

FYSM 1004B Reading Literatures and Cultures

Prof. B. Johnson

Topic: Inner Voyages, Other Worlds: Approaching Literary Fantasy

This first-year seminar will introduce you to fundamentals of literary and cultural studies with an emphasis on how authors work with literary devices, form, intertextuality, and genre conventions to create meaning. The “fantasy” of our title refers not only to worlds of “high” fantasy (the ones featuring wizards and dragons), but to all forms of literary world-building that depart in some way from what we commonly take to be “ordinary” reality. High fantasy, superhero stories, Gothic horror, fairy-tales, and science fiction are all “literary fantasies” of this sort, and will be the focus of the poems, short stories, novels, and comic books that we read.

Throughout the year, we will be interested in the questions of how and why literary fantasy engages us at the deepest levels and what it can tell us about ourselves and the world. The fall term will focus on “fictions of development” through a study of the *bildungsroman* (or “novel of education”), comparing its variations across a range of subgenres, identities, and sociopolitical contexts. In the winter term, we will examine intersections between literature and psychology in greater depth, focusing on approaches to fairy tales, fictional memoir, science fiction, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* that emphasize psychoanalytic questions of subjectivity and development. We will also consider contemporary short story, film, and comic book adaptations and rewritings of these fascinating source texts.

Over the course of the year, you will receive training in the foundations of close reading and textual analysis. You will also learn how to engage meaningfully with secondary sources, and hone your own scholarly writing. You will have opportunities to practice creative writing (poetry, nonfiction, and/or fiction) and oral presentation skills for certain assignments.

Texts

Fall Term

Susan Holbrook, *How To Read (and Write About) Poetry* (Broadview)
Ursula K. Le Guin, *Earthsea: The First Four Books* (Penguin)
G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel: Vol. 1 No Normal* (Marvel)
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Gold-Bug and Other Tales* (Dover)
Toni Morrison, *Sula* (Vintage)
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Penguin)

Winter Term

Maria Tatar, ed., *The Classic Fairy Tales*. Second Norton Critical Edition. (Norton)
Robertson Davies, *Fifth Business* (Penguin)
Samuel R. Delany, *Nova* (Vintage)
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Third Norton Critical Edition. (Norton)
The Avengers (selected issues) (Marvel Comics)
Swamp Thing (selected issues) (DC Comics)