

RELIGION AND FANTASY

REL 3095 | FALL 2022

TUESDAYS, 5 – 7:40 PM



Contact

Prof. Jeanette Smith

Religious Studies

Email: jesmith@fiu.edu

Phone: 305-598-1404 (cell)

Office: DM 359A (DM 302)

Office hours: by appointment

Works we'll explore

C.S. Lewis

The Magician's Nephew

The Lion, the Witch,

and the Wardrobe

The Last Battle

J.R.R. Tolkien

The Lord of the Rings:

The Return of the King

George R.R. Martin

A Song of Ice and Fire

Lev Grossman

The Magicians

Neil Gaiman

American Gods

Concerning this course

What part does religion play in fantasy literature? How does fantasy capture the real-world complexity of religious faith and practice? What is it about fantasy literature that intrigues us? Is it something inherent within the genre?

This seminar explores the relationship between religion and fantasy literature and adaptations through the critical study of a wide range of fantasy, including works by C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, George R.R. Martin, Lev Grossman, Neil Gaiman, and others. We will explore key themes in the study of religion, such as creation myths, innocence and experience, ritual, sacrifice, and redemption, as well as explore contemporary questions regarding religious diversity and the interplay of religion and culture. We will also consider how fan cultures and perhaps even the concept of fantasy itself may or may not resemble whatever it is we mean when we use the term “religion.”

Learning objectives

- Become familiar with the central theoretical approaches to the study of religion through the lens of fantasy literature
- Practice writing in a variety of genres
- Acquire general knowledge of how various religious traditions intersect with the development of fantasy literature
- Think about fantasy literature and religion from a variety of perspectives, including production, consumption, and adaptation

Global Learning Course Outcomes

- Global Awareness: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the interrelatedness of beliefs and religious traditions both as they appear within diverse fantasy universes and genres and as they reflect their real-world global counterparts.

Source materials could include

Into the Wardrobe: C.S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles by David C. Downing

A Field Guide to Narnia by Colin Duriez

The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth by Ralph C. Wood

J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion by Richard L. Purtill

The Evolution of Tolkien's Mythology: A Study of the History of Middle-earth by Elizabeth A. Whittingham

Game of Thrones versus History: Written in Blood edited by Brian A. Pavlac

The Ultimate Game of Thrones and Philosophy: You Think or Die edited by Eric J. Silverman and Robert Arp

Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords edited by Henry Jacoby

Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance by Valerie Estelle

- **Global Perspective:** Students will construct a multi-perspective analysis of the universes upon which fantasy literature and media is based, making religious and real-world connections between these works of fantasy and the cultures upon which they are built or with which they overlap.
- **Global Engagement:** Students will demonstrate a willingness to engage in an ongoing dialogue about current global concerns in order to address problems arising from the intersection between global concerns and local religious beliefs and fantasy.

This is a Discipline-Specific Global Learning course that counts toward your FIU Global Learning Graduation Requirement.

Prerequisites

This course assumes no specific prior knowledge of the works that we will be exploring but does assume at least a general interest in fantasy materials.

Assignments

What follows is a general summary of the assignments for this course. Further details about each will be available on Canvas and in class.

Class Attendance and Participation: This class is a seminar that meets only once a week, so participation and discussion is a large part of the course. Every effort should be made to attend each session but should a situation develop that will impact your performance or attendance, please inform the instructor immediately. Participation includes reading and preparing for class and participating in discussions. You'll also need to post two or three discussion questions based on that week's materials in the Canvas discussion forum by Tuesday at 2 pm. This portion of the class will serve as an assessment of your Global Awareness, Perspective, and Engagement.

Into the Wardrobe Essay: This is a fun, credit/no-credit assignment that will help me and a few of your classmates get to know you. Write a two-page (typed, double-spaced) essay. At the beginning, please introduce yourself in whatever way you would like to – where you're from, what you're up to so far at FIU, and why you are taking this course. Then, help me/us get to know you even further by answering the following question: You are going through the wardrobe into Narnia (or another imaginary land of

your choice), and you know that you will be there for at least a year. What three items do you take with you and why? Those three items should tell us more about you. Be creative, write clearly, and have fun!

Blog Essay: Your first major essay for the semester will take on the form of a blog essay for an erudite popular readership. This means that it will be 800-1,000 words, on the topic of your choice, analyzing one or several of our readings from the first month of the semester. You can include information from other readings that you may have done on the same authors if you would like. You don't actually have to post a public blog; the idea is to learn the format of writing a thoughtful piece suitable for an online format.

Studies in Fandom and Adaptations: All of the series that we are studying this semester have vibrant fan communities; most of these series also have been adapted into some non-literary medium, such as a film or a television series. For this second paper, you will have a choice between writing a sophisticated review of a film or television adaptation or doing a micro-ethnography of a fan community or fan discourse. Either choice will help you learn how to think about how texts circulate in the world.

Imagined Dialogue: For your final writing project, you'll write an imagined dialogue (or larger conversation) between two or more characters from at least two *different fantasy series* we have studied this semester. You will use this exercise in order to demonstrate your knowledge of the major themes of the course, including making connections between these works of fantasy and the cultures upon which they are built and the different styles and perspectives of each author. This assignment serves as an assessment of your Global Perspective.

Changes

The instructor reserves the right to alter readings, assignments or the schedule below as dictated by the needs and interest of the class. Any changes will be mentioned in class and announced on Canvas.

Readings?

While all of these works are excellent and well worth the read, we simply do not have the necessary time for fully exploring each of the authors and their most noteworthy tomes. I also recognize that some of you will be more well-versed in some of the works than in others or that your knowledge of some of the works might come from movies or television adaptations. That being said, I want those of you with more in-depth knowledge on particular works to be able to express yourselves and utilize that knowledge both in our class discussions and in the writing assignments. Feel free to include other works by the authors that we have explored in your essays and even class comments.

The texts on the first page are those that we will be discussing in depth and with which you should have familiarity, whether because you have already read them, read them during the class, or have seen non-literary adaptations. The items that you should read are the three by C.S. Lewis (very quick reads), the novel by Lev Grossman (it's a trilogy but we will only be reading the first volume),

the novel by Neil Gaiman, and, if possible, the volume by J.R.R. Tolkien although I understand that some of you may need to fall back on the movie for that one. I do not anticipate that any of you will get through *A Song of Ice and Fire*, but some of you may have already read it. You are not responsible for reading the source materials listed on the second page with the exception of excerpts that will be posted on Canvas. Multiple and diverse perspectives are addressed throughout the readings and as a class every effort is made to expand beyond the traditional fantasy writers, particularly as diverse authors enter the genre. Note that we will likely make some changes to our list of works to explore based on interest and availability.

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)

As some of you may know, we will have students from UNIMINUTO, a university in Bogota, Colombia, joining us for part of the semester as part of a COIL Global Learning project. They and their professor will join us virtually for some of our classes. We may also slip in a few short Colombian legends/myths during their time with us. Both English and Spanish versions will be available. It should be a lot of fun to have guests, particularly after the last two years that we've all had!

Schedule of Readings/Viewings – to be updated over the next two weeks

- Introductions! Determining our baseline.
- C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*
- C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe; The Last Battle*
- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

Grading

Attendance & Participation 28%

--includes the Into the Wardrobe essay

Writing Assignment 1 24%

Writing Assignment 2 24%

Writing Assignment 3 24%

Letter	Range %	Letter	Range %	Letter	Range %
A	93 - 100	B	83 - 86	C	70 - 76
A-	90 - 92	B-	80 - 82	D	60 - 69
B+	87 - 89	C+	77 - 79	F	59 or less