Taming the Dragon

Planning an Honors Colloquium on Writing Fantasy

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Taming the Dragon

Learning to Write Fantasy Literature
Abstract

Fantasy literature has grown in popularity over the last ten years, becoming both a part of pop culture as well as a part of the literary canon. Series such as the *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* have introduced much of the reading world to the wonders of fantasy literature. However, in traditional fiction classes, fantasy is considered genre writing and is frowned upon. Contained within this thesis are the plans for an Honors colloquium in fantasy writing. This class combines both reading and writing fantasy literature. After taking this colloquium, students should gain a better understanding of creating and reading fantasy literature, as well as learning more about themselves as writers.
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When a Fantasy Becomes Reality

Or

Why I chose to create this colloquium.

It all started with one book. One of the very books I’m using for this course, as a matter of fact. Mercedes Lackey’s *Arrows of the Queen*. Here I was, aimlessly searching for a book in my school library when I found a novel about a shy and timid brown haired and brown eyed girl trying to make a place for herself in a world where magic was not an option. But swiftly, for both of us, it became an option. Talia had gotten her chance to become a Herald, and I had gotten my chance to create worlds where magic could exist. The magic of words. Spells consisting of metaphors and similes, of people and places one could only dream of.

I began writing. I began reading. And I’ve been writing and reading ever since.

I wrote fantasy stories for my friends during high school, and I chose to go on to college for creative writing. Each semester I’ve taken at least one creative writing class. I’ve had the honor and the privilege of having Ball State’s finest creative writing professors, and now I want to become one.

I created the class because during my sophomore year I took a colloq with Jenny Gibson. At that point in time, I had no idea that a student could teach a class, let alone a specialized colloquium. After that colloq, I decided that I too wished to teach a class, and this one would be about fantasy writing.

So here are my efforts, presented as my Honors thesis. I would like to teach this class, perhaps in the Spring of 2003.

Cheers!

~Shanna Johnting
Taming the Dragon: Learning to Write Fantasy Literature
T-Th or M-W
Honors 390
Shanna Johnting

Required Texts

Fantasy, editors Wendy Mass and Stuart P. Levine
Arrows of the Queen, Mercedes Lackey
The Farthest Away Mountain, Lynne Reid Banks
Course Packet

Course Description

This class is intended to teach the student about reading and writing fantasy literature. For the first half of the semester, we will be exploring the nature of fantasy as well as its structure. We will construct characters, look at secondary worlds, and learn about plot devices such as the quest. In the second half, the student will be constructing his/her final project, a fantasy story of reasonable length. We will have individual workshops to speak about the student's progress on his/her story.

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Attendance Policy

You have a leeway of two classes. I need no excuses for these two days. That is a week of class. However, if you miss more than two classes, I must receive a note from you about why you have missed, as well as proof that it may be excused (doctor's note, field trip form, etc.). You may NOT miss the conferences we schedule, however if you need to reschedule we will arrange something.
Assignments

Weekly Reading Responses

150 points

The students will turn in a weekly reading response that is one page to two pages in length. They can choose to respond to what they have read in class or they can respond to a weekly question that will be presented in class. These assignments will be turned in the second class meeting of every week. They are worth 20 points a piece, with an extra ten points given to students who turn in all seven. If students do not turn in all seven, they will lose the points for each response as well as the extra ten points. The reason the reading responses are worth so many points is because I feel that reading and understanding literature is a great part of writing literature.

Example:

In *Arrows of the Queen*, Mercedes Lackey presents us with a secondary world called Velgarth. How is Velgarth different from Earth? How is Valdemar different from America? Compare and contrast.

In Class Assignments

50 points

These will be assorted and varied from class to class. This includes writings done in class, pop quizzes, and any worksheets.

Examples:

A quiz is given about Dakin’s actions in *The Farthest Away Mountain*. An in-class exercise is undertaken to create characters.
Character List

25 points

The character list will be something entirely new for a creative writing course offered at Ball State. A character list will be a compilation of several characters that the student has created for use in their fantasy story. Each character list will feature five three dimensional main characters and ten secondary characters. The students are not required to use all fifteen characters in their story. This assignment is meant to get the students thinking about characterization as well as plot.

Examples:

Main Character: Lyarith Silverblades: The last of her kind, the Silver Elves. She is a master swords woman as well as a powerful sorceress. She seeks to restore her people to their glory. Humorous and cheerful, she is friendly as well as deadly.

Secondary Characters: Selderas, the Owl Wizard: Selderas is an old man, bent with years of magic working, who has recently retired from his full-time wizardry. His familiar is a magical wooden dragon and he lives with his granddaughter, who is a journeyman sorceress.

Miscellaneous Assignments

50 points

Also known as participation, these fifty points will be awarded for participation in class as well as attendance. Students will be allowed two absences, and any unexcused absence after those will cost them ten points off of this total.

Examples:

Jane Dear participates eagerly in class, but has missed five classes. Two were okayed by the teacher, two were excused with doctors' notes, but one was unexcused. At the end of the semester, she loses ten points to receive forty.

Dante Sartre has had perfect attendance, but often sleeps in class. He receives 35 out of 50 for lacking participation.
Rough Draft of Story

50 points

The rough draft and conference are integral parts of the course. Students are assigned both a rough draft and final draft because the revision process is essential to the creation of any story. The rough draft and conference together are worth fifty points. Students will be assigned the fifty points automatically when they turn in the story and will be given a “shadow grade” to get an idea of what grade they would receive if they turned this story in without revising it. Students who do NOT attend an individual conference will not be given the points for their draft until they meet with me.

Example:

Rory Durgood turns in a draft, but cannot make it to his conference due to a family emergency. He does not reschedule before the final drafts are presented, so he loses the fifty points.

Final Draft

150 points

Included in these points are both the final draft and the presentation of the story. Each student must present his or her story to the class during workshops. The final draft of the story is expected to be anywhere from 3-12 pages in length. Length is stressed, however, because it is difficult to create an effective short fantasy story (even experienced authors have trouble creating short shorts) in less than three pages. The story will be graded on plot, characterization, grammar and spelling, as well as creativity.
Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Introduction.

Week 2: Types of Fantasy, Troll Bridge, Building Blocks of Fantasy

Week 3: The Farthest Away Mountain, The Quest

Week 4: Arrows of the Queen (Chapters 1-6), An Integral Sense of Wonder

Week 5: Arrows of the Queen (Chapters 7-12), Fantasy Books for Adolescents...

Week 6: Course Packet Materials on Characterization, Film: Lord of the Rings

Week 7: Characterization Continued, Lord of the Rings, Characterization in LOTR.

Week 8: Plot Devices and Themes, Symbolism and Allegory

(Students should be working on their rough draft by now)

Week 9: Creating a Secondary World Exercises, Creating Characters Exercises

Week 10: Conferences

Week 11 through 15: Student Presentations and Workshops
The reason I chose the Fantasy book is for its invaluable essays on the topic. Although I will not be using each essay, I will be using a substantial portion of them as discussion starters.

SRP: $19.99

The Farthest Away Mountain
Lynne Reid Banks

I chose this book because it delighted me when I was younger and I felt it was a concise and clear representation of youth fantasy. The quest story contained within the pages is classic as well as entertaining.

SRP: $4.50

Arrows of the Queen
Mercedes Lackey

This book is an excellent example of a well constructed story layered over believable characters and a wonderful secondary world. It is also a bildungs-roman. The story is appropriate for the classroom setting and will raise some interesting questions.

SRP: $6.99
ISBN: 0-886-77378-4

The Lord of the Rings
(Film)

The reason I'm choosing this film is simple. It is fresh in everyone's mind and it is a classic tale of good versus evil. Students WILL be required to watch the film, even if they have already seen it. Students will respond to the film in writing as a story, not as a film.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr. Laurie Lindberg for taking time out of her busy schedule to work with me and encourage me to do this project. Her time and effort are very much appreciated. I’m very happy to have found someone else I can share my love of fantasy with! Also, I’d like to thank my Mom. She helped me read more fantasy than I could handle and I loved every minute of it!