

Introduction to Fantasy

Summary

Name of Discipline:	Introduction to Fantasy Literature and Cinema
Teacher(s):	Bökös Borbála-Mária
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Weekly Hours (course + seminar/lab/practice):	1 course + 1 seminar
Credits:	5
Language of Instruction:	English
Year of Study (recommended):	All years

Prerequisites

A good command of English language is necessary (min. B1 level).

Course Content

Abstract

This course will explore the fantasy genre in both literature and film, focusing on key themes, trends, and techniques that define the genre. Over 14 weeks, students will analyze various fantasy films (each week looking at a different film fragment), examining how fantasy creates alternative realities, tackles universal themes, and engages with mythological and folkloric traditions. Students do not need any prior knowledge of fantasy to participate in this course. Each week, we will watch a few short film clips during class and analyze them together. The discussions and debates will happen entirely within class time, and no additional assignments will be given outside of these sessions.

Objectives of study:

- To understand the key characteristics and elements of the fantasy genre.
- To analyze the construction of fantastical worlds and creatures.
- To explore the relationship between fantasy, mythology, and folklore.
- To examine the role of fantasy in addressing social, cultural, and psychological themes.
- To critique and interpret fantasy works from various periods and cultures.

Topics

Week	Topic
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<p>Week 1</p>	<p>Introduction to the Genre of Fantasy Fiction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: Overview of various fantasy genres. - Discussion Themes: Introduction to fantasy; understanding high vs. low fantasy; key trends and themes in fantasy fiction. - Interactive Activities: Group discussion on favorite fantasy films or books; brainstorming session to define “fantasy.” - Cultural/Social Connection: Exploring why humans are drawn to fantasy stories and how these stories reflect universal desires, fears, and values.
<p>Week 2</p>	<p>World-Building in Fantasy – The Lord of the Rings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: The Lord of the Rings trilogy. - Discussion Themes: Crafting immersive worlds; constructing characters and landscapes; the significance of Middle-Earth in fantasy. - Interactive Activities: Map-making workshop for fictional worlds; discussion on creating complex characters. - Cultural/Social Connection: The appeal of escaping into fictional worlds, especially in turbulent times, and how fantasy settings can provide refuge and reflection.
<p>Week 3</p>	<p>Fantasy and the Remaking of Mythology – Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief (2010)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief - Discussion Themes: Revisiting ancient myths; the Hero’s Journey structure in modern fantasy; relevance of mythological retellings. - Interactive Activities: Group exercise to identify elements of the Hero’s Journey in popular stories; myth retelling contest. - Cultural/Social Connection: Understanding how mythology provides frameworks for personal growth and societal ideals, and why such themes remain relevant today.
<p>Week 4</p>	<p>Magic at Work – The Harry Potter Series</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: The Harry Potter series. - Discussion Themes: Representations of magic, wizards, and witches; the role of magical education; good vs. evil in magical narratives. - Interactive Activities: Sorting activity based on character traits; creating original spells or magical abilities. - Cultural/Social Connection: Examining the appeal of magic in adolescence and adulthood as a metaphor for potential, growth, and overcoming adversity.
<p>Week 5</p>	<p>Fantastic Creatures – Dragons in Game of Thrones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: Selected episodes from Game of Thrones. - Discussion Themes: The symbolism of dragons; power and destruction; loyalty and myth in relation to these creatures. - Interactive Activities: Designing original mythical creatures; discussion on the

	<p>symbolic roles of dragons in various cultures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural/Social Connection: Understanding how different cultures use mythical creatures to embody human emotions, ambitions, and fears.
Week 6	<p>Fantastic Creatures – Vampires and the Living Dead in Dracula and Byzantium (2012)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: Dracula (various adaptations) and Byzantium (2012). - Discussion Themes: Vampire lore and themes of immortality; fear, attraction, and the undead in folklore. - Interactive Activities: Debate on the ethics of immortality; designing a “new-age” vampire character. - Cultural/Social Connection: Examining society’s fascination with eternal youth and the taboo around death and mortality.
Week 7	<p>Fantastic Creatures – Fairies from Folk Tales to Modern Adaptations in The Watchers (2024)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: The Watchers (2024). - Discussion Themes: Evolution of fairy folklore; fairies as symbolic beings of nature and mystery. - Interactive Activities: Folktale adaptation workshop; creating short stories or characters based on traditional fairy lore. - Cultural/Social Connection: Discussion on humanity’s relationship with nature and how fairies symbolize the boundary between civilization and the wilderness.
Week 8	<p>The Fantastic and the Gothic – Coraline and Stranger Things</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: Coraline, Stranger Things. - Discussion Themes: Intersection of fantasy and horror; Gothic elements; the allure of parallel worlds and hidden fears. - Interactive Activities: Writing exercise on “parallel worlds”; designing a Gothic-style creature or setting. - Cultural/Social Connection: Exploring the human fascination with the macabre and why dark fantasy resonates as a means of coping with real-world anxieties.
Week 9	<p>Contemporary Fantasy as Social Commentary – Pan’s Labyrinth, The Shape of Water, Edward Scissorhands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: Pan’s Labyrinth, The Shape of Water, Edward Scissorhands. - Discussion Themes: Social issues in fantasy; exploring themes of isolation, difference, and acceptance. - Interactive Activities: Class discussion on metaphorical elements in each film; creating fantasy characters to represent social themes. - Cultural/Social Connection: Analysis of how fantasy reflects societal norms, challenges prejudices, and celebrates diversity.

<p>Week 10</p>	<p>Fantasy and Coming of Age – The Chronicles of Narnia and His Dark Materials (2019)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: The Chronicles of Narnia, His Dark Materials (2019). - Discussion Themes: Growth, transformation, and self-discovery in fantasy; symbolism in coming-of-age journeys. - Interactive Activities: Character growth mapping for protagonists; designing “transitional” artifacts or spaces for fantasy worlds. - Cultural/Social Connection: Discussing rites of passage and personal transformation, and how fantasy provides models for growth and change.
<p>Week 11</p>	<p>Urban Fantasy – The Crow (1994) and Hellboy (2004)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: The Crow (1994), Hellboy (2004). - Discussion Themes: Fantasy within urban settings; anti-heroes and the darker side of humanity. - Interactive Activities: Creating an “urban fantasy” scene or character; brainstorming stories that blend modern cities with mythical elements. - Cultural/Social Connection: Exploring the blend of fantasy and realism in city life and the concept of the anti-hero as a critique of modern values.
<p>Week 12</p>	<p>Environmental and Eco-Fantasy – Princess Mononoke, Avatar, MFKZ (Mutafukaz)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: Princess Mononoke, Avatar, MFKZ (Mutafukaz). - Discussion Themes: Nature, technology, and environmental conservation; conflicts between humans and nature. - Interactive Activities: Group project on eco-friendly world-building; creating eco-fantasy characters. - Cultural/Social Connection: Discussing real-world environmental issues and how eco-fantasy prompts reflection on our ecological responsibilities.
<p>Week 13</p>	<p>Non-Western Fantasy and Animations – The Secret of Kells, Spirited Away, Attack on Titan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Films/Media: The Secret of Kells, Spirited Away, Attack on Titan. - Discussion Themes: Global perspectives on fantasy; cultural symbols, values, and folklore in non-Western fantasy. - Interactive Activities: Comparative analysis of Eastern and Western fantasy motifs; designing a myth or creature based on non-Western folklore. - Cultural/Social Connection: Discussion on the importance of diverse perspectives in storytelling and how different cultures shape unique fantasy tropes and messages.
<p>Week 14</p>	<p>Student Project Presentations and Course Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities: Student presentations on favorite fantasy-related films/animations/stories (optional). - Themes: Reflection on key topics; synthesis of course learnings. - Cultural/Social Connection: Final discussion on how fantasy as a genre can influence and inspire real-life perspectives and ambitions.

Learning Outcomes

After completing the course, students will be able to:

- Identify and analyze the key elements and themes of the fantasy genre in both literature and film, such as worldbuilding, magic, and the hero's journey.
- Interpret and critique fantasy works from various cultural, historical, and philosophical perspectives, understanding their deeper meanings and societal implications.
- Compare and contrast different subgenres within fantasy, including epic fantasy, urban fantasy, dark fantasy, and others, recognizing the unique characteristics of each.
- Evaluate the role of mythology, folklore, and allegory in the construction of fantasy narratives, understanding how these elements contribute to storytelling.
- Create and develop original fantasy concepts or narratives, applying techniques learned from course materials to their own creative projects.
- Engage critically with fantasy films and literature, articulating well-reasoned arguments in discussions, essays, and presentations.
- Understand the evolution of the fantasy genre across different media and cultural contexts, recognizing contemporary trends and innovations.

Assessment

Class Activity (active involvement in discussions, presentations, class assignments) 50%

Moodle tests: 50%

Requirements to Pass

Minimum 30% in Class Activity and minimum a 5th grade obtained from Moodle tests.

Bibliography:

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- Bökös, Borbála ed. *Myths in Visual and Literary Contexts*. Oradea: Partium, 2018.
- Alkon, Paul K. *Science fiction before 1900: Imagination discovers technology*. London: Routledge, 2002.
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- H. Nagy, Péter, ed. *Idegen (látvány)-világok. Tanulmányok science fiction és cyberpunk filmekről*. Dunaszerdahely: Lilium Aurum, 2008.
- Maár, Judit. *A fantasztikus irodalom*. Budapest: Osiris, 2001.
- Sobchack, Vivian. *Screening Space. The American Science Fiction Film*. New York: Ungar, 2004.
- Telotte, J. P. *Science Fiction Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Bevezetés a fantasztikus irodalomba*. Budapest: Napvilág, 2002.
- Tóth, Csaba szerk. *Fantasztikus világok: társadalmi és politikai kérdések a képzelet világaiban*. Budapest: Athenaeum, 2017.

The Oxford Book of Fantasy Stories. Ed. Tom Shippey. Oxford U Press, 2003.