

**Writing 4880G (Winter 2020)**  
**Writing Fantasy**  
**SH 3307**  
**Tuesdays 12:30-3:30**

**Instructor: Michael Fox**  
**Office: UC 3429**  
**Office Hours: T 3:30-4:30; W 2:30-3:30**  
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### **Course description and objectives**

*Character wants a good job, plenty of excitement, quest, possible assistance from mentors and companions.* By working through language creation, motifs, and structure, this course will help you create and plan a full-length creative project of fantastic literature.

The premise for this course comes from the observation that *The Hobbit* is a particular retelling of *Beowulf*, which is itself just one extant version of a folktale known as ATU 301, “The Three Stolen Princesses.” As folktales, all three of these “works” adhere to some basic rules regarding their content, structure, and specific motifs. We will work to understand those rules, and we will explore how those rules are bent, broken, or ignored in contemporary fantasy. Because the folktale is a particular kind of genre, we will stick with “high fantasy” in this course, meaning that we will look at works with “secondary worlds” and attempt to create our own secondary worlds, even as the first step in such creation to create that language that shapes that secondary world.

### **Required texts**

Liuzza, R.M., trans. *Beowulf* (with facing page OE), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Peterborough: Broadview, 2013.  
Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*. London: HarperCollins, 2006.

### **\*Optional\* texts (each student will be required to read one of these)**

Joe Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself* and/or *Half a King*  
R. Scott Bakker, *The Darkness that Comes Before*  
Terry Brooks, *The Sword of Shannara*  
Jim Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*  
David Eddings, *Pawn of Prophecy*  
Kate Elliott, *Cold Magic*  
Jennifer Fallon, *Wolfblade*  
Raymond Feist, *Magician[: Apprentice]*  
Terry Goodkind, *Wizard's First Rule*  
Robin Hobb, *Assassin's Apprentice*  
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*  
George R.R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones*

Naomi Novik, *Spinning Silver* [iffy; a Rumpelstiltskin retelling]  
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.  
Pálsson, Hermann and Paul Edwards, trans. *Seven Viking Romances*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.  
[*The Saga of Arrow-Odd*, pp. 25-137]

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

### **Course Requirements and Grade Allocations**

#### **Preliminary tale construction (ungraded; due January 7)**

In the first class, students will complete a small-scale version of the course task as a whole, giving a sense of the arc of the project.

#### **Language creation (15%; due January 28)**

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

#### **Critical Reading (10%; due February 11)**

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

#### **Character Biographies (20%; due March 3)**

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

#### **Oral/Written Report (15%; oral March 3 or March 10; written version due March 17)**

Students will present an oral report on an optional text (listed above), and submit a written version of the report in the next class (maximum 1000 words).

#### **Final Project (40%; due in class, April 7)**

The final project will consist of five parts: 1) a language 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 and provide a suitable reason (*see also the section “Medical Accommodation Policy”* below).

### **Attendance/Participation**

This is a senior-level seminar course. Your attendance is expected at every session of the class.

Students may miss up to three hours (the equivalent of one week of class) of class meetings during the term without explanation. That means that the first three class hours you miss will be recorded as absences but excused provided you don't miss any more. However, if you miss a total of four to nine class hours (the equivalent of up to three full weeks of class), your final grade will be reduced by 10% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 72). If you miss a total of more than nine hours of class meetings (the equivalent of more than three weeks of class meetings) your final grade will be reduced by 15% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 68).

This policy will be waived only for medical or compassionate reasons. If you have good reasons for waiving an absence of one class meeting (e.g. if you've missed three hours, and need or want to miss another class meeting) discuss these reasons with your instructor within one week of that absence. If your absence is extended and prolonged (over one week of continuous non-attendance), then you should discuss it with your academic advisor in your home faculty, who may require documentation. That advisor may then contact all of your instructors. See also: “Medical Accommodation Policy” below.

**Note:** a class meeting missed in order to write a test, exam, or other form of “make-up class” in another course will count as non-attendance, and will attract penalties as defined above if applicable. Instructors at the University of Western Ontario shall not require a student to write a make-up test or similar at times which conflict with that student's other scheduled class times. If you are asked or “required” to do this, you should immediately contact an academic counsellor in your Dean's office. If you elect to miss a class in order to write such a test, that is your choice; your absence will not be excused.

### **Medical Accommodation Policy**

Western has a comprehensive policy covering requests for accommodation by students who are not registered with Student Accessibility Services. All students should review this policy here, under the heading “Accommodation for Illness – Undergraduate Students,” noting the procedures, restrictions, and notice requirements:

[http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page\\_12](http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_12)

In Writing courses, students covered by this policy who are seeking academic consideration must proceed as follows.

**Writing Studies' Basic Policy:** students seeking academic consideration **on medical or any other grounds** for any missed tests/exams, class attendance/participation components, or late or missed assignments must either initiate a Self-Reported Absence (**for a grade component worth up to 30% of their final grade, but excluding final exams scheduled during the exam period**) or apply in person to the Academic Counselling or Undergraduate office of their home Faculty and provide a Student Medical Certificate (SMC) or other supporting documentation as required in accordance with official Western policy (linked above).

Students seeking academic consideration **must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours** after the end of the period covered by either:

- i. A Self-Reported Absence, or
- ii. Academic consideration supported by the Academic Counselling Office.

**Exception:** in Writing Studies courses, a student seeking academic accommodation **on non-medical grounds** for any missed in-class tests/exams, class attendance/participation components, or late or missed assignments **worth less than 10% of a final grade** *may* first consult directly with her or his instructor, who will – in his or her discretion – elect either to make a decision on the request directly or instruct the student to follow the procedures set out in **Writing Studies’ Basic Policy**.

**Please note** that individual instructors will **not under any circumstances** accept or read medical documentation directly offered by a student, whether in support of an application for accommodation on medical grounds or for related reasons (e.g. to explain an absence from class which may result in a grade penalty under an “Attendance” policy in the course). **All medical documentation must** be submitted to the Academic Counselling or Undergraduate office of a student’s home Faculty.

**Students who are or who feel they should be covered under Student Accessibility Services** should review Western policy here:

[http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page\\_10](http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_10)

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

### **Scholastic 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 the following Web site: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.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.”

“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 permission of the Department.

## Schedule [potentially subject to some adjustment!]

**January 7:** Introduction [preliminary tale construction due at the end of class]

**January 14:** Language Creation

**January 21:** Language Creation/*Beowulf*

**January 28:** *Beowulf/Sellic Spell* [language creation assignment due]

**February 4:** Character biographies/*The Hobbit*

**February 11:** Character biographies/*The Hobbit* [critical readings due]

**February 18:** Reading Week

**February 25:** Character biographies, work and review

**March 3:** Reports [character biographies due]

**March 10:** Reports

**March 17:** Mirror World Publishing visit [written version of reports due]

**March 24:** Interviews

**March 31:** “The Great Scene”; draft peer review

**April 7:** Final Project Submission [final projects must be handed in by 3:30pm]

### **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.” *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp. 109-61.

### **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

- 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]
- Andersson, Theodore M. *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967. [see pp. 200-10 for a structural analysis of the saga]
- 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 *Orcrest* 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.
- Fox, Michael. "The Medieval Methods of Patrick DeWitt: *Undermajordomo Minor*." *Medievalism in English Canadian Literature*, ed. Anna Czarnowus and M.J. Toswell. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2020, pp. 189-204.
- 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." *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association* 17 (1991): 13-34
- 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*]
- McKinnell, John. *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005. [particularly pp. 126-46, "Pórr 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.
- 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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> 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](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.