

Writing 3900F (Fall 2020)
Writing Fantasy
Online/Asynchronous

Instructor: Michael Fox
Office: UC 3429
Office Hours: Zoom, Wednesdays 10:00-12:00
Email: mfox52@uwo.ca

Course description and objectives

Character wants a good job, plenty of excitement, quest, possible assistance from mentors and companions.

Students in this course will work on various aspects of a full-length fantasy novel, focusing on aspects of world-building, the use and transformation of common fantasy motifs, various ways to structure the narrative and tell the story, and how to devise the most affective and climactic scenes. We will read some secondary material (including Tolkien and others on the genre), and students will also be required to read and report on a contemporary fantasy novel of their choice as we assess what makes fantasy successful. At the conclusion of the course, students will submit a portfolio of work that includes a language or myth that underpins their created world, character sketches, an outline of their novel, and an excerpt from it.

Required texts

None.

***Optional* texts (each student will be required to read one of contemporary work of fantasy and report on it; this is a list of some of the possibilities)**

Joe Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself*, *Half a King*, or *A Little Hatred*
Terry Brooks, *The Sword of Shannara*
Jim Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*
Justin T. Call, *Master of Sorrows*
David Eddings, *Pawn of Prophecy*
Jennifer Fallon, *Wolfblade*
Raymond Feist, *Magician[: Apprentice]*
Terry Goodkind, *Wizard's First Rule*
Robin Hobb, *Assassin's Apprentice*
N.K. Jemisin, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*
Robert Jordan, *The Eye of the World*
Mark Lawrence, *Prince of Thorns* [iffy; post-apocalyptic world, but excellent otherwise]
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wizard of Earthsea*
Jane Lindskold, *Through Wolf's Eyes*
Scott Lynch, *The Lies of Locke Lamora*
Naomi Novik, *Spinning Silver*
Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind*
Brent Weeks, *The Black Prism*
Tad Williams, *The Dragonbone Chair*

Recommended further primary reading (secondary material below)

Byock, Jesse, trans. *Grettir's Saga*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
---. *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*. London: Penguin, 1998.
Liuzza, R.M., trans. *Beowulf* (with facing page OE), 2nd edition. Peterborough: Broadview, 2013.
Pálsson, Hermann and Paul Edwards, trans. *Seven Viking Romances*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.
[*The Saga of Arrow-Odd*, pp. 25-137]
Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*. London: HarperCollins, 2006.

Old English (in general) and *Beowulf* (in particular) were Tolkien's literary inspirations for his creative work. Because *The Hobbit* is his earliest novel, tracing the effect of *Beowulf* on it is easier than in *The Lord of the Rings*. A thoughtful read of both is highly recommended, but I'll talk about this in the course. Old Norse sagas are also excellent sources of ideas, characters, and mood. If you're skeptical, try a modern translation of *Beowulf* instead of Liuzza:

Headley, Maria Dahvana. *Beowulf: A New Translation*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2020.

Read the following review of Headley, and see if her work appeals to you:

<https://www.npr.org/2020/08/27/906423831/bro-this-is-not-the-beowulf-you-think-you-know>

DeWitt, Patrick. *Undermajordomo Minor*. Toronto: House of Anansi, 2016.
Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Buried Giant*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2016.

Fantasy (as you know and we'll discuss) does not have to be about unlikely heroes who go on quests in secondary worlds of magic and win treasure and love in conflicts without nuance. Contemporary novelists have immersed themselves in the genre with great success, and DeWitt and Ishiguro are two superb (and hugely different) examples of how it works.

Course Requirements and Grade Allocations

Fantastic tale construction (ungraded; due September 18)

Students will devise a brief outline of a fantastic tale. The point of the exercise is to familiarize you with some basic concepts and tools.

Critical Reading (10%; due September 25)

Students will read and summarize the salient points of one piece of secondary material (written summary handed in: maximum 500 words).

Language/myth assignment (15%; due October 9)

Students will "create" the language(s) necessary for their secondary worlds, using the linguistic principles outlined in class (maximum 1000 words).

Character Biographies (20%; due October 30)

Students will submit three character biographies (maximum 500 words each).

Book Report (15%; due November 9)

Students will present an oral report (maximum 10 minutes) on a fantasy novel (some options listed above).

Final Project (40%; due Friday, December 11)

The final project will consist of five parts: 1) a language/myth document; 2) at least three character biographies; 3) a one-page (single-spaced) synopsis of a full-length work of fantasy; 4) an explanation of how that full-length work of fantasy deploys the motifs, movements, and structures we have learned in the course; and 5) an excerpt from the work, one “great” scene (if necessary with an introduction to contextualize the scene). The length of the final part will vary, but it should be in the vicinity of at least 2500 words.

Course Policies

Assignment Format

All assignments are to be typed, and must have your name, course name, section number, and instructor’s name on the first page. Do not use a cover page; these are particularly unnecessary for online submissions. When using sources, you will be expected to follow MLA, APA, or Chicago citation practice.

Submitting Assignments

Assignments are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Late work **will be penalized at 2.5% per day unless** I have permitted an extension of the due date. You must contact me ahead of time for an extension (*see also the section “Accommodation Policy”* below).

Attendance/Participation

This is a senior-level seminar course. I expect you to be “present” and participating, but the only penalties revolve around missing peer review. *Peer review is an important part of the course. Students who do not participate in the peer review or who fail to submit drafts for peer review will receive a 10% deduction on their assignments. That could be 10% on the character biographies and then 10% more on the great scene peer review.*

STUDENT CONDUCT

This ought to go without saying, but please remember, especially as we conduct our conversations remotely and asynchronously, that *the use of racist or any language that works against the values of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion will not be tolerated.*

SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES, INCLUDING PLAGIARISM

The University Senate requires the following statements, and Web site references, to appear on course outlines:

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

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text 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 (see Scholastic Offence Policy as above).

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>).”

PREREQUISITES

The University Senate requires the following statement to appear on course outlines:

“Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.”

The prerequisite for this course is at least 65% in one of Writing 2101F/G, Writing 2125F/G (or the former Writing 2121F/G), Writing 2111F/G, Writing 2130F/G or Writing 2131F/G; or at least 65% in one of Writing 1000F/G, Writing 1030F/G, or Writing 1031F/G; or at least 65% in each of MIT 1020E (or both of MIT 1021F/G and MIT 1022F/G) and MIT 1025F/G; or permission of the Department (consult the Undergraduate Program Director, Writing).

ACCOMMODATION POLICY

Note: the official Western Accommodation Policy appears below. This is in effect, but may be modified temporarily by the university during the academic year as conditions change.

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](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student’s final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors by email within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student’s final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see

[Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

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

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing (email), 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](#).

SPECIAL REQUESTS: SPECIAL EXAMINATIONS, INCOMPLETE STANDING, AEGROTAT STANDING

Please refer to the “Information for All Students in a Writing Course” for more detailed information. Briefly, remember that your instructor does not have the discretion to initiate, consider, or grant (or not) such requests; you must go directly to the Dean’s office of your home faculty.

OTHER RESOURCES

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

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/>

Schedule

Week 1 (Sept 9-11): Introductions

Week 2 (Sept 14-18): Basic Tale Construction [ungraded outline due Friday, September 18, 11:55pm]

Week 3 (Sept 21-25): Language/Myth [critical reading due Friday, September 25, 11:55pm]

Week 4 (Sept 28-Oct 2): Defining fantasy

Week 5 (Oct 5-9): Motifs/movements [language/myth assignment due Friday, October 9, 11:55pm]

Week 6 (Oct 13-16): *The Hobbit* (Tolkien’s model explained)

Week 7 (Oct 19-23): *Undermajordomo Minor* (a modern example) [character biographies peer review]

Week 8 (Oct 26-30): *The Kingdom of Liars* (model book report) [character biographies due Friday, October 30, 11:55pm]

Fall Reading Week (Nov 2-6)

Week 9 (Nov 9-13): Book Reports [Book Reports due Monday, November 9, 9:00am]

Week 10 (Nov 16-20): Book Reports

Week 11 (Nov 23-27): Interviews

Week 12 (Nov 30-Dec 4): “The Great Scene” draft peer review

Week 13 (Dec 7-9): Final Project Submission [Friday, December 11, 11:55pm]

Basic reading on the genre

Armitt, Lucie. *Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction*. New York and London: Continuum, 2005.

Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

---. *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Clute, John, and John Grant. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1997.

Frye, Northrop. *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen, 1981.

James, Edward and Farah Mendlesohn, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

---. *A Short History of Fantasy*. London: Middlesex University Press, 2009.

Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

[Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.]

Tolkien, J.R.R. ---. "On Fairy-Stories." *Tolkien: On Fairy-Stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson. London: HarperCollins, 2014, pp. 27-84.

Basic reading on writing the genre

Chester, Deborah. *The Fantasy Fiction Formula*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.

On language (creation)

Petersen, David J. *The Art of Language Invention*. New York: Penguin, 2015.

Rosenfelder, Mark. *The Language Construction Kit*. Chicago: Yonagu Books, 2010.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *A Secret Vice*. Ed. Dimitra Fimi and Andrew Higgins. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2016. [the essay "A Secret Vice" is also available in Christopher Tolkien, ed. *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp. 198-223.]

Miscellaneous other readings/resources (these are NOT necessarily appropriate or desirable for the critical reading assignment)

Aarne, Antti and Stith Thompson. *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1973. [Antti Aarne's *Verzeichnis der Marchentypen*, translated and expanded by Stith Thompson]

Acker, Paul. "Tolkien's *Sellic Spell*: A Beowulfian Fairy Tale." *Tolkien Studies* 13 (2016): 31-44.

Barnes, Daniel R. "Folktale Morphology and the Structure of *Beowulf*." *Speculum* 45 (1970): 416-34.

Benson, Stephen. *Cycles of Influence: Fiction, Folktale, Theory*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2003. [includes a chapter on "The Role of the Folktale in the Development of Narratology"]

Boberg, Inger M. *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972.

Chance, Jane. *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England*. Revised edition. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001. [pp. 48-73, "The King Under the Mountain: Tolkien's Children's Story"]

Christensen, Bonnie-Jean. "Tolkien's Creative Technique: *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*." *Mythlore* 57 (1989): 4-10. [earlier version in *Orcrist* 7 (1972-73): 16-20; both based on an otherwise unpublished dissertation from USC, a copy of which I do have if you are interested]

Fjalldal, Magnús. *The Long Arm of Coincidence: The Frustrated Connection between Beowulf and Grettis saga*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979.

---. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.

Glenn, Jonathan A. "To Translate a Hero: *The Hobbit* as *Beowulf* Retold." *Lightspill* (n.d.). https://lightspill.com/schola/nando/hobbit_beowulf.html

Hieatt, Constance B. "Envelope Patterns and the Structure of *Beowulf*." *English Studies in Canada* 1 (1975): 249-265.

- Hodge, James L. "The Heroic Profile of Bilbo Baggins." *Florilegium* 8 (1986): 212-221.
- Howlett, David. *British Books in Biblical Style*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997. [pp. 504-40]
- Jameson, Fredric. "The Formalist Projection." *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972, pp. 43-98. [but really just the section on Propp, pp. 64-9; see also Jameson's comments on Lévi-Strauss, pp. 112-20]
- . "Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism." *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981, pp. 103-50.
- Lapidge, Michael. "Beowulf and Perception." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001): 61-97.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "Structure and Form: Reflections on Work by Vladimir Propp." Trans. Monique Layton. *Vladimir Propp, History and Theory of Folklore*. Ed. A. Libermann. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 167-89.
- . "The Structural Study of Myth." *Journal of American Folklore* 68 (1955): 428-44.
- Leyerle, John. "The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37 (1967): 1-17 [reprinted in the Norton edition of Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*]
- Lord, Albert B. "Interlocking Mythic Patterns in *Beowulf*." *Old English Literature in Context: Ten Essays*, ed. John D. Niles. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980, pp. 137-42
- McKinnell, John. *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005. [particularly pp. 126-46, "Þórr and the Bear's Son"]
- Niles, John D. *Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983.
- . "Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*." *Publications of the Modern Language Association [PMLA]* 94.5 (1979): 924-35
- Orchard, Andy. "Grettir and Grendel Again." *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*. 1995. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003, pp. 140-68.
- Parks, Ward. "Ring Structure and Narrative Embedding in Homer and *Beowulf*." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 89 (1988): 237-51.
- Peterson, R. G. "Critical Calculations: Measure and Symmetry in Literature." *Publications of the Modern Language Association [PMLA]* 91.3 (1976), 367-75.
- Pizarro, Joaquín Martínez. "Transformations of the Bear's Son Tale in the Sagas of the Hrafnistumenn." *Arv* 32-33 (1976-77): 263-81.
- Propp, Vladimir. *The Morphology of the Folktale*. 2nd edition. Trans. Laurence Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
- Puhvel, Martin. *Beowulf and the Celtic Tradition*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979.
- Rauer, Christine. *Beowulf and the Dragon*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000. [the basic overview of how dragon fights happen, pp. 52-86]
- Righter-Gould, Ruth. "The Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda: a Structural Analysis." *Scandinavian Studies* 52 (1980): 423-41.
- Rosenberg, Bruce A. "Folktale Morphology and the Structure of *Beowulf*: A Counter-Proposal." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 11 (1975): 199-209.
- Scowcroft, R. Mark. "The Irish Analogues to *Beowulf*." *Speculum* 74 (1999): 22-64.
- Sharma, Manish. "Metalepsis and Monstrosity: The Boundaries of Narrative Structure in *Beowulf*." *Studies in Philology* 102.3 (2005): 247-79.
- Shippey, Thomas A. "The Fairy-Tale Structure of *Beowulf*." *Notes and Queries* 16 (1969): 2-11.
- . *The Road to Middle Earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003. [pp. 55-93, "The Bourgeois Burglar"]
- Stitt, J. Michael. *Beowulf and the Bear's Son: Epic, Saga and Fairytale in Northern Germanic Tradition*. New York: Garland, 1992.
- Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. 1946. Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1977.
- . *Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jestbooks and Local Legends*. 6 vols. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1975. Available online (without vol. 6) at http://www.ualberta.ca/~urban/Projects/English/Motif_Index.htm.

Tolkien, J.R.R. "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics." *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp. 5-48.

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. 3rd ed. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.