

ENG 225-00: British Fantasy

Fall 2009

Cedar Crest College

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Office hours: MW 11-12, Th 6-7, and by appointment

Texts

The Mabinogion, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (Everyman, 1993)

Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur, Keith Baines, ed. (Signet, 2001)

White, T. H. *The Once and Future King* (Ace, 1987)

Nesbit, Edith. *The Enchanted Castle*. (Puffin, 2004)

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

Clarke, Susannah. *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* (Tor Books, 2006)

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass* (Yearling, 2001)

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Scholastic, 2001)

Other course materials will be made available at the eCompanion site for this class.

Course Description

ENG 225: Topics in British Literature is a three-credit course; it is taught in a combination of lecture and discussion formats. There is no prerequisite for this course. This semester's topic is "British Fantasy."

The popularity of the Harry Potter series and the recent spate of film adaptations of fantasy classics, including *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Golden Compass*, and *Inkspell*, underscore fantasy's appeal to readers and movie-goers and suggest our perennial interest in tales of good and evil, an interest that seems to grow as we face "dark times." In this course, we will read examples of British fantasy from medieval times to the present in order to explore some of the typical features of this sub-genre, trace the sources and evolution of modern fantasy novels, discuss the cultural contexts to which fantasy literature responds, and consider what happens when text is translated to the big screen.

Because fantasy narratives tend to be "writ large," in terms of their length, it will not be possible for us to read most of the works we are considering in their entirety. However, we will discuss a sampling of different works in order to develop a sense of the possibilities. You will have the pleasure of reading the rest of the various series on your own.

Course Objectives

As with all English courses offered by the department, ENG 225 seeks to help students acquire the ability to read and analyze critically works of literature, to acquire a general knowledge of the history of literature in English, and to expand their knowledge and appreciation of their own and other cultures and historical moments. As with other English courses, ENG 225 also seeks to develop students' oral and written communication skills.

ENG 225: British Fantasy seeks specifically to achieve these programmatic goals by helping students 1) to use the language of literary critical discourse to identify significant archetypal and narrative features of fantasy as a sub-genre of the larger category "fiction" and to trace the evolution of these features in British fantasy from the medieval period to the present; 2) to explore how fantasy helped British writers and readers to respond to various cultural changes and intellectual and social developments; 3) to compare a form of "popular fiction" to "more serious" forms of literature and to consider whether and how literature thought of as "escapist" in fact may provide complex insights into the culture in which such literature is produced.

Course Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have gained a greater understanding of the development of contemporary forms of fantasy literature from their pre-modern predecessors. As a result of my contributions as instructor and the opportunity for students to practice via class discussions and written assignments, students will be able to go beyond reading works of literature for the plot and increasingly be able to apply the tools of literary analysis to examine how the elements of a work of literature reinforce its thematic content and reveal its cultural context. Finally, students will be better able to articulate to others, both through oral and written discourse, their understanding and appreciation of popular fictional forms, such as fantasy, and their contribution to the creative expression of human experience.

Assessment of Course Outcomes

The successfulness of ENG 225: British Fantasy in achieving its outcomes will be assessed, in part, by the ability of students to complete course assignments successfully. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the assigned texts and their competency in applying the tools of literary analysis through their performance in class discussions and on the midterm and final exam. They will demonstrate their ability to explore the possibilities for interpretation of assigned texts and effectively communicate their insights, both orally and in writing, through class discussions and through a self-designed formal project.

Course Requirements

The requirements for this course are as follows:

1. Midterm short response exam, worth 20% of the final grade
2. Final essay exam, worth 30% of the final grade
3. Attendance and participation, worth 10% of the final grade. You are expected to come to class fully prepared to engage in lively discussion of our course materials. Active and consistent participation, not just bodily presence, is required for full credit. If you attend every class but remain silent, you will have earned a "B-" for this portion of your grade. As far as attendance goes, you may miss two classes without penalty; thereafter, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade from your attendance/participation grade for each additional class missed (i.e., an A would become an A-, etc.). I will have a sign-in sheet at the front of the class—it is your responsibility to sign the sheet at either the beginning or end of class to record your attendance.
4. Online journal, worth 15% of the final grade. Beginning on September 1st, you will contribute “before” and “after” responses to your encounters with each assigned fantasy

text to our eCompanion site. Write a journal entry (a generous paragraph to a page in length) before coming to class the first day we are discussing the work. Write a second journal entry after we have finished discussion of that work—but before you write about our next work (Because eCompanion records the date of entries, I will easily be able to check on whether you are posting entries faithfully as we go along). By the end of the semester, you will have contributed 16 journal entries. The purpose of this assignment is to help you to think about what you're reading, to make connections and share insights that might otherwise go unspoken, and to record thoughts that might be helpful to you as you prepare for exams and your self-designed project. I will review the class's contributions each week and will use some of the observations in your journals to help guide our discussions. Due to the size of our class, however, I will most likely NOT comment individually on all journals on a regular basis, unless the spirit moves me (i.e., you inspire me to do so!). You may speak with me at any time, however, about your journal entries or my evaluation criteria for this assignment—also see the instructions on eCompanion detailing my expectations for your journal and suggested subjects for entries.

5. Self-designed project, worth 25% of the final grade. This project may take one of the following forms:

--a comparison/contrast paper (5-7 pages) focusing on two works' treatment of a common theme used by fantasy writers. Ideally, you will compare an earlier and a more modern treatment of the theme.

--a comparison/contrast paper (5-7 pages) exploring the way a single scene in either *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Golden Compass*, or *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* is made significant in text and film.

--a creative project that responds to (or "translates") a fantasy theme, character archetype, or plot. This project may take the form of a short story "re-vision" (fan fic is also acceptable), a poetry cycle (not a single poem), or a visual arts project. You may wish to brainstorm your project with me. I will expect the project explicitly and intentionally to apply course concepts. You will also be required to provide a 2 page "artist's statement" that addresses the way(s) in which your project, in its conception and execution, was connected to ideas and narratives encountered in the course.

I will give you more details about the self-designed project as the semester goes along.

Course Policies

Please see attached document for specific information regarding attendance and my policies regarding absences, classroom protocol and the Cedar Crest Honor Code, late work, make-up work, academic dishonesty and plagiarism, disability accommodations, and class cancellations.

Course Schedule

Aug 25 T Introduction to the course. Discussion: What constitutes "fantasy"? What is its appeal as a genre? Exploration of the visual dimension of fantasy, including illustration and film

- Aug 27 Th Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," from *Tree and Leaf* (accessible at the eCompanion course site). Discussion: critical definitions of fantasy; critical appraisals of the genre.
- Sep 1 T From *The Mabinogion*, "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed" (3-20)
- Sep 3 Th From *The Mabinogion*, "Culhwch and Olwen" (80-113)
- Sep 8 T From *Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur*, "The Tale of King Arthur" (21-26—to "The most formidable of King Arthur's enemies"; 36-43), and "The Tale of Launcelot du Lake" (118-136)
- Sep 10 Th From *Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur*, "The Tale of Sir Gareth" (137-169), and "Le Morte d'Arthur" (472-507)
- Sep 15 T White, *The Once and Future King*, "The Sword in the Stone" (7-209)
- Sep 17 Th White, "The Sword in the Stone," discussion continued
- Sep 22 T White, *The Once and Future King*, "The Queen of Air and Darkness" (211-312)
- Sep 24 Th White, *The Once and Future King*, "The Candle in the Wind" (515-639)
- Sep 29 T Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, chapters 1-8
- Oct 1 Th Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, chapters 9-12
- Oct 6 T **Midterm exam**
- Oct 8 Th Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book One, Chs. 1-5
- FALL BREAK
- Oct 15 Th Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book One, Chs. 6-11
- Oct 20 T Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book One, Ch. 12 through Book Two, Ch. 4
- Oct 22 Th No class: Presidential inaugural activities—finish your Tolkien and begin your Clarke!
- Oct 27 T Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, complete
- Oct 29 Th Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, Vol. 1, Chs. 1-22 (3-261)
- Nov 3 T Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, from Vol. 2, Chs. 23-36 (265-510)
Submit plan for self-designed project
- Nov 5 Th Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, from Vol. 2, Chs. 37-44 (511-633)
- Nov 10 T Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, from Vol. 3, Chs. 45-46 (637-661), Ch.

48 (681-700), Ch. 50 (709-731), Ch. 57 (825-830), Ch. 61-64 (883-939), Chs. 66-68 (952-992)

- Nov 12 Th Pullman, *The Golden Compass*, Chs. 1-12
- Nov 17 T Pullman, *The Golden Compass*, Chs. 13-23
- Nov 19 Th No class meeting: use the time to work on your self-designed project
- Nov 24 T Discussion: The Harry Potter phenenomon. Begin reading (or rereading) your Rowling!
Self-designed project due

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- Dec 1 T Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Chs. 1-13
- Dec 3 Th Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, complete. Discussion and wrap-up to the course
- Dec 4 F The class is invited to a screening and discussion of the film version of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in Miller 33, starting at 6:30 p.m.. Since this activity will take place outside of our regularly scheduled class time, your attendance is encouraged, but not required.

Final exam time will be scheduled by the Registrar