the brooks their flowed a delicious kind of water that tasted like milk. Men, too, were good and happy, and they all lived for a long time, for three hundred years and more, and did not get old and grey, but always remained young. They had no need of houses, but lived out of doors with the beautiful earth for a carpet and the sky for a roof. Neither were there any distinctions such as we have now between rich and poor, or the upper and lower classes, but all were equal and lived together as friends. When they had lived for a long time and had had enough of life, they fell into a deep sleep and never woke again. That was their death.

The Golden Age came to an end at last, but those who had lived during that time became guardian spirits who still wander unseen over the earth and are kind to us that are now alive.

What genre of folk narrative is this?

3/4

There's the professor that vanished at Thompson Park? Supposedly the whole park is haunted and back a bunch of years a teacher from JCC [Jefferson Community College, a local school] took some students to the park for class cuz it was such a nice day. Apparently, they were sitting on the grass at the bottom of a little hill while he paced about lecturing. At one point he walked to the top of the hill, turned around and saw the students acting funny, so he came back down the hill. And all of the sudden the students started freaking out, screaming and running around. When he got one student calm enough to talk he found out why. Apparently when the professor walked to the top of the mountain he disappeared. The students got up and started looking for him when he suddenly appeared at the bottom of the hill.



What genre of folk narrative is this?

4/4

A wealthy squire he lived in our town, and he was a man of high renown. He had one daughter, a beauty bright, and the name he called her was his heart's delight.

Many young men far to court her came, but none of them could her favour gain - 'til there came one of a low degree, and above them all, why, she fancied he.

But when her father he came to know - that his lovely daughter loved this young man so, over fifty miles he sent her away - all to deprive her of a wedding day.

One night as she lay in her bedroom, her lover appeared from out the gloom. He touched her hand and to her did say, "Arise my darling and come away."

'Twas with this young man she got on behind, and they rode swifter than any wind. They rode on for an hour or more, when he cried, "My darling, my head feels sore!"

A Holland handkerchief she's then drew out, and with it wrapped his aching head about. She's kissed his lips and these words did say, "My love, you're colder than any clay!"

When they arrived at her father's gate, he said, "Get down, love, for the hour is late! Get down, get down, love, and go to bed, and I'll see this gallant horse is groomed and fed."

When she's arrived at her father's hall, "Who's that? Who's that?" her own father called. "It is I, dear father, didn't you send for me - by such a messenger?" And she's named he.

"Oh no, dear daughter, that can never be! Your words are false, love, and you lie to me! For on yon mountain your young man died, and in yon green meadow, well, his body lies."

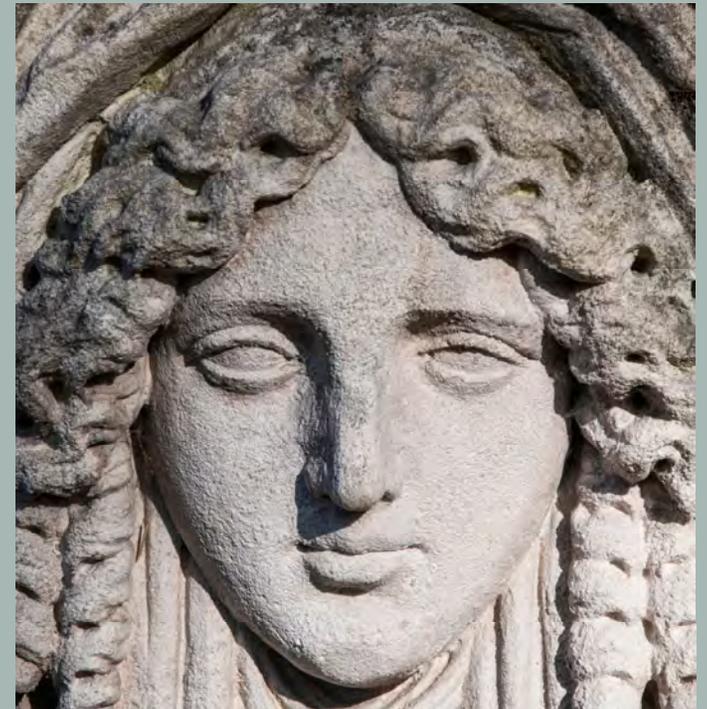
The truth then dawned upon this lady brave, and with her maidens, they exposed his grave. There lay her love, though nine months dead, with the Holland handkerchief tied round his head.



Writing a Myth: Adapt, Create, Embed

Myths are:

- *Narratives*: Stories which may be told or written as prose or poetry.
- *Sacred*: Associated with holy teachings, rituals, and paraphernalia.
- *Believed*: Taught for the purpose of encouraging or strengthening belief, accepted on faith, and cited as factual.
- *Cosmological*: Detailing the origin of the world, of humankind, of life and death, of good and evil, and so on. They also recount the origins and lives of gods and other superhuman beings.
- *Otherworldly*: Set in the distant past or in a place different from the Earth as we understand it.
- *Populated*: Containing primary characters who are not human but may have human attributes such as gods, giants, elves, dwarves, culture heroes, and sometimes animals.



Writing a Legend: Adapt, Create, Embed

Legends are:

- *Narratives*: Stories which may be told or written as prose.
- *Historicized*: Occur in the everyday world and not in a fantastical or cosmological one, told as if they are true.
- *Believable*: Contain elements that reinforce the veracity of the story.
- *Migratory*: Often widely known by many different variants.
- *Strange*: Concerned with the ambiguous, unusual, and bizarre.

Additionally, urban legends are:

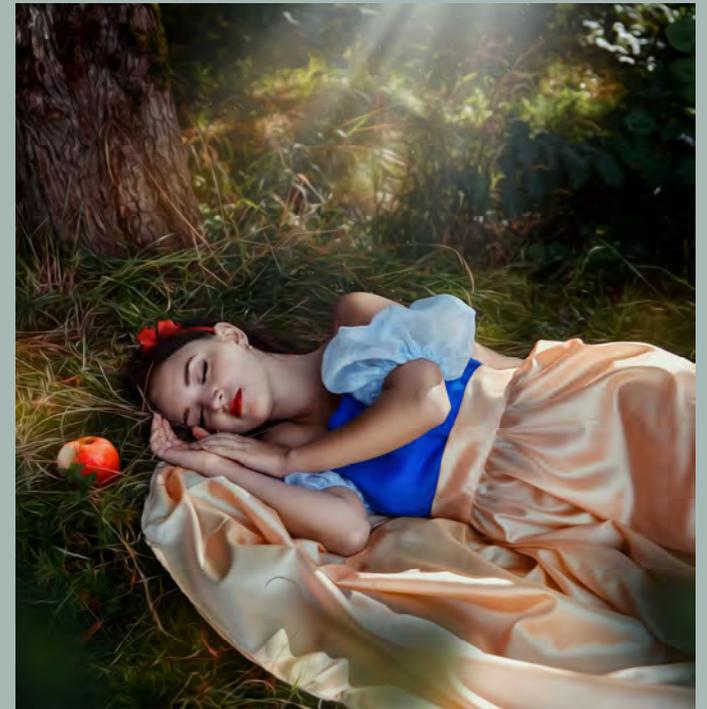
- *Authenticated*: Attributed to the friend-of-a-friend, situated in the real world, or sourced in reputable mass media.
- *Recent*: Contain references to urban locations, current political concerns, technologies, and other elements of modern life.
- *Conversational*: Told informally and often with "film noir" tone.



Writing a Fairy Tale: Adapt, Create, Embed

Fairy tales are:

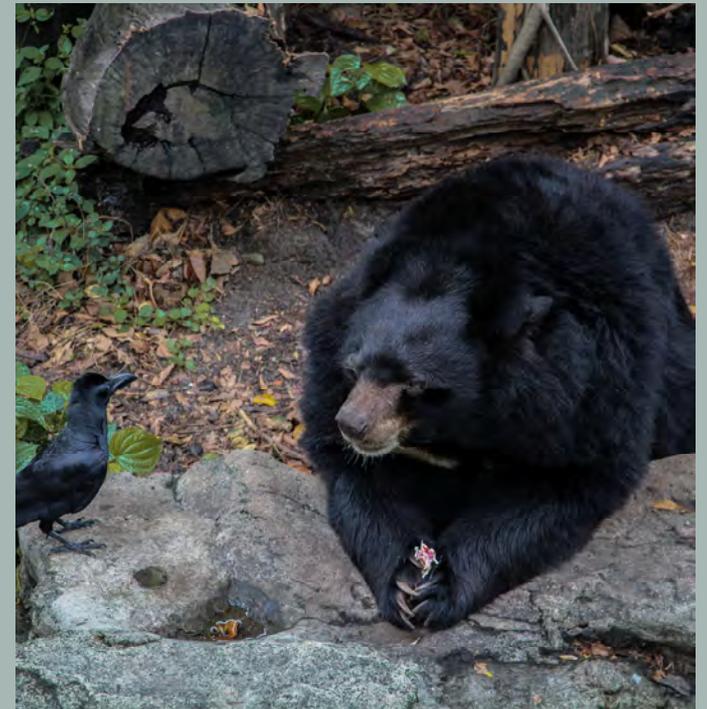
- *Short Narratives*: Short stories which may be told or written as prose or poetry.
- *Both Magical and Mundane*: Containing supernatural beings, objects, and other story elements that intervene in the everyday lives of people.
- *Infused with Moral Lessons*: Imparting social values relevant to the contexts in which they were created, told, and received.
- *Resolved by Rewarding the Good and Punishing the Wicked*: Often called "happy endings," it might be more helpful to think of these resolutions as logical outcomes of moral lessons the tales impart.
- *Passed Down from Oral Traditions*: Collected in cultures where people learned these stories from other people.



Writing a Fable: Adapt, Create, Embed

Fables are:

- *Narratives of Many Kinds*: Tales that may be written as poetry or prose and may be structured in a variety of ways.
- *Designed to Be Instructive*: Told or written specifically for the purpose of imparting a moral or ethical message, which might be set off from the rest of the fable at the end.
- *Often Populated with Animals*: Protagonists who mirror human characteristics and behaviours, make human decisions, and meet with human successes and failures as a result.





Participant Questions and Comments

Following the Folklore & Fiction Project

Website: csmaccath.com | folkloreandfiction.com

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The sidebar of the blog page contains the *Folklore & Fiction* archive, including the original newsletters I used to write this webinar.

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No release date as yet for “The Belt and the Necklace,” podcast radio play, but I’ll post a note in these places when I have one.

