

ENG 2100 | Section 100

“Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?”

Critical Approaches to Reading, Writing, & Playing Fantasy
Autumn 2018 | Ohio University | Edmond Y. Chang

ENG 2100
Section 100
CN 10163
MW 3:05-4:25
PM
Tupper 005
Autumn 2018
Ohio University
Dr. Edmond Y.
Chang
change@ohio.edu



“First sentences are doors to worlds.”
—Ursula K. Le Guin

“And once upon a time I wondered: Is writing epic fantasy not somehow a betrayal? Did I not somehow do a disservice to my own reality by paying so much attention to the power fantasies of disenchanted white men? But. Epic fantasy is not merely what Tolkien made it.”
—N.K. Jemisin

URSULA K. LE GUIN once asked, “Why are Americans afraid of dragons?” Central to her question about the reading, understanding, and analysis of fantasy literature, particularly in the US context, is an engagement with with genre, with the imagination, with our and other worlds. Le Guin argued, “For fantasy is true, of course. It isn’t factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy...They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom.” This class will take up Le Guin’s provocation and explore a range of fantasy literature, film, scholarship, even everyday practices—from Tolkien to Okorafor, from *Dungeons and Dragons* to LARP—to address questions of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, space, and time. Part of the course will engage in experiential learning and live-action game play from basic mechanics to character creation to role-playing and adventuring.

A REQUIREMENT for this class is a well-developed curiosity and a willingness to explore and interrogate interdisciplinary lines of inquiry. Our class will be organized around a survey of texts engaging scholarship, media, and popular culture. This class will take up everyday culture as critical practice, explore what it means to close read and think critically, and how fantasy literature and popular culture can be deployed as theory, as dramatizing the concerns, wonders, struggles, and politics of lived life and experience. This class will spend the semester reading, thinking, watching, discussing, researching, playing, and writing about various narratives and how and what these texts argue, reveal, narrate, hide, perpetuate, and complicate the world we live in.

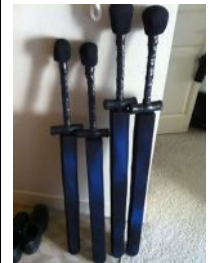
SPECIFICALLY, our course goals include:

- We will develop and demonstrate a familiarity with a range of texts, terms, and theories of the study of fantasy literature, fandom, and live-action role-playing games.
- We will identify and articulate different ways to explore, close read, analyze, and critique literature, film, games, and other media.
- We will consider questions and intersections of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, nation, culture, and power.
- We will use fantasy literature and popular culture as vernacular theory to think, talk, write, and interrogate the world around us.

WE WILL spend the semester asking and addressing difficult, challenging, and sometimes discomfiting ideas, questions, and topics, focusing on different identities, bodies, histories, desires, experiences, and even struggles and violences. Whether on the page, screen, on campus, or in the community, we will explore and engage multiple perspectives, levels of familiarity with the material, and heady and heartfelt responses. In other words, our class will be a safe, respectful, but not necessarily comfortable space. While pushing boundaries and comfort zones are essential to critical thinking, making connections, and intellectual and personal freedom, see me with concerns and queries, for reasonable accommodations, and for further resources on campus.

“If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities.”
—Maya Angelou

“One day, you will be old enough to start reading fairytales again.”
—C.S. Lewis



Required Course Texts & Materials

- Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.
- Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*.
- Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*.
- Nguyen, *She Kills Monsters*.
- Liu & Takeda, *Monstress*.
- Roanhorse, *Trail of Lightning*.
- Chang, *Archaea Live-Action Role-Playing and Wargaming*.
- Shorter readings will be available via Blackboard.
- Web access and an active Ohio University email account.



Course Requirements

- Plog, or, Play Log (10%)
- Creative Responses (10%)
- Response Papers (20%)
- Research Proposal (10%)
- Final Project (20%)
- Class Participation (30%)

Requirements & Grading

Your grade should not be the sole exigence or motivation for this class. It is the hope of the course that you walk away from ENG 2100 with something more. Find some pleasure and some edification and some knowledge from this class (or any class really) and success is usually not far behind. With that in mind, your grade will be a reflection of engagement, effort, close reading, critical thinking, writing, and participation.

Plog, or, Play Log (10%)

In the latter half of the course, you will engage various readings, theoretical perspectives, and of course, actual live-action role-playing play. You will be required to keep a weekly “plog” or “play log” about the texts that you see and read and your larping experience. Plog entries will be short reactions, responses, meditations, and provocations that engage your dressing up and play on a critical, analytical, or theoretical level. Plogs will be posted each week to the class blog. These weekly logs will be evaluated on completion and your critical, analytical engagement with the prompt.

Creative Responses (10%)

Not only will you be reading and writing academically about fantasy literature, you will have the opportunity to write (more) creatively to explore and demonstrate the ideas and goals of the course in different ways. Over the course of the semester, you will write a personal essay, a short-short story, a character history, and a critical review. These creative responses will be evaluated on completion and your critical, thoughtful engagement with the prompts.

Critical Response Papers (20%)

Over the course of the semester, you will complete a number short, critical, analytical response papers. These single-spaced, one-page writings serve as close readings of, analyses of, and articulations of the texts and connections you see, read, and talk about in class. These responses are more than just summaries or personal reactions and will be graded on clarity, focus, coherence, critique, and your ability to concisely formulate arguments. You will be required to generate a response paper approximately every other week for a total of 5. See the response paper prompt for more details.

Research Proposal Memo & Bibliography (10%)

As part of your Final Project research and writing process, you must generate a 1-page research proposal in business memo format and a working bibliography. You will also arrange for a conference with me to go over your proposal. The proposal and bibliography will be graded for clarity, detail, completion, and manuscript format. Your proposal and conference must be completed at least 4 weeks prior to the end of the semester.

Final Project (20%)

At the end of the semester, you will complete a Final Project that integrates what you have read, explored, and written about in your Response Papers, that draws on specific terms, concepts, or issues from the class, and that articulates the critical value of fantasy literature and LARPs. The project asks you to make connections and to create an argument across different kinds of evidence and added research. Your final project can be a traditional research paper, a media production (which includes a substantive analytical component), or a hybrid of the two.

“Fantasy is an exercise bicycle for the mind. It might not take you anywhere, but it tones up the muscles that can. Of course, I could be wrong.”
—Terry Pratchett



“When I examine myself and my methods of thought, I come to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than any talent for abstract, positive thinking.”
—Albert Einstein

“I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it’s a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope and that enables you to laugh at life’s realities.”
—Dr. Seuss

Participation and Preparedness (30%)

Preparedness and participation forms a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Moreover, negative participation will hurt your participation grade. Participation is determined by 1) your **respectful** presence in class and interactions with me and others, 2) your **willingness** to discuss, comment, and ask questions, 3) your **preparation** for class, which includes bringing required materials to class and doing all of the assigned reading for class, 4) your **engagement** and **collaboration** in group work, presentations, office hours, and course events, and 5) your care and use of the class *Blackboard*—henceforth called the “class blog”—bookmark the address, check and comment regularly, once or twice a week, and think of the blog as an extension of class: https://blackboard.ohio.edu/webapps/blackboard/execute/modulepage/view?course_id=486436_1&cmp_tab_id=533415_1&editMode=true&mode=cpview



Response Paper Formatting

1) 1” margins top, bottom, left, and right on each page.

2) Single-spaced block header with your name, date, course, my name. For example:

Student Name
ENG 2100
August 27, 2018
Chang

3) Response (week number and title (e.g. Week #2: Race in *The Great Gatsby*).

4) Response papers are single-spaced, standard indented paragraphing, no page numbers.

5) Standard Times Roman Font, 12 point only.

6) Correct MLA citation and bibliographic format. Bibliography if necessary.

Attendance

Attendance is required. If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class I may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the day, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and will be mark as such. Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your overall participation grade for the class. **Moreover, absences for more than 14 class sessions (50% of class time or more) will result in a failing grade regardless of reason. There are no excused or unexcused absences.** If you know you are going to or must miss class, please let me know (via email) as soon as possible and make any necessary arrangements. When you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes or see me during office hours in order to make up missed work in a timely manner. You are always responsible for all material covered during your absence.

Assignment Format

All papers must be typed or produced on a word processor. All documents should be saved in Microsoft Word format (or if necessary Rich Text Format). All papers must follow the manuscript format outlined by the assignment. Unless instructed otherwise, **all papers must use MLA citation and documentation conventions.** All papers must be neatly printed (in black), stapled in the top, left-hand corner if necessary, and should not be three-hole punched. Papers that do not follow these format guidelines will not be accepted. They will be returned unread to you. Papers will be regarded as late until they are resubmitted in the proper format.

Always make a backup copy of every paper you turn in, lest you be one of the unhappy people whose paper is eaten by the computer. You may even want to take the precaution of e-mailing your paper to yourself as an attachment during the drafting process and certainly before you exit the document and leave the computer. Or you may want to invest in cloud-based file storage like OneDrive (which all OU students have already have access) or DropBox.

Evaluation Rubric

Over the course of the quarter, your assignments will receive feedback and comments that will identify what you are doing well and what still needs improvement. Your grades assess your fulfillment of the assignment, the quality



Late Assignments

All assignments must be done completely and turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized half a grade for every day that they are late. So, if your essay is late by one day and you received a B- for your work, then your final grade would be a C+. Moreover, I will not comment on late work. However, you still need to complete late work or you will receive a zero. If you miss class on the due date of a paper, you must notify me and make arrangements to get the paper to me as soon as possible. **Unless previously arranged, I DO NOT accept assignments via email.** Remember that a paper has not been officially handed in until it is in my hands. Never turning anything in late is always the best policy.

of work, detail, analysis, and argumentation, overall effort, and finally, style, polish, and risk taking. Consider the following evaluation rubric as signposts or a kind of legend to your progress and evaluation:



- **Outstanding (A/A+):** Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.
- **Strong (B+/A-):** Offers a proficient demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), which could be further enhanced with revision, additional support, and creativity.
- **Good (B-/B):** Effectively demonstrates the trait(s) associate with the course or assignment goal(s), but less proficiently; could use revision to demonstrate more skillful and nuanced command of trait(s).
- **Acceptable (C/C+):** Minimally meets the basic course or assignment requirement, but the demonstrated trait(s) are not fully realized or well-controlled and would benefit from significant revision.
- **Inadequate (D/D+):** Does not meet the course or assignment requirement; the trait(s) are not adequately demonstrated and require substantial revision on multiple levels.

Learning (With) Technology

Unless you have an official accommodation, the use of technology in our classroom is a privilege, not a right. Mobile devices like phones, media players, and cameras should be off and put away. Computers and tablets should be used for note-taking, in-class work, and readings only. Print is generally preferred for course texts and readings, but full-size e-versions are acceptable provided the student is able to readily highlight, annotate, and index. Finally, be conscientious and respectful in the use of the course website and social media and post no material from class to the internet or non-class sites without explicit permission from the instructor and the class. Keep in mind these three rules:

- 1) Use the Right Tool for the situation and the task—keep it simple and elegant,
- 2) Practice Best Practices—it must improve or enhance your learning,
- 3) Be a Good Neighbor—it cannot distract or detract from others' learning.

Inappropriate use and abuse of technology in class will result in the taking away of technology privileges for the offending student and/or class as a whole.



Finding Help

My office and office hours are listed in the left sidebar. I am available during that time and by appointment to help you. I encourage you to come see me early in the quarter even if it is just to talk about the class, about the assignments, or about school in general. I may ask you to meet with me when I think a conference would be useful. My office is located on the second floor, south wing of Lindley Hall (west of College Green), south elevator stop 2R, Room S205. See <<https://www.ohio.edu/athens/ioumap.html>>

Contact Ed

Office:
S205 Lindley Hall
(South Wing)
Office Hours:
MW 1-2:30 PM
or by appointment
E-mail:
change@ohio.edu
Google Talk:
EDagogy



I am also available electronically by email and the course blog. Email and the blog are the best means of contacting me. I will do my best to answer your emails and blog posts, usually **within twenty-four hours**. If there is an emergency and you need to reach me, please contact the main English office in N196 Lindley Hall. Furthermore, when time permits, I will supplement my office hours with virtual hours via Google Talk (nickname: **EDagogy**); if I am logged in, during reasonable hours, you are more than welcome to discuss the class or ask questions. Please, when you initiate an IM conversation, **use a greeting**, please identify yourself to me, and be **patient** because my responses may not be immediate.

You can find additional writing and academic help at the Student Writing Center (SWC) on campus, a good resource for this class and other classes. The SWC is located in the Academic Advancement Center (AAC) on the first floor of Alden Library and offers a variety of services including help with reading, papers, brainstorming ideas, and research. See <<https://www.ohio.edu/uc/aac/swc.cfm>> to make an appointment and for more information. Further resources, both on- and off-campus can be found on the Links page of the course website: <<http://www.edmondchang.com/courses/2010/links.html>>.

Academic Integrity

All students are required to uphold the highest academic standards. Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, so feel free to ask questions at any time. For our class, plagiarism includes:

- a student failing to cite sources of ideas
- a student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
- a student failing to site sources of specific language and/or passages
- a student submitting someone else's work as his or her own
- a student submitting his or her own work produced for another class

If you have any doubt about how to cite or acknowledge another's writing, please talk to me. Any plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in failure of an assignment or of this course. It is always better to be safe than sorry. Please review the Ohio University's Academic Misconduct page at <<https://www.ohio.edu/communitystandards/academic/students.cfm>>.

Accommodations

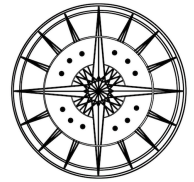
Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should see me or contact me **in the first week of class** to discuss their specific needs and provide written documentation from Student Accessibility Services. If you are not yet registered as a student with a disability, please contact Student Accessibility Services at 740-593-2620 or visit the SAS office in 348 Baker University Center. The SAS website is: <<https://www.ohio.edu/uc/sas/index.cfm>>.

Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

Ohio University and this course are committed to a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment. Title IX makes clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, and so on. As your instructor, I am a mandatory reporter and am required by law to share with the University any information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on campus. For more information about policies and resources or confidential reporting options, see the Office of University Equity and Civil Rights Compliance: <<https://www.ohio.edu/equity-civil-rights/>> or the Division of Student Affairs page on Student Conduct & Community Standards: <<https://www.ohio.edu/communitystandards/process/sexualassault.cfm>>.

"SF is the literature of the theoretically possible, and F is the literature of the impossible."

—Piers Anthony



"My imagination makes me human and makes me a fool; it gives me all the world and exiles me from it."

—Ursula K. Le Guin

"Without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of the imagination is incalculable."

—Carl Jung

syl-la-bus: *n* 1: a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements 2: subject to change

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8/27
First Day of Classes

August						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Week 1: August 27-31

Introduction to the Course & Syllabus
 Le Guin, "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?"
 Attebery, "Locating Fantasy"
 Mendlesohn, "Introduction," *Rhetorics of Fantasy*
 Zipes, "Why Fantasy Matters Too Much"

Week 1 or 2 CR is recommended.

Week 2: September 3-7*

"Little Red Riding Hood" and "Cinderella," *Classic Fairy Tales*
 Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories"
 Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954)
 Flieger, "Fantasy and Reality"

Mon 9/3 Labor Day

Fantasy
Autobiography Due

Week 3: September 10-14

Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (cont.)
 Plank, "The Scouring of the Shire: Tolkien's View of Fascism"

September						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

Week 4: September 17-21

Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968)
 Jago, "A Wizard of Earthsea and the Charge of Escapism"

Week 5: September 24-28*

Monster Camp (2007, film)
 Fine, "Introduction," *Shared Fantasy*
 Stark, "Closeted Gamers and the Satanic Panic"
 LARP @ Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LARP> &
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_live_action_role-playing_games

Week 5 or 6 CR is recommended.

Start working on *Archaea* character and costume.

Fri 10/5
Fall Semester
Reading Day

October						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Week 6: October 1-5

Darkon (2006, film)
 Stark, "Race in Larp: Some Initial Musings"
<http://leavingmundania.com/2014/01/30/race-in-larp-initial-musings/>
 Upkins, "Going Medieval"
<http://thenerdsofcolor.org/2016/02/11/going-medieval/>
 Worley, "Vikings were not Nazis"
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vikings-neo-nazis-anti-racists-swedish-nordic-resistance-movement-larp-a7987716.html>
 Ferguson, "Race," *Keywords*

Week 7: October 8-12

Play *Archaea*
 Brown, "The Trouble with Gender in Larp"
<http://analoggamestudies.org/2015/09/the-trouble-with-gender-in-larp/>
 Martin, Vaccaro, Heckert, Heasley, "Epic Glory and Manhood Acts in Fantasy Role-Playing"
 Halberstam, "Gender," *Keywords*

Character History
Due

Week 8: October 15-19*

Play *Archaea*
 Graham, "Finding Your Way as a Queer LARPer"
<https://killscreen.com/articles/finding-your-way-queer-larper/>
 "PBS Showcases Queer Aspects of Cosplay"
<http://www.advocate.com/geek/2014/04/18/watch-pbs-showcases-queer-aspects-cosplay>
 Somerville, "Queer," *Keywords*

Week 9: October 22-27

Play *Archaea*

Stark, "Social Justice in Larp: A Practical Approach"

<http://leavingmundania.com/2014/12/01/social-justice-in-larp-a-practical-approach/>

Henry, "Reimagining Disability in Role-Playing Games"

<http://analoggamestudies.org/2015/02/reimagining-disability-in-role-playing-games/>

Adams, Reiss, Serlin, "Disability"

Week 10: October 29-November 2

Okorafor, *Who Fears Death* (2010)

Okorafor, "Organic Fantasy"

TBD: Play *Archaea*

Week 11: November 5-9*

Okorafor, *Who Fears Death* (cont.)

Okorafor, "Writers of Colour"

TBD: Play *Archaea*

Week 12: November 12-16

Nguyen, *She Kills Monsters* (2012, play)

TBD: Play *Archaea*

Week 13: November 19-23

Liu & Takeda, *Monstress: Awakening* (2016)

Cruz, "Marjorie Liu on the Road to Making *Monstress*"

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/09/marjorie-liu-monstress-interview/539394/>

Week 14: November 26-30*

Roanhorse, *Trail of Lightning* (2018)

Sumac, "A Conversation on Why Indigenous Literatures Matter with Author Daniel Heath Justice"

TBD: Play *Archaea*

Week 15: December 3-7

Roanhorse, *Trail of Lightning* (cont.)

TBD: Play *Archaea*

Week 16: Final Exams

Project Proposal and
Conferences Due

Week 10 or 11 CR is
recommended.

November						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

11/21-11/25
Thanksgiving Recess

Final Project Due
Critical Review Due

December						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					