

Lit 165: Imaginary Worlds

Topics in Literature

Syllabus



Spring 2005

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Web Visit our Blackboard course site:

<http://blackboard.wcupa.edu>

Web Visit our custom site:

<http://brainstorm-services.com/wcu-2004>

“This is the purpose of literature—not just great literature, but of all literature: to become so absorbed in an imaginary world that we become suddenly aware that in the battle between the world and the mind, it is the mind that is destined to win.” *Colin Wilson*

“Realism...falls short of reality. It shrinks it, attenuates it, falsifies it; it does not take into account our basic truths and our fundamental obsessions: love, death, astonishment. It presents man in a reduced and estranged perspective. Truth is in our dreams, in the imagination.” *Eugene Ionesco*

“We slip into a dream, forgetting the room we’re sitting in, forgetting it’s lunchtime or time to go to work. We recreate, with minor and for the most part, unimportant changes, the vivid and continuous dream the writer worked out in his mind (revising and revising until he got it right) and captured in language so that other human beings, whenever they feel like it, may open his book and dream that dream again.” *John Gardner*

LIT 165: Imaginary Worlds Syllabus

Course Texts and Materials

Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories. Edited by Eric S. Rabkin

The Inferno. Translated by Robert Pinsky.

Brave New World. By Aldous Huxley.

Waiting for Godot. By Samuel Beckett.

E-Reserve materials if announced. FHG Library.
(Online access)

Pocket folder or small binder to use as a Portfolio



Course Description

As the course catalog explains, this introductory level literature course is “designed to develop an awareness of literature as being central to all the arts, to increase levels of literacy and critical faculties, and to broaden understanding of the human condition.” (WCU Undergraduate Course catalogue)

Course Components: Reading, Discussing, Writing

The readings are the heart, mind, and soul of our course. You are expected to carefully read each assignment prior to class, even if you personally find it difficult or confusing—even if you think it’s “boring.” You *must* make the effort to read through these obstacles. Along with the literature that excites or intrigues you, or the works you find easy but which leave you indifferent, these challenging texts or passages often become excellent springboards for class discussion. Our readings will be truly diverse in range, style, and genre. In addition to a novel, an epic poem, and a play, we’ll read several shorter poems and short stories. What will tie them together will our own desire and our own ability to weave a meaningful thread through the imaginary worlds they visit.

Discussion is a term that refers to several different class activities to extend or enhance your thinking about the readings: class-wide, large group discussions; collaborative, small group discussions; and individual response papers, which are meant to be shared with the instructor and potentially with your classmates. Students are expected to attend each class prepared to engage in any of these discussion activities when materials are assigned.

The formal writing assignments for this course will be very open-ended and in some cases creative (that will be up to you). You will be required to develop your own topics and make your own explicit choices regarding purpose (expressive, expository, or persuasive) for the papers you write. I expect you to use MLA style documentation when necessary for all of your formal papers. Three formal papers, 4-6 pages each, and one independent term paper (in lieu of a final exam) are required. The term paper should be longer: 6-8 pages.

The reading, discussion, and informal writing you do throughout the semester will combine to form your **PARTICIPATION** grade at the end of the semester. Absence (see attendance policy) and lack of preparation for any of the assigned classwork will affect your participation grade. The formal writing assignments and the independent term paper will combine to form your **ESSAY** grade. If you fail to hand in one of your formal essays you cannot receive more than a “D” for your final course grade, regardless of your other scores. If you fail to hand in more than one of your formal essays, you will receive an “F” for the course. Your final course grade is calculated by compiling your PARTICIPATION, ESSAY, and PORTFOLIO scores as follows:

65%	ESSAYS
30%	PARTICIPATION
5%	PORTFOLIO

Class Policies

Late Work. All essays and other assignments are due on the date assigned. If a serious injury, illness, or other emergency prevents you or seems likely to prevent you from meeting a deadline, make arrangements with me before the assignment is due, or the day it is due. If no specific arrangement has been made, late penalties will ensue. Late papers will be assessed a penalty of one letter grade for every two days late (in our age of email, weekends count). You cannot turn in an assignment for full credit more than one week after its due date. After one week, your work can only earn a "D" (numerically 65) or lower.

Portfolio. Each student is required to hand in a portfolio of their writing at the end of the semester. The portfolio assignment (10% of your grade) will ask you to discuss your overall response to the reading and writing you did throughout the semester by compiling your work and writing a commentary.

Attendance. I take attendance each class period. Students are expected to attend every class having read assigned material or prepared assigned homework. Any student who misses more than four classes may receive a lowered grade. (Absences necessitated by a student's participation in a University-sanctioned event are not penalized if the student follows the "excused absence" policy stated in the University catalog.) After four absences your final grade may be lowered according to the severity of your absenteeism and my own discretion. Students with extended medical problems or personal emergencies should notify the Dean of Students, who will contact me about allowing for necessary adjustments. Athletes, student teachers, band members, etc., should provide me with a note from the appropriate professor or coach documenting your need to be away from class. Chronic or extended absence throughout the semester without consultation or permission from the Dean of Students will be grounds for failure. These penalties may be waived only in the case of extreme extenuating circumstances. It is up to the student to provide official verification from the Dean's office of extenuating circumstances, and preferably to discuss these issues with me directly via office visit, phone, or email.

Writing Center. If you are having trouble with a writing assignment, do not hesitate to bring your problem to my attention or bring your essay to the Writing Center in Main 203. The Writing Center offers free, high-quality tutoring to any student who is writing a paper for any course offered by the college. The staff will assist students at all stages of the writing process: developing ideas, organizing drafts, revising, and editing. Tutors will not serve as your proofreaders, however. Their aim is to help you develop your own skills. You may need to call ahead for an appointment as the center becomes fairly busy once the semester is under way. The number is 436-2121. Writing Center hours are M (10-4), Tu (9-5), W (9:30-7:30), Th (10-7:30), F (10-2).

Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. I will make accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability, please make your needs known to me and contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities at 436-3217 for further support or information.

Diversity and Fair Language. You are required by University policy to use nondiscriminatory language and to treat all issues of diversity respectfully (including, but not limited to, race, sex/gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation). Read **Quick Access**, pp.101-103.

Academic Honesty. Plagiarism of any type is a serious academic offense that can result in a failing grade on an assignment, failure of the course, or referral to academic judicial affairs, depending upon the instructor's judgment. You are plagiarizing if you lift either ideas or word-for-word passages from a published book, article, or website without giving credit to the author; pass off another student's work as your own; or allow a "helper" to actually write parts of your paper for you. Don't do it!!! If you have any questions about how to use sources properly, approach me or one of the tutors in the Writing Center. You can also read **Quick Access**, pp. 126-134.



Outline of Readings < > Related Material

LARGER PICTURE/SUPPLEMENTALS

Approaching Literature (discussion/web)
The Sources of Fantastic Literature (FW 3-39)
The Function of Myth (discussion/web)
The Power of Myth: The Message of the Myth (Program 2) (screening)
The Uses of Enchantment by Bruno Bettelheim (discussion/web)
Northrup Frye (selected materials) (discussion/web)

IMAGINING CREATION AND THE AFTERLIFE

Beginnings: Mythic Tales

Genesis (Old Testament) (tale) (FW 41)
The Blackfoot Genesis (Native American) (FW 47)
The Eye of the Giant (African, Ghana) (FW 53)
How I Brought Death Into the World (African, Nigerian) (FW 56)
The Myth of Actaeon (Greek) (FW62)
The Myth of Narcissus (Greek) (FW 66)
The Myth of Philomela (Greek) (FW 72)
Why Tortoise's Shell Is Not Smooth (Nigerian) (FW 84)

The Afterlife

The Ghost Wife (Tale) (FW 80)
The Black Cat (FW 248) (the problem of evil; the psychology of evil)
[The Vision of Paul the Apostle](#) (Gnostic Gospels) (e-reserve)
[Book VI, The Aeneid](#) (web/e-Reserve)
The Inferno (Epic Poem) Translated by Robert Pinsky
Leaf By Niggle (Tale) (FW 141)

Creating a Mythic National Identity: "The American Dream"

[What Is An American?](#) (Essay) (web/e-reserve)
[Let America Be America Again](#) (Poem) (web/e-reserve)

IMAGINING THE WORLD AS IT COULD BE

Utopias and Dystopias

[Kubla Khan](#) (Poem) (web/e-reserve)
The Birthmark (Short Story) (FW 343)
The Sandman (FW 214) (Compare to the original *Stepford Wives*)
Brave New World (Novel)

IMAGINING THE WORLD AS IT COULD BE, cont.

Fantasy

The Tinder Box (Fairy Tale) (FW 112)

The Star (Short Story/science fiction) (FW 360)

[Darkness](#) (Poem) (web/e-reserve)

EPICAC (FW 372) (free will for computers, instead of the other way around; computer brains projected onto us)

[Christabel](#) (web/e-reserve) (she went because she could...free will)

[The Rime of the Ancient Mariner](#) (web/e-reserve) (he killed the albatross because he could...free will)

[The Lady of Shalott](#) (Poem) (web/e-reserve)

FANTASTIC VISIONS OF THE WORLD AS IT IS

Surrealism and Theater of the Absurd: Beckett and Kafka

Waiting for Godot (Drama)

[The Metamorphosis](#) (web/reserve)

[A Hunger Artist](#) (web) and "The Zebra Storyteller" (FW 460)

Cockroaches (FW 410)

[La Belle Dame Sans Merci](#) (web/handout/e-reserve)

The Zebra Storyteller (FW 460) / The Hunger Artist (web/e-reserve)¹

Magical Realism²: Márquez and Córtazar

Axolotl³ (FW 424) (Short Story) (FW 424)

[A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings](#) (Short Story)
(web/e-reserve)



¹ A prof's prompt from the Internet: "Spencer Holst's short short story, "The Zebra Storyteller," explicitly states its vision of the role of the artist in society. Explain how Holst's story treats the figure of the artist. Franz Kafka's "The Hunger Artist" illustrates for us a much different view of the artist's role in society. Explain what Kafka's piece has to say about the figure of the artist, and contrast Kafka's understanding of the artist with Holst's."

² From the Internet: "Magical Realism": Like many Latin American writers, Gabriel García Márquez has been inextricably linked to a style of literature known as "magical realism." Literature of this type is usually characterized by elements of the fantastic woven into the story with a deadpan sense of presentation. The term is not without a lot of controversy, however, and has come under attack for numerous reasons. Some claim that it is a postcolonial hangover, a category used by "whites" to marginalize the fiction of the "other." Others claim that it is a passé literary trend, or just a way to cash in on the Latin American "boom." Still others feel the term is simply too limiting, and acts to remove the fiction in question from the world of serious literature.

³ An Axolotl is a Mexican salamander. From the Internet: "Salamanders have been considered by some cultures to be mystical creatures associated with fires. They were thought by some to be fire elementals, while many regarded them as able to live in the flames of a fire because of their cold nature which others regarded as capable of extinguishing or absorbing the flames. Indeed, some alchemists believed that they would jump into their furnaces when the temperature was right to attempt to change base metals into gold." Remember to read the E.T.A. Hoffman story "The Golden Salamander."