Course Description

Hello and welcome to English 208A! The purpose of this course is to explore the myriad forms of a widespread phenomenon of novels, books, games, films, and art which deals with fantasy. While fantasy is broadly understood as a form of genre literature with attendant themes, tropes, canons, and archetypes, this course involves exploring not only these, but its origins in folklore as well, its influences from various peoples, its social and psychological impacts, and its implications for society today. By the end of this class, you will hopefully have a better understanding of the forces at play in this fascinating movement, and of the purpose it ultimately serves for individuals. To do so, we will pursue four different aspects of fantasy’s evolution, beginning with its otherworldly roots in folklore and superstition; to its classical use as religious morality tale; the modern conception of fantasy as dreams and as latent desires made manifest; and finally as postmodern ideal-imaginary in which it takes on many different forms. Ultimately, this course has two primary learning objectives:

1) Fantasy is about the “Other” World: From Hades to Niflheim, and from Narnia to the Feywild, fantasy concerns itself with worlds in which the familiar are rendered unfamiliar, and that which is known is turned on its head. They bear many similarities to our own world, but the ‘Otherworld’ is always a concept understood in relation to our own.

2) Fantasy is about Order. From the earliest days to today, the defining characteristic of fantasy is an imagined Otherworld in which otherwise normal people, places, and objects are subject to a higher cosmology in which the secrets of the world, however ‘otherworldly’ they are presented to be, provide a framework by which all the mysteries of our own world might be answered and all dread abolished by that higher understanding.

While much of what I’ve just described will be unfamiliar to many of you, do not be apprehensive—it is okay. It is my goal that this course be both challenging and rewarding for you. Rest assured, I want you to succeed, and I will be here to talk with you and help you understand as much as I can if you need it!

Expectations and Course Format

Success in this course will involve active engagement, both with myself and with your group mates. The bulk of the time you will be expected to put into this class will be in reading fantasy texts, thinking critically about each of them while you do, and writing about them. Each week, students are expected to have read the relevant text for that week, consulted the relevant week’s page in the LEARN site and read any materials provided there (if there is any, they will be short, I assure you), and to listen to lecture and respond to questions in class about those texts you have read, engaging in discussion with your fellow classmates as well.

Our Tuesday class is going to be mainly concerned with discussion about the text we have read, and our Thursday classes will take on more of a seminar format with a period of open discussion and reflection followed by collaborative work with regular student groups in which you will answer several
discussion questions I will provide for you. This work is critical to your success in that it will offer you an opportunity to demonstrate the skills you have developed that week in relation to the text you will be considering.

The weekly work we do will feed into the major assignments for this course, which involve a formal Review Essay and a Final Project (to be each discussed below).

**Mark Breakdown**

Your grade breakdown is as follows:

**Class Engagement - 20%**
**Group Discussion Questions (Due Weekly) - 25%**
**Review Essay (Due February 26th) - 25%**
**Final Project (Due March 30th) - 30%**

**Assignments**

In the following section, I will attempt to break down each assignment as clearly and comprehensively as I can. If you have questions, please don’t hesitate to voice them!

**1) Class Engagement:** Staying involved is critical to success in this class. This grade is a measure of your engagement. It is comprised of three components, as follows: **Attendance - 4%, Engagement during class time - 8%, and Engagement with group members - 8%**. You will be given a holistic grade halfway through the course, with brief feedback, as well as a final grade at the end of the course. I will be looking for students to be actively listening, asking questions, asking for clarification either in class or during office time, consistent and active participation in your group discussions and to have that reflected in the answers you provide collaboratively to discussion questions on the LEARN system. If you have any questions or concerns about class engagement, please don’t hesitate to ask me directly.

**2) Discussion Questions:** Each week I will present three discussion questions which I will upload to LEARN for you based on the discussions we have had in class and the texts we have discussed. In our Thursday class, you and your group will work together to answer those questions in complete sentences and as comprehensively as you can, whereupon you will post them to the relevant week’s discussion group in the LEARN system. Each answer should be 150-200 words. If your group’s answer requires justification, then provide it. If you think it doesn’t, tell me why! These questions are designed to encourage open-ended reflection—they will not necessarily have a correct answer. They are an opportunity to consider and explore the ramifications of what we have looked at in light of the theory we have been considering, and provide additional context with which you might plan and execute your assignments. Questions will be provided on Thursdays before class time, and are due by the end of the following Friday. For each answer, you will each receive a mark out of five, and as will swiftly become a theme in this course, like any good fellowship, you will depend on one another for success!

**3) Review Essay:** In the first few weeks of class, you will each choose a fantasy novel you would like to read, study, and write about in a formal Review Essay. Each student will propose a novel they would like to write about that is not one of our required readings, and each novel may be chosen only once. That means that no two students can double up on any one novel! For this consideration, series are to be considered as a whole—Meaning that only one student might write on *The Lord of the Rings*, not three (one for each book in the series). The essay is to be 1500 words in length, and must reflect upon at least two of the broader themes we have discussed in class, with reference to at least two of the texts we have
studied. I am looking for something more than a thesis saying “this book is good/bad” or that it “is very effective”. One sign that you are on the right track is that the thesis you develop makes a claim that demonstrates your opinion without explicitly stating so. For example, I might argue that “George R. R. Martin’s *A Game of Thrones* is an excellent book,” or I could argue that “*A Game of Thrones* subverts typical themes of heroism by subtly indicating heroic qualities in Eddard Stark, only to dispense with him at the end of the novel, leaving readers bereft.” The latter of these is a justified and arguable perspective which *signify* quality, and that is what I’m looking for. Success in this assignment will require that you demonstrate A) an understanding of how your chosen text functions in the broader field of fantasy writing, B) reading comprehension, and C) your adhering to a formalized and cohesive format.

Some examples of the kinds of review essays I am looking for:

*Discworld*

*Conan*

*Note: I would be looking for something a *touch* more formal than either of these, but the likes of those are decidedly less easily linked to in a syllabus.*

*4) Final RPG Project:* As with many fantasy narratives you (will) have encountered in this course, exploring the Otherworld will be undertaken by a hero’s “progress” or journey. While that protagonist hero is central to the plot of many fantasy narratives, they are often simply the vector by which we come to know the world in which the tale takes place and takes part in the unfolding of that world’s fate. There are few better modes by which we might come to understand fantasy and the role it plays in our lives and society than through enacting that progress ourselves via *Role-Playing Games* (or RPGs). In this final assignment, you and your group will,

A) each read the required book for a tabletop RPG, chosen as a group from a list that I will provide. Each group will then play five sessions of that game together, each comprising at least two hours. Your goal will be to *finish a simple* adventure.

B) You will then reflect upon that play experience and submit for me a two-part written component, the first of which is a *Chronicle*. In 1500 words, the Chronicle will be a short story you write in the style of at least one of the texts we have studied in this class, and which cohesively details the events in the game you played with your group mates as if it were an anticipated narrative—i.e., as if you authored each players’ actions in a novel rather than in a game.

C) You will then write a 1000-word *Reflection*, in which you reflect in general upon the experience of play, the nature of the narrative you have just composed, how and why you integrated the style of the authors you drew upon to write it, what work you did to fit the incidental actions of the players into a coherent and meaningful narrative, and what themes you integrated or witnessed take place in the experience of play and in the writing of the Chronicle.

D) Each of these components will be packaged into one physical product you then give to me at the end of class! Consider the different ways you might present it, including multiple kinds of media you might use to turn it into an Edda, a Scroll, a weatherworn journal, and all kinds of additional material such as sketches, images, songs, or anything else you might think of. I encourage you to get as creative with it as you like! Bonus marks are available to the most creative of you, so don’t hesitate to be adventurous! (So to speak.)

This might appear to be a daunting assignment, but it is meant to be as challenging as it is fun and as comprehensive (in terms of what we will have studied) as it is creative. These are independent projects, but they are the products of collaborative effort to create and explore a world of peoples and themes together. Success in this assignment therefore hinges upon playing and working collaboratively to provide
each other with the material for each individual’s work. The assignment will require that you A) write cohesively and clearly according to a plan you have developed with B) a thorough understanding of the themes and texts we have discussed in class. You will also be assessed based on C) your ability to synthesize your experience with your group into a cohesive narrative. Don’t forget above all else: be engaged! The more investment you demonstrate with this assignment, the better your grade will be!

Note: While each of you is expected to have read the relevant RPG rulebook, one of you will be required to take on the role of Games Master (GM) and build the story and world for the players to explore. While your elected GM might not have to build and play a character, the role requires a little more reading and work to be done in order to MC each play session, and this will be taken greatly into consideration for that student’s participation and Final Project grades. I would recommend only a highly invested, enthusiastic, and motivated individual take on this role!

LEARN

The class LEARN page will include notes for the coming week’s class on the Content page for that week. Any additional material will be provided (if any), along with some of the basic concepts we will be discussing. It will also contain the assignment dropbox for the Review Essay. Do your best to check it each week before class—it is also where I will be posting announcements (such as if class is cancelled for any reason!), so keep in touch!

Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Readings/Games</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Jan 7th, 9th</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Introductions, Syllabus, Assigning Groups, Texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>2: Jan 14th, 16th</td>
<td>Eddas and Epics</td>
<td>The Epic of Gilgamesh</td>
<td>Discussion Questions, Due Friday, Jan 17th</td>
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<td>3: Jan 21st, 23rd</td>
<td>Hoplites and Heroes</td>
<td>Homer, The Odyssey</td>
<td>Discussion Questions, Due Friday, Jan 24th</td>
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<td>4: Jan 28th, 30th</td>
<td>Monsters and Madness</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Discussion Questions, Due Friday, Jan. 31st</td>
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<td>5: Feb. 4th, 6th</td>
<td>Shouting Scholars</td>
<td>The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim</td>
<td>Discussion Questions, Due Friday, Feb. 7th</td>
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<td>Week</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Feb. 11th, 13th</td>
<td>Fairies and Fellowships</td>
<td>C. S. Lewis</td>
<td>The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Feb. 18th, 20th</td>
<td>Reading Break</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Feb. 25th, 27th</td>
<td>Reading Break</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>March 3rd, 5th</td>
<td>Dryads and Dreaming</td>
<td>William Shakespeare</td>
<td>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>March 10th, 12th</td>
<td>Tentacles and Torment</td>
<td>H. P. Lovecraft</td>
<td>The Call of Cthulu</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>March 17th, 19th</td>
<td>Humble Hobbits</td>
<td>J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>The Hobbit</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>March 24th, 26th</td>
<td>Dungeons and Dragons</td>
<td>R. A. Salvatore</td>
<td>The Crystal Shard</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>March 31st</td>
<td>Messiahs and Modernity</td>
<td>J. K. Rowling</td>
<td>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone</td>
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<td>Chance and Anarchy</td>
<td>George R. R. Martin</td>
<td>A Game of Thrones</td>
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Class Policies

Formatting

Each of your written assignments should be double-spaced, 11-pt font. Assignments should have page numbers (pagination) in the top right of the page. They should also have a byline, with no title page. (Though the Final RPG Project may absolutely have one, but *must* have the byline represented on the cover in some way—again, you can be creative, so long as the information is clear enough that I can easily sort them!) That means that your first page should have a small, single-spaced series of lines in the top left corner that look like this:

ENGL-294
Jean Valjean
#00024601
Review Essay - Religiosity in C. S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia
22 February 2020

So that’s the course code, followed by your name, your student number, the title, and the date. When the essay then begins, it’s double spaced and in proper paragraph structure. Files should be .DOCX format, and the file names must be written as follows:

Valjean, Jean - Review Essay.DOCX

That’s last name, comma, first name, space-dash-space, assignment name. These might not seem like important criteria, but they help me tremendously in keeping you all accounted for and gets assignments back to you quite a bit faster! If you have multiple versions submitted in the online dropbox I will default to marking the latest file to have been submitted. Note that any late marks will apply based on that latest submission, however! Please do your best to make sure it is done correctly before handing it in rather than make small corrections and upload later and later versions of your assignment. If there are significant revisions that in hindsight you felt were required in the days following its submission, feel free to write me and make mention of them—we can make arrangements.

Attendance

Attendance is always considered mandatory, and particularly important when it comes to playing RPGs. RPG parties can find themselves short-handed should a player (or GM!) not be in attendance. Please remember, if your absence forces the rest of your play group to remain idle during an in-class play session, this will have serious consequences for your whole play group! I will do everything I can to accommodate absences if I have sufficient advance notice given the nature of the absence, of course.

Late Assignments

Where it is not specified otherwise, assignments are due at 11:00 PM on the due date listed. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 5% per day. Extensions may be discussed with me with reasonable advance notice.

Contact
I am always available to field any questions or concerns you may have through email or during arranged office meetings. I maintain a personal schedule policy about emails. I generally only check them between the hours of 9 AM - 5 PM, Monday to Friday. Over the weekend and holidays, I generally do not check my work email. This is a policy I maintain based on Marxist philosophical praxis. In fact, I encourage you to mediate your working hours in the same way, so you are not *effectively* always working, which is what constant attention to email implicitly demands. I believe it is unreasonable to ask this of you. This may result in your experiencing some issue with your assignments, class, etc. that occur during times that I am not available. In those instances, go ahead and email me, and I will do my best to accommodate you. Do your best to respect deadlines, and beyond that I will do all I can to help. This policy will not impede your ability to succeed in this course—as I have said before, I want you to succeed and I will do everything I can to accommodate your needs, so please do not hesitate to ask!

**Marking and Feedback**

Assignments in the arts do not often possess a concretized idea of a perfect score in which you have done all that is theoretically required, and made no errors. We approach grading assignments with clear criteria, but it can rarely be easily said that a student has embodied them perfectly. This means that as we grade, we build upward, observing what you've accomplished and assign a grade as to how much and how well you have developed that which you have been writing. This means that in English classes, an 85% on a paper is an excellent grade, and a 95% is almost unheard of.

Assignments will be marked and returned to you as soon as possible, with a few end comments. Where students have a great deal in common as regards to things they have done well or had some difficulty with, I will attempt to give general feedback to the class as a whole as well via the LEARN system. If after that you would like more feedback on your individual assignments, please feel free to discuss the assignment with me during office time—I am more than happy to elaborate. This policy is entirely personal, in that I would otherwise write you extensive feedback that has at times been *longer* than the submitted essay, which is exhausting—where students are not always inclined to read feedback, it is better for me to provide it in person on a case-by-case basis!

**University Policies**

**Cross-listed courses**

Please note that a cross-listed course will count in all respective averages no matter under which rubric it has been taken. For example, a PHIL/PSCI cross-list will count in a Philosophy major average, even if the course was taken under the Political Science rubric.

**Academic Integrity**

*Academic Integrity:* In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage](#) for more information.

*Discipline:* A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. Check the [Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the
Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 - Student Appeals.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Services office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

Mental Health Support

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health support if they are needed.

On Campus

• Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 ext. 32655

• MATES: one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services

• Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

• Good2Talk: Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454

• Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-4300 ext. 6880

• Here 24/7: Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247

• OK2BME: set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

Full details can be found online on the Faculty of Arts website
Download UWaterloo and regional mental health resources (PDF)
Download the WatSafe app to your phone to quickly access mental health support information

Territorial Acknowledgement
We acknowledge that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.

For more information about the purpose of territorial acknowledgements, please see the CAUT Guide to Acknowledging Traditional Territory (PDF).

On a personal note, while I think on balance it is better to include such statements than it is to keep silent about critical Canadian history, particularly for the sake of those students that might otherwise be unaware of the perpetual cultural tensions in this country, it is also possible that, for the above peoples, this statement might be adding insult to injury. I’m afraid I have no resolution to offer, other than to acknowledge this Catch-22, and to encourage that students seek out more information on the ongoing epidemic of MMIW in particular for themselves.

*Academic freedom at the University of Waterloo*

Policy 33, Ethical Behaviour states, as one of its general principles (Section 1), “The University supports academic freedom for all members of the University community. Academic freedom carries with it the duty to use that freedom in a manner consistent with the scholarly obligation to base teaching and research on an honest and ethical quest for knowledge. In the context of this policy, 'academic freedom' refers to academic activities, including teaching and scholarship, as is articulated in the principles set out in the Memorandum of Agreement between the FAUW and the University of Waterloo, 1998 (Article 6). The academic environment which fosters free debate may from time to time include the presentation or discussion of unpopular opinions or controversial material. Such material shall be dealt with as openly, respectfully and sensitively as possible.” This definition is repeated in Policies 70 and 71, and in the Memorandum of Agreement, Section 6.

*About Me*

I am a fifth-year PhD candidate at the University of Waterloo. I have been a TA and adopted various roles in teaching for eight years now, and have taught several courses in Shakespeare, Business Communications, Game Studies, and introductory English Writing as well. My areas of study include Discourse and Text Analysis, Games, Folklore, Shakespeare, and American Literature. I am thirty-five years old (or at least will be shortly), and am native to Southern Ontario, born and raised in Whitby, having done my undergraduate degree and my MA at Trent University in Peterborough. I am usually longwinded, though I consider it respectful to be as candid as the necessary clarity demands. Foremost as an instructor I try to be respectful, polite, and to possess and demonstrate integrity. My interests include reading and writing, of course, on all kinds of subjects, but I also enjoy fine dining and like to experiment with cooking, trying interesting scotch and beer, I like painting, and I very much enjoy games of all kinds as well.

Politically speaking, I consider myself a leftist Marxist. I also think authoritarianism ought to be curbed where it exceeds its mandate. To the best of my ability this will not influence how I assess what you write about positively or negatively. It is about how you argue, not what you argue for, and I encourage you to keep this in mind. Your position on something doesn't earn or deduct you anything, only your argumentation. My pedagogical philosophy is built upon embracing both the classroom and my expression as a contact zone for you—a place in which you will likely encounter new concepts and ideas and in which you must work with others that may or may not agree with you to develop your understanding. This means I consider a classroom a challenging environment and I expect that anything you do not understand you will ask about, or use what resources are at your disposal to try to understand.
I will also always take your questions seriously and treat them with respect, as nothing should make you look or feel stupid in a classroom--only challenged. Classrooms are mediated spaces, but they are not "safe" spaces, per se. They are places to challenge and adapt, because that is what it means to learn.