

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR: MAGIC, MONSTERS, AND MEDIEVALISM

Fall 2020

Howard Hall 0212

MW 8:00 – 9:15

Instructor: Dr. Gabriel Ford
Section: 06
Email: gabriel.ford@drake.edu
Office: Old Main 208
Course website: moodle.converse.edu

Office hours
Remotely (Zoom) until further notice
Monday: 3:00 – 4:30
Tuesday: 10:00 – 11:30
Thursday 3:00 – 4:30

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- ❖ Understand medievalizing speculative fiction from a range of historical periods.
- ❖ Interpret medievalist tropes as deployed in post-medieval genre literatures (e.g. fantasy, weird tale, or fairy tale).
- ❖ Recognize the varieties of cultural work to which speculative fiction can be put.
- ❖ Develop research skills in support of academic argumentation specific to the course topic.
- ❖ Produce lucid arguments in academic prose according to the conventions and forms of academic writing.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Medievalism—the use of medieval images, motifs, narrative traditions, and social configurations in post-medieval texts—pervades our current pop cultural moment. *Game of Thrones*—until very recently—anchored a major network. Peter Jackson’s two Middle-earth trilogies are watched and re-watched by adoring fans. If anything, J.R.R. Tolkien’s celebrated and genre-defining fantasy novels inspire more devotion even than the film adaptations. Even J.K. Rowling’s unprecedentedly popular *Harry Potter* series regularly world-builds from medieval materials. This course takes its cue from this cultural prominence of medievalism and sets its task as the exploration of the development and deployment of medieval tropes in post-medieval fiction. How did medievalist types—wizard, dragon, swordsman, enchanted ring, wicked king, damsel in distress—make their way into our own imagination? Why do they resonate so powerfully with so many? The course will work towards answering these and like questions as it proceeds in reverse chronology, backwards from fantasy literature published within the last twelve months and into the deep past. It will proceed through influential twentieth-century fantasy novels, nineteenth-century ideological medievalism, eighteenth-century pseudo-philological fiction, and the Middle Ages’ own use of fantasy modes. After doing so, it will return to twenty-first century fantasy literature to apply our retrospective work to the present moment and its medievalisms. We will focus particularly on the uses of the monstrous and the magical, not just because they are fun and interesting (they are), but also because these kinds of distortions often open narrative and imaginative possibilities for world-building and social commentary. Students are encouraged to develop projects that interpret the medievalisms of other pop cultural genres and forms: comics, genre fiction, television, film, tabletop games, and video games.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Eco, Umberto. *Baudolino*.
Jemisin, N.K. *The City We Became*.
Miéville, China. *This Census-Taker*.
Peake, Mervyn. *Titus Groan*.
Selected electronic texts posted to Blackboard.

COMPONENTS OF THE FINAL GRADE

Response Papers	25%
Argumentative Essays	30%
Research Paper	20%
Participation	15%
Small-group project	10%

GRADING SCALE

A	93.00 and up	B-	80.00-82.99	D+	67.00-69.99
A-	90.00-92.99	C+	77.00-79.99	D	63.00-66.99
B+	87.00-89.99	C	73.00-76.99	D-	60.00-62.99
B	83.00-86.99	C-	70.00-72.99	F	0 – 59.99

Drake University employs a 4-pt plus/minus scale for all final grades (A,B,C,D). This policy may be viewed here, [Drake Grades and GPA](#). Final grade points are not rounded but marked according to their exact point bracket.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

RESPONSE PAPERS

At the end of each week, each student will submit a response paper that engages one reading from the preceding week. These papers should be argumentative rather than descriptive. I'll have more to say on that later, but the essence of argumentation in humanities is the demonstration of the need for interpretation and the response to that need with textual evidence.

ESSAYS

You will be responsible for producing 3 argumentative essays of approximately three to five pages during the semester. Each should engage secondary scholarship from our course readings and build on the writing techniques we develop and practice in our writing lessons.

RESEARCH PAPER

At the conclusion of the semester, you will produce a research paper that builds on the methods and structures we have practiced in the response papers and the essays. In preparation for the research paper, you will move beyond the secondary sources we have read together in class and will conduct original research on your chosen topic using resources from the Cowles Library. Of course, I will be happy to help you as you work through the research phase of your work.

COURSE POLICIES

EXPECTATIONS FOR ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Consistent class attendance is expected for all of us. Students should notify the instructor as far in advance of any excused absences as possible. Unless an absence falls into this “excused” category, we need you here with us for every session. Successful completion of formal assessments will require an understanding of information, methods, and assignment guidelines presented in class. More importantly, the success of this course depends on the spirited engagement of the full learning community that is this class; fulfillment of the student’s obligation to this learning community involves regular class attendance, careful reading of all assigned materials, thorough and consistent preparation, and informed participation in class discussion and activities. Our collective reliance on you is the reason that we have a participation grade. Informal presentations, turns as discussion leader, reading quizzes, and the like may also factor in this grade at the discretion of the instructor. Finally, more than one unexcused absence may reduce your final grade beyond the detrimental effects such absences may have on formal assignments or participation grades up to 3 points for each absence beyond the second one.

Covid-19 / Coronavirus

- **Self-Monitoring and Experiencing symptoms:** Please carefully monitor your own health and wellbeing throughout the semester, including frequently taking your own temperature. If you experience [Covid-19 symptoms](#) or a fever, even if you do not test positive, *please* alert the dean of students’ office at dos@drake.edu
- **Instructions for Students who Test Positive:** If you test positive for Covid-19 or have been exposed and need to isolate yourself, please send an email to dos@drake.edu from your Drake email account and include your full name and student ID along with information about your situation. College and schools’ deans’ offices will then contact your professors, who will work with you to provide fully virtual learning opportunities during your quarantine and/or recovery. If possible, however, please also alert me directly and I will work with you to help you make the transition to suit your new situation.
- **You do not need to disclose medical information directly to me.**

POLICIES ON THE SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Unless specified in the assignment sheet, all essays and projects are to be submitted electronically over Blackboard. Formatting is important to me. Please use the Times New Roman typeface in 12 point and format your pages in double spacing with 1” margins. It is not my policy to deduct points for late work, but that policy will be revised if it is judged to be harming the learning community more than it is helping it.

Changes to the Syllabus

In order to promote course learning objectives, the standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified in the course of the semester by the instructor. Notice of such changes will be by announcement in class and posted on our online class page.

Policy on Materials from the Course

No part of this syllabus or any of the course handouts or materials should be shared or uploaded to third-party sites without explicit permission from the professor.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Accommodation

- Services Information: [Drake Student Disability Services](#)
- Student Disability Services Office: Michelle Laughlin, SDS Coordinator, 515-271-1835 and michelle.laughlin@drake.edu
- Drake and your instructor are committed to full and equal access to our educational programs. If you have a disability and need academic accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services early in the semester. Note: accommodations are made from instructor notification forward and are not applied retroactively.

Academic Integrity

Integrity and honesty in academic work are expected in this course. **Any student found to be submitting uncredited work as their own may receive a failing grade (F) for the assignment and/or course.** Please read and plan to abide by the Drake University policies linked above and excerpted in part below.

- Academic dishonesty is an all encompassing term involving any activity that seeks to gain credit for work one has not done or to deliberately damage or destroy the work of others. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - **Plagiarism** - The misrepresentation, either by intent or negligence, of another's ideas, phrases, discourse, or works as one's own.
 - **Cheating** - the act, or attempted act, of giving or obtaining aid and/or information by illicit means in meeting any academic requirements, including examinations.
 - **Fabrication** - intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic sense in any academic exercise.
 - **Facilitating Academic Dishonesty** - intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.
- Policy Information: [Drake Policy on Academic Dishonesty](#)
- Office: 515-271-2982 and titleix@drake.edu

Title IX and Confidential Mandatory Reporting

Please note that your instructor is a mandatory reporter of any information shared with her about these concerns. If you prefer confidential assistance, several options are noted above under "Disclosure" or may be asked about.

- All students are entitled to an environment free of all forms of misconduct, abuse, and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. As noted in the university Title IX policy site, The University's Title IX Coordinator responds to concerns of:
 - Sex-based discrimination (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation)
 - Interpersonal misconduct (including domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking)
 - Retaliation against anyone seeking assistance, filing a complaint, or participating in an investigation of sexual or interpersonal misconduct
- Title IX Policy Information: [Drake Title IV Office](#)
- Guide: [Resources and Reporting for Sexual and Interpersonal Misconduct](#)
- Disclosure: [Confidential and Mandatory Disclosure Options](#)
- Title IX Office: 515-271-2982 and titleix@drake.edu

Date	Topics	Preparations
Week 1 (remote): Course Introduction; Monstrosity		
M 8/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course introduction 	None
W 8/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to monstrosity • The genre of fantasy literature • “genre fiction” and “literary fiction” • Worldbuilding and speculative fiction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asma, from <i>On Monsters</i> (Blackboard) • “What is Fantasy Literature?” lecture (Blackboard) • Lang, from the <i>Fairy Books</i> (Blackboard)
Response papers are due Friday, 8/28 by 5pm.		
Week 2: Monster Theory; <i>The City We Became</i>		
M 8/31 or	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The City We Became</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohen, “Monster Culture” (Blackboard)
W 9/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monster theory • Using paragraphs to argue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Monster Theory: Part 1” lecture (Blackboard) • “Jemisin Author Bio” lecture (Blackboard) • Jemisin, chapters 1 to 4
Response papers are due Friday, 9/4 by 5pm.		
Week 3: <i>The City We Became</i> continued		
Note: Labor Day is a university holiday. In order to balance the week, we will have to return to Zoom for this week and all come together on Wednesday morning.		
W - 9/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monster theory, continued • Urban fantasy and <i>The City We Became</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Monster Theory: Part 2” lecture (Blackboard) • “Urban Fantasy” lecture (Blackboard) • Jemisin, chapters 5 to 9
Response papers are due Friday, 9/11 by 5pm.		
Week 4: <i>The City We Became</i> conclusion		
M 9/14 or W 9/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The politics of monstrosity • Is <i>The City We Became</i> an allegory? • Introductory paragraphs for academic writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bould and Vint, “Political Readings” (Blackboard) • “The Hugo Awards Controversy, 2013-2017” lecture (Blackboard) • “Allegory” lecture (Blackboard) • Jemisin, chapter 10 to “Coda” (i.e. the rest of the book)

Full Essay #1 is due by Monday, 9/21 at 8am.		
Week 5: Magic as Speculative Possibility		
M 9/21 or W 9/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why magic? • Magic and worldbuilding • “The Faery Handbag” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Magic as Speculative Possibility” lecture (Blackboard) • Link, “The Faery Handbag” (Blackboard)
Response papers are due Friday, 9/25 by 5pm.		
Week 6: Magic and Mystery		
M 9/28 or W 9/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a fairy tale? • When is a fairy tale? • <i>This Census-Taker</i> • Stylistics and academic writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Fantasy and Fairy Tale” lecture (Blackboard) • Traditional fairy tales (Blackboard) • “Miéville Author Bio” lecture (Blackboard) • Miéville, <i>This Census-Taker</i>, first half
Response papers are due Friday, 10/2 by 5pm.		
Week 7: <i>This Census-Taker</i> as Fairy Tale		
M 10/5 or W 10/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairy tale traditions and adaptation • <i>This Census-Taker</i> • Quotation framing and source engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Fairy Tale and Postmodern Fairy Tale” lecture (Blackboard) • Cunningham, from <i>A Wild Swan</i> (Blackboard) • Miéville, <i>This Census-Taker</i>, second half
Essay #2 is due by Monday, 10/12 at 8am.		
Week 8: Medievalism and Speculative Fiction		
M 10/12 or W 10/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is “medievalism”? • Fantasy and medievalism • Peake’s <i>Titus Groan</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A Brief History of Medievalism” lecture (Blackboard) • Eco, “Dreaming of the Middle Ages” (Blackboard) • “Peake Author Bio” lecture (Blackboard) • Peake, “The Hall of the Bright Carvings” to “At the Prunesquallors” (pp. 9-140 in my edition)
Response papers are due by Friday, 10/16 at 5pm.		
Week 9: Language and Worldbuilding		
M 10/19 or W 10/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philology • Language and worldbuilding • Peake’s <i>Titus Groan</i> • Arguing with topic sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Le Guin, “From Elfland to Poughkeepsie” (Blackboard) • “Language and Fantasy Worldbuilding” lecture (Blackboard) • Tolkien, excerpts (Blackboard) • Peake, “A Gift of the Gab” to “Farewell” (pp. 140-282 in my edition)

Response papers are due by Friday, October 23 at 5pm.		
Week 10: Gothic Medievalism		
M 10/26 or W 10/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gothic literature • Nostalgia and fear • Peake wrap-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mishra, “The Gothic Sublime” (Blackboard) • “Gothic Medievalism” lecture (Blackboard) • “Medievalism, Nostalgia, and the Irredeemable Past” lecture (Blackboard) • Peake, “Early One Morning” to “Mr Rottcodd Again” (i.e. through the end of the book)
Essay #3 is due by Monday, 11/2 at 8am.		
Week 11: Eco’s Middle Ages		
M 11/2 or W 11/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Baudolino</i> • How does one end an essay? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Eco Author Bio” lecture (Blackboard) • Eco, <i>Baudolino</i>, chapters 1 to 13
Week 12: How Does Medievalism Work?		
M 11/9 or W 11/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third Crusade • Relics • <i>Baudolino</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Medieval Background” lecture (Blackboard) • “Conducting Academic Research” lecture (Blackboard) • Eco, <i>Baudolino</i>, chapters 14 to 30
Week 13: Medieval Marvels		
M 11/16 or W 11/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prester John and the Marvels of the East • <i>Baudolino</i>’s conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Marvels of the East” lecture (Blackboard) • Mercer, “Truth and Lies in Umberto Eco’s <i>Baudolino</i>” • Eco, <i>Baudolino</i>, chapters 31 to 40
Annotation assignment is due by Friday, 11/20 at 5pm.		
Thanksgiving Week		
We won’t hold classes between Monday, 11/23 and Friday, 11/27		
Week 14 (remote): Individual Meetings for Research Essay & Small-Group Presentations Over Zoom		
Schedule a Zoom meeting that is to take place before Wednesday, 12/2 at 5pm.		
Finals Week (remote)		
Research Essay is due by Friday, 12/11 at noon.		