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Department of English & Writing Studies

Speculative Fiction: Fantasy **English 2072G (650)** Winter 2014

Instructor: Cristina Ionica

Antirequisite(s): The former English 134E.

Course Description

This course presents a study of the purposes and historical origins of fantasy, and modern developments in fantasy: alternate worlds, horror or ghost stories, sword and sorcery, and heroic romance.

Objectives:

Successful students who complete the course will be better able to:

- Place individual texts in their context within the historical development of fantasy as a genre;
- Recognize and understand the features of genres and subgenres such as fantasy, horror fantasy, sword and sorcery, heroic romance, etc.;
- Analyze texts employing the skills of literary analysis, considering features such as narrative technique, symbolism, structure, etc.;
- Understand the political, religious, moral, and philosophical underpinnings of the texts studied;
- Communicate ideas effectively in writing (through discussion posts and persuasive essays);
- Develop a specific, focused argument and support it with textual evidence;
- Approach the fantasy genre as readers, critics, and perhaps creators.

Course Materials

J. R. R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*, including *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*.

J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

Peter S. Beagle, *The Last Unicorn* (ironic fantasy).

John Gardner, *Grendel* (fantasy retelling).

Dan Simmons, *A Song for Kali* (horror).

Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* (alternate history).

J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (postmodern fantasy).

Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories, ed. Eric S. Rabkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

Reading and working with these specific editions is preferred, especially for essays and in discussing the texts. If you already have some or all of the texts in different editions, then inform me what edition you will be using on your essays. The UWO Bookstore will have these texts in stock, and you can order them on-line from the Bookstore. For more information, go to <http://www.bookstore.uwo.ca>. You may also find the books at a local bookseller.

During the course, you are expected to read the relevant sections of the course package in combination with the texts. The package provides important background information on and interpretations of the texts in order to guide you through the readings

Note on Readings:

This course is one of a package of three derived from the former English 134E “Science Fiction, Fantasy, Utopian and Other Forms of Romance and Satire.” This course, E2072F/G, focuses specifically on fantasy literature though it touches upon materials that are examined more fully in the other two courses: Science Fiction, English 2071 F/G, and English 2073F/G, a course which considers texts that are principally utopian.

The course explores a wide range of fantasy texts and focuses primarily upon materials from the Twentieth century. Rosemary Jackson, in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, provides a general schema for distinguishing different kinds of the fantastic. Her first category of the marvelous includes the world of the fairy tale, romance, magic, and supernaturalism. The marvelous is characterized by a minimal narrative whose narrator is omniscient and has absolute authority. This form discourages reader participation and represents events which occurred in the past and are assumed to be no longer relevant (33). The mimetic are narratives that claim to imitate an external reality, but which also distance experience by shaping it into meaningful patterns and sequences (or in other words, events that are claimed to be real but are in fact fictional) (34). The fantastic includes narratives that confound elements of both the marvelous and the mimetic. These texts assert that they are real--relying upon all the conventions of realistic fiction to do so--and then they proceed to break that assumption of realism by introducing that which is manifestly unreal. Stories like Poe’s “The Black Cat” or Jorge Luis Borges’ “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” pull the reader from the apparent familiarity and security of the known and everyday world into something strange, into a world whose improbabilities are normally associated with the marvelous (34).

The readings in the course span the categories described above and attempt to illustrate not only the wide range of fantasy works, but to offer a diversity of interpretations to illustrate the many functions fantasy texts can perform.

Methods of Evaluation

Response Paper OR Creative Writing Piece	20%
Research Essay (2000-2500 words)	35%
Forum Posts	10%
Final Exam	35%

Late Policy: Late assignments should be submitted to the “Late Assignments” dropbox on Sakai. Unless a student presents a valid excuse prior to the assignment due date, essays will incur a late penalty of 2% per day, up to a maximum of 28% (or 2 weeks). Assignments handed in late will not receive comments. After the two week period, the “Late” dropbox will close and no assignments will be accepted.

Missed Assignments Policy: See Accommodation below.

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html#grade>.

Timetable:

- WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION: Introduction and Introductory stories. Begin *Lord of the Rings*.
WEEK 2 *Lord of the Rings*.
WEEK 3 *Lord of the Rings*.
WEEK 4 *Lord of the Rings*.
WEEK 5 Kafka and Shultz stories and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.
WEEK 6 Stories. **Response Paper/Creative Assignment Due**
WEEK 7 *Grendel*.
WEEK 8 Fairy Tales and *The Last Unicorn*. **End of Week: Last chance to submit Response Paper/Creative Assignment.**
WEEK 9 *The Man in the High Castle*.
WEEK 10 Horror Fiction-Poe and Hoffmann stories, **Research Essay Due.**
WEEK 11 *Song of Kali*.
WEEK 12 *Crash* and closing story, Holst - "The Zebra Storyteller." **End of Week: Last chance to submit Research Essay.**

Assignments:

Response Paper: A formal critical review of one of the works studied during the first term. Each essay must have a clear, argumentative, and analytical thesis statement that will be developed over the course of the essay. Suggested topics will be circulated in advance of the due date. All students who wish to choose a topic that is not on the list should send me a short description of their topic for approval. Secondary research is required (at least 1 material - essay/article from a collection of essays/academic journal). Advanced essay-writing tips, as well as research tips (finding/evaluating materials), will be provided early on. MLA citation style is required.

Creative Writing Piece: An original story that follows the rules of one of the genres/subgenres discussed this term, with or without accompanying drawings. OR A parody of a fantasy story. OR A discussion of a film adaptation of one of the literary works studied this term in which the student criticizes some of the filmmaker's choices and proposes better alternatives. (Please note that merely saying "I would follow the book more closely" is neither elaborate nor creative enough to satisfy the requirements for this assignment.)

Research Essay

A formal, extended discussion of a theme/ ideological issue as it is reflected in

a) the works of two of the authors studied throughout the course

OR

b) one of the literary works studied this term and a film adaptation of that work

Write a clear, argumentative, and analytical thesis statement that will be developed over the course of the essay. Go beyond mere comparison and provide an in-depth discussion of the ideological implications of the literary text(s)/ film adaptation.

Secondary research is required (at least 2 materials - essays/articles from books/academic journals). MLA citation style is required. A list of suggested essay topics will be provided in due time. All students who wish to choose a topic that is not on the list should send me a short description of their topic for approval.

If you choose the story/film option for the Creative Assignment, you won't be allowed to choose option b for the Research Essay. In addition, you are not allowed to write about the same work(s) in both term papers.

Participation: You will be expected to participate in our forum discussions by posting short answers to at least 10 of the questions I will post throughout the term. At the end of each week, I will look all discussion threads pertaining to that week's materials. (Translation: You are not allowed to fall behind on your readings & posts.)

Final Exam: A combination of short-answer and essay questions. Short definitions of relevant terms and accurate examples will be required. A close reading section will be included, but there will be no passage recognition involved (the author/title will be provided). The exam will be cumulative and will be written during the exam period (date, time and location TBA).

Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.