

Reading Popular Culture:

Narratives of Community and Exclusion

ENGLISH 2017 (001)

Course Description

Popular narratives are everywhere and nowhere: like a fish that doesn't know it's in water, we can sometimes find it difficult to see the huge volume of popular books, films, television shows, and other narratives which fill our cultural environment. But these narratives do not merely entertain: every narrative conveys some kind of worldview, and the more popular a work is the more that worldview will be disseminated. Examining texts that range from the work Lewis Carroll to H.P. Lovecraft, from Lord Dunsany to *Akira*, and J.R.R. Tolkien to *Conan the Barbarian*, students in this course will trace the histories of these narratives through multiple genres and mediums, with special attention to the ways that these works depict, criticize, and on occasion participate in, processes of social exclusion.

Course Objectives

Students who complete this course will learn,

- To critically read and interpret key works of popular literature and film
- To link specific popular texts to broader social and political histories
- To connect specific popular texts to major ideas in social and cultural theory
- To closely read works of literature and film to produce novel insights and interpretations

Grades

Note: All assignments will be handed in via the Assignments tab on OWL unless otherwise noted. Assignments should be formatted according to the MLA Manual of Style.

- Short Essay, 500-600 words (Due Oct 23 at 11:55 p.m.) – 15%
- Midterm Exam (Date TBA) – 25%
- Research Essay, 1,000-1,200 words (Due April 1 at 11:55 p.m.) – 25%
- Final Exam (Date TBA) – 25%
- Attendance and participation (throughout the course) – 10%

Short Essay: Students will write a critical close reading of one of the course texts from weeks one through seven. The essay does not need to cite any sources, but it does need to articulate some kind of argument which it then backs up with evidence from within the text (such as by quoting passages or summarizing particular scenes). More information will be given closer to the due date.

Research Essay: Much like the short essay, but this time students will need to produce an essay which defends a well-defined thesis statement. The essay will also need to compare two works from the syllabus, at least one of them from the second semester. Writing on the text you discussed for your short essay is prohibited. Furthermore, essays will have to cite at least three peer-reviewed sources which are not taken from the syllabus (i.e. you have to do your own research).

Attendance and Participation: In addition to attending class, students will sometimes be asked to perform small group assignments based on that day's lecture. These assignments are graded on a pass/fail basis – students who fail to meet the minimum requirements or who do not complete the assignment will be given a zero.

Course Texts

First Semester

- William Gibson, *Burning Chrome*
- Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*

Second Semester

- Lewis Carrol, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*
- Lord Dunsany, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*
- H.P. Lovecraft, *The Call of Cthulhu and At the Mountains of Madness: Two Tales of the Mythos*
- J.R.R. Tolken, *The Fellowship of the Ring*
- Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

All films will be screened during class on the day indicated in the Course Schedule. Film screenings will begin at the start of class and will usually be followed by an in-class activity or discussion. Other readings will be supplied via OWL, either in Course Readings or in Resources.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to

recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Accommodation Policies

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities.

Accommodation for Students on Medical Grounds

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 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 Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The full policy is set out here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

Academic Integrity Tutorial

All students are required to enroll in and complete the Centre for Teaching and Learning's Academic Integrity Tutorial. To access the tutorial, please use the link provided in the Resource tab in the course OWL site. Once the tutorial has been completed, you will receive a downloadable certificate. You must upload the certificate and submit it through the course Assignments tab in order to complete this assignment. The tutorial must be completed by Friday in the second week of term. This tutorial is mandatory in order for you to complete and pass the course. If you have completed the tutorial already for another course, you may upload the same certificate for this course; you do not need to repeat the tutorial.

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>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, here. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Support Services

Registration 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/>

Academic Support & Engagement <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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

First Semester

WEEK ONE (Sept 11)

- Lecture: Course introductions

WEEK TWO (Sept 18)

- Reading: Excerpt from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (on OWL)
- Screening: *Frankenstein* (1931)
- Lecture: on Shelley

WEEK THREE (Sept 25)

- Reading: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry" (on OWL)
- Lecture: on *Frankenstein* (1931)

WEEK FOUR (Oct 2)

- Reading: *Burning Chrome*: "Johnny Mnemonic," "The Gernsback Continuum," and "Burning Chrome"
- Lecture: William Gibson and cyberpunk

WEEK FIVE (Oct 9)

- No Class (Thanksgiving)

WEEK SIX (Oct 16)

- Screening: *The Thing*

WEEK SEVEN (Oct 23)

- Reading: Pricilla Wald, "Imagined Immunities: The Epidemiology of Belonging" (on OWL)
- Lecture: *The Thing*

READING WEEK: October 30 to November 5

WEEK EIGHT (Nov 6)

- Reading: *The Parable of the Sower*
- Lecture: First half of *Parable*

WEEK NINE (Nov 13)

- Reading: *The Parable of the Sower*
- Lecture: Second half of *Parable*

WEEK TEN (Nov 20)

- Screening: *Akira*

WEEK ELEVEN (Nov 27)

- Reading: Christopher Bolton, “From Origin to Oblivion: Reading *Akira* as Anime and Manga” (On OWL)
- Lecture: *Akira*

WEEK TWELVE (Dec 4)

- Lecture: Midterm exam review

Second Semester

WEEK ONE (Jan 8)

- Reading: Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*
- Lecture: *Alice*

WEEK TWO (Jan 15)

- Reading: Lord Dunsany, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*
- Lecture: First half of *Elfland*

WEEK THREE (Jan 22)

- Reading: Lord Dunsany, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*
- Lecture: Second half of *Elfland*

WEEK FOUR (Jan 29)

- Reading: H.P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”
- Lecture: Lovecraft

WEEK FIVE (Feb 5)

- Reading: H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*
- Lecture: More Lovecraft

WEEK SIX (Feb 12)

- Screening: *Conan the Barbarian* (1982)

READING WEEK: FEBRUARY 17-25

WEEK SEVEN (Feb 26)

- Reading: Guido Ipsen, “Conan the Blueprint: The Construction of Masculine Prototypes in Genre Films”
- Lecture: *Conan*

WEEK EIGHT (March 4)

- Reading: J.R.R. Tolken, *The Fellowship of the Ring*
- Lecture: *Fellowship* “Book 1”

WEEK NINE (March 11)

- Reading: J.R.R. Tolken, *The Fellowship of the Ring*
- Lecture: *Fellowship* “Book 2”

WEEK TEN (March 18)

- Reading: Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- Lecture: First half of *Left Hand*

WEEK ELEVEN (March 25)

- Reading: Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- Lecture: Second half of *Left Hand*

WEEK TWELVE (April 1)

- Lecture: Final exam review