

**English 2072G Speculative Fiction: Fantasy – Online (Section 650)
January-April 2015**

Instructor: Dr. Mark Stephenson

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E-mail Policy: E-mail me for any course-related concerns; I should reply within 24 hours. If you have not received a reply in 24 hours, email me again, and I'll be sure to get back to you shortly (email correspondence occasionally goes missing in cyber-space and/or I may have missed your initial email).

Office Hours

I am also available for **consultations on campus**, on Mondays and Wednesdays, between **12:00 and 1:30 p.m.**, in case you are in London. My office is **(Old) Ivey Building, 2G28L**.

Teaching Assistant: TBA

Be sure to read the following information completely and carefully. You are responsible for it.

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.

Note that English 134E is an anti-requisite to this course; hence, if you have taken English 134E, you cannot receive credit for English 2072F/G.

Course Objectives

- 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 and critics.

Course Texts

* J. R. R. Tolkien, *The 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 UP 1979).

Reading and working with these specific editions is preferred, especially for essays and 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 lectures posted online in combination with the texts. The lectures provide important background information on and interpretations of the texts in order to guide you through the readings

Assignments and Evaluation

Essay 1 (1000-1500 words):	20%
Essay 2 (2000-2500 words):	35%
Forum Posts:	10%
Final Exam:	<u>35%</u>
	100%

******Final Grades******

STUDENTS MUST PASS BOTH TERM WORK AND THE FINAL EXAMINATION IN ORDER TO PASS THE COURSE. STUDENTS WHO FAIL THE FINAL EXAMINATION (REGARDLESS OF THEIR TERM MARK) AUTOMATICALLY FAIL THE COURSE.

Late Policy

Late assignments should be submitted to the corresponding drop-box on Sakai (the drop-box will accept the assignment after the due date and mark it as “late”). Unless a student presents a valid excuse prior to the assignment due date, late assignments 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 drop-box will close and no assignments will be accepted.

Missed Assignments Policy

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments 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

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>.

The full policy is set out here:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

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.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The official Western University policy pertaining to punishment is that a first offence will result in a mark of zero on the assignment, and the Department of English as well as your Faculty will be notified (this is the minimum penalty); a second, or very blatant, offence will result in failure of the course and debarment from all further Department of English courses. The Department of English also takes seriously internal plagiarism; you should be aware that the department keeps a database of all internet essay sites.

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students will be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

A Note on the 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 2071F/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.

Though it follows a rough historical narrative, the course develops thematically by examining related themes and concerns. The short stories examined in the course are situated between the novels to function as segues between texts in order to either introduce a new thematic concern or to examine a particular theme or issue. In addition, many of the short stories are accompanied by contextual information used to establish the historical or cultural context of a particular theme, image, preoccupation, or concern. These stories are meant to be in active dialogue with the novels that surround them. As well, though many of the stories and novels are given fairly precise interpretations, these interpretations are meant to offer examples for how to approach the texts and not to foreclose discussion. Hence, in the preparation of your responses to the texts and the organization of your essays, you should draw upon your readings of the texts, the course lectures, and your own analysis of the materials. Two analogies that may aid you throughout the course: read like a *detective* (search for clues, contradictions, subtleties, and problems) and write like a *lawyer* (construct a clear and cogent case supported with evidence from the texts).

A Note on Errors of Approach You Should Avoid

While reading the lectures, you will discover that, for the most part, I include few detailed references to illustrate my argument. The point of the lectures is to provide some literary analysis, some context, and some theory in order to provide students a perspective into the texts under discussion. In contrast, when writing your essays, you need to prove your points by direct reference to the text under discussion. Students sometimes make one of the two following errors: either they assume that if they read the lectures they will not need to read the books assigned; or, they assume that in their essays all they need to do is demonstrate that they have read the books by summarizing the texts. These errors lead to two major problems that can undermine the strength of an essay. In the first case, the essay will be too abstract and unfocused, one which engages entirely in the analysis of ideas but does not clearly demonstrate how the ideas relate to literature. The second, and equally grave problem, is that many students believe that if they demonstrate, over and over, that they have read the text, they will achieve a passing grade. This problem is identified as description or plot summary. In contrast to these two common errors, you need to be both judicious and selective, reorganizing your material into a set of arguments and developing a sharp and focused thesis statement.

A Note on Literary Terms

If you have previously taken an English course, you are probably familiar with the basic technical vocabulary of English literary studies. If not, you may want to consult a handbook of literary terms when in doubt. M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms* offers an excellent source book for literary terms. For an excellent overview of recent literary and critical theory consult *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. *The John Hopkins Guide* was edited by University of Western Ontario Professors Martin Kreiswirth and Michael Groden.

The Participation Grade and Discussions

The one great drawback to an online course is the lack of classroom discussion. I therefore encourage students to use the Forums feature in OWL, which gives you the opportunity to

discuss a text with your classmates. Your participation in these discussions is worth 10% of your grade.

Discussion questions are posted in the forums. You may use these questions to get a discussion of a text started, although you may certainly raise other questions or issues not included in the questions. Once a discussion is posted, you may respond to it or raise another issue. Post as many discussions and responses as you like.

Remember, these discussions replace in-class discussions and should, therefore, be seriously considered and analytical. Avoid using the Forums just to state whether you liked or disliked a text or to simply agree or disagree with a previous post. I will be checking the Forums at least three times a week, and I expect you to do likewise. Posting responses to questions without first reading your fellow students' responses is not discussion: it's a monologue, and it does not meet the criteria of this on-going assignment. You'll get the most out of this assignment by treating it as an academic conversation.

For the most part, the Forums page is for students; however, I will interject if a student has posted a problematic reading or an error, if I want to emphasize a particular point or issue that has been raised, or if students seem to need some help to push their ideas further. I try to keep my interventions brief, so often they will take the form of a question stemming from the previous discussions.

The Final Exam

Date, time and location of this will be announced as soon as it becomes available, but it will be some time during the exam period, which runs from April 11-30. I will also give detailed indications as to the structure of the exam as we get closer to the date in question (probably no less than a month in advance of the date). However, for now, you should know that the exam will consist of a series of identification passages, which also asks you to discuss their significance, and an essay or series of essays.

A Brief Description of the Assignments

I Essay 1

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 not required. Advanced essay-writing tips will be provided early on. MLA citation style is required.

II Essay 2

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 not required. 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.

A Note on the Essay Format and Quotations

Your essays must follow MLA (Modern language Association) format, as detailed in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6th edition (Joseph Gibaldi, 2003). I strongly suggest consulting a copy of the MLA Handbook while writing your essays, as it contains important information regarding essay format and the citation of sources.

A good introduction to MLA style is available on the UWO English department's web site; you should visit the MLA tips pages for your essays, and even printing out the pages (if possible) is a good idea. The URL is <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/MLAstyletips.html>

Regarding citations and avoiding plagiarism, the basic rule to follow is that you must indicate the source of any idea and any words that are not your own—whether you are quoting directly or paraphrasing. As well, your Works Cited list should include all sources that you cite in and consulted for your essay, including footnotes/endnotes, dictionaries, and internet material (for citing sources, you will need to look at the MLA Handbook).

Since English 2072F/G is an English literature course, you will be evaluated based on your ability to write clear, well-argued essays. Elements such as grammar, organization, argumentation, citation, and editing are all important and will affect your grade.

While planning and writing your essays, as always, feel free to get in touch with me for any questions you might have.

Tips for Writing Effective Essays

* Your essay must have a clear thesis. A thesis is a statement of what you are trying to prove in the essay – your argument, your point, your stance or position. It should be something with which your reader can potentially agree or disagree; it should not be a statement of fact or general knowledge. In general, your thesis is most effective as the last sentence of your introductory paragraph.

* Your essay must have a clear structure. This means that you need definite introductory and concluding paragraphs; as well, your body paragraphs should follow a logical order of argument, covering specific points and/or ideas that support and work to support your thesis. Make sure that each paragraph has a topic and concluding statement, and that you establish smooth transitions between paragraphs. Attention to good structure helps your reader follow your argument, and helps you keep your thoughts and evidence organized.

* Always be specific. Do not assume that your reader will “get” what you are alluding to (thing of a potential reader who may be a little familiar with the topic or the text in question, but needs specific information in order to engage fully with your argument). Quoting or paraphrasing from the primary text – the novel or short story, for instance – is always a good idea to give your reader a definite context for what you are saying.

* Take time to plan and outline. Before writing the first words of your essay, spend time planning and outlining it. Gather your evidence and look for patterns, similarities, and differences. Remind yourself what it is that you want to discuss and prove, then think about the best way to organize your essay accordingly. What is your point? What is your argument or position? What evidence will you need to support your thesis? What is the most effective way to structure the essay—what argument should come first and what is your most important

evidence? Essentially, when you sit down to write, you should have a firm idea of what you want to do in your essay and how the parts will fit together. Good planning and outlining will save you tension and frustration.

* Write about what interests and excites you. When considering a topic, think of what you liked most in the texts on the course—issues, ideas, passages, and so forth. What would you like to explore further? What would you find interesting to write about for a number of pages? If any of the suggested topics do not appeal to you, you can devise your own topic in consultation with me. If you enjoy what you are writing about, your essay will show it.

* Finally, reread and edit. Before submitting your paper, reread it and revise it as necessary, looking for everything from typos to potentially unclear sentences to improper essay format. Having someone else look at a draft is always a good idea, particularly if you trust that person to be honest and helpful. A “clean” essay shows that you care about your writing, which in turn encourages the reader to care about what you are saying.

Course Outline

WEEK 1 January 5-11

INTRODUCTION: Introduction to the Fantasy Genre

Introductory stories: “Genesis” (King James Version), *FW* 41-46; “Paul Bunyan of the Columbia (Esther Shephard), *FW* 89-95; “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” (James Thurber), *FW* 202-207; “Golden Wings” (William Morris), *FW* 311-324; “The Piano Player” (Donald Barthelme), *FW* 450-452.

Begin reading Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.

WEEK 2 January 12-18

The Lord of the Rings.

WEEK 3 January 19-25

The Lord of the Rings.

WEEK 4 January 26-February 1

The Lord of the Rings.

WEEK 5 February 2-8

Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*.

“The Judgement” (Franz Kafka), *FW* 399-409; “Cockroaches” (Bruno Shultz), *FW* 411-414

WEEK 6 February 9-15

Harry Potter (concl.)

“The Marker” (Robert Coover), *FW* 456-459; “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*” (Jorge Luis Borges), *FW* 415-423; “There Is No Such Place as America” (Peter Bischel), *FW* 443-449; “Pastoral” (Tommaso Landolfi), *FW* 430-37; “Axolotl” (Julio Cortázar), *FW* 424-429

*****Essay 1 Due*****

February 16-22 – Reading Week

WEEK 7 February 23-March 1

Gardner, *Grendel*

End of Week: Last chance to submit Response Paper

WEEK 8 March 2-8

Fairy Tales (“Little Red Cap,” “The Sleeping Beauty,” and “Hansel and Gretel” – FW 96-111)
Beagle, *The Last Unicorn*.

WEEK 9 March 9-15

Alternate History: *The Man in the High Castle*.

WEEK 10 March 16-22

Horror Fiction: “The Black Cat” (Poe) and “The Sandman” (Hoffman), FW 214-256

*****Essay 2 Due*****

WEEK 11 March 23-29

Simons, *Song of Kali*.

WEEK 12 March 30- April 5

Ballard, *Crash*

Story: “The Zebra Storyteller” (Holst), FW 460-463.

End of Week: Last chance to submit Essay 2

April 11-30: Exam Period