

RELIGION AND FANTASY LITERATURE

Professor Jodi Eichler-Levine | REL 079 | Fall 2017

Contact

Dr. Jodi Eichler-Levine

Religion Studies

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E-mail is best. However, I receive a high volume of e-mail. Allow 24 hours for a weekday response; 48 hours if it is the weekend.

Office phone: 610-758-3370

Office Hours

I keep regular **drop-in** office hours on **Thursdays from 9-11 am**. You do not need an appointment to come and see me then.

I am also available by appointment. Allow a few days for scheduling—don't wait until the last minute!

Course Meets

Tues/Thurs 2:35-3:50 pm

Maginnes Hall 270



Concerning this course

This class provides an introduction to the connections between religion and fantasy literature by examining some of its classic and more recent series. We will begin with selections from *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*, continue with *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, and conclude with *The Magicians*.

Through our reading, writing, and discussion of these series and some secondary materials, we will explore key themes in the study of religion, including: creation myths; innocence and experience; ritual; and sacred texts. 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.”

Like Lyra's alethiometer in *The Golden Compass*, this syllabus is a very helpful guide. Consult and *re-consult* it regularly.



Required texts

The following books are **required**. They can be purchased at University Books and More or wherever fine books are sold. You must acquire a **hard copy** to bring to class— e-books are not acceptable (see "Low Tech Life" policy, page 4, below). Further readings are available on Course Site as indicated in the reading schedule.

- C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
- C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*
- C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*
- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (please note: the first two volumes of Lord of the Rings are *not* required; excerpts will be provided on Course Site).
- J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*
- J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*
- Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials* trilogy (all 3 books)
- Lev Grossman, *The Magicians*

Learning Objectives

Students in this course will:

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

Assignments

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

Class Attendance and Participation: I expect you to be present in class and to respectfully engage in class activities and take part in discussions. I realize that not everyone is a social



butterfly, but I do expect you to speak up now and then— the emphasis here is on quality, not quantity. My attendance policy works this way: Everyone gets **four “free” absences, no questions asked, just please do me the courtesy of sending an e-mail.** Those can be for: illness; religious holidays; family issues; job interviews; playing video games in your dorm room. I don’t care what you are doing, just spend them *wisely* (this means that if you take one for playing video games in September, you might be out of luck when you catch some horrible flu in November). After you have exceeded four absences, your attendance grade will reflect this. It will also reflect the quality of your participation. (Accommodations can be made for truly serious issues— i.e. extended illnesses— if you work through the Dean of Students office to **for written documentation**). **Value: 100 points**

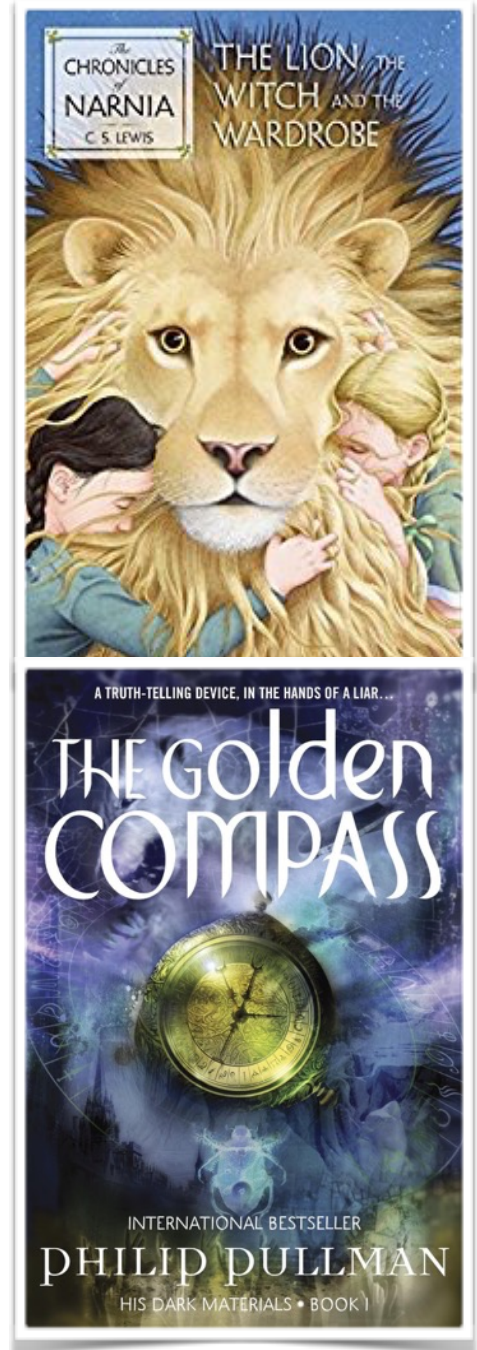
Into the Wardrobe Essay: Welcome to the new semester! This is a fun, credit/no-credit assignment that will help me get to know you. Write a 2 page (typed, double-spaced) essay. At the beginning, please introduce yourself to me in whatever way you would like to—let me know where you’re from, what you’re up to so far at Lehigh, and why you are taking this course. *Then*, help me get to know you even further by answer 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? Those three items should tell me more about you and your intellectual goals. Be creative, *write clearly*, and have fun! **Due: Typed and printed at the START of class on Thursday, August 31. Value: 20 points**

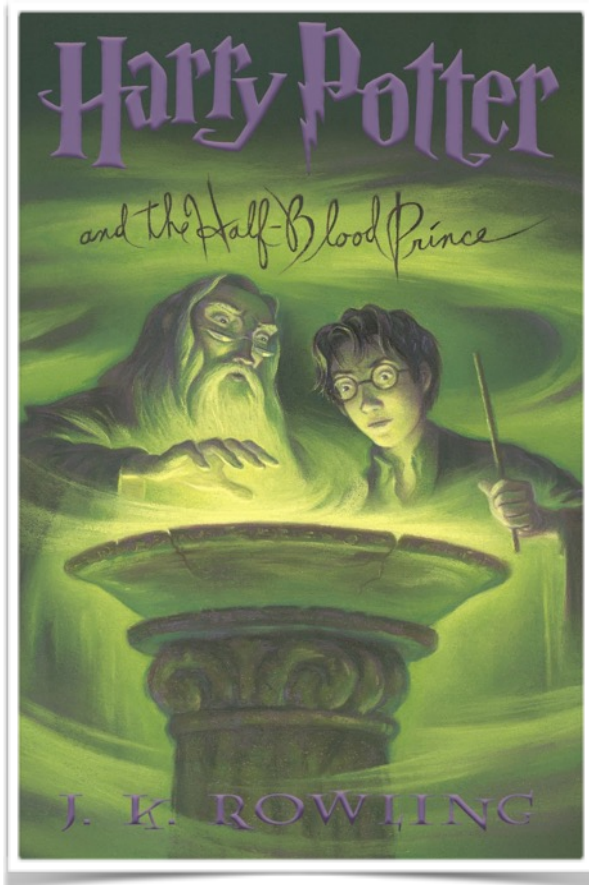
In Class Writing Assignments: We will have frequent short, in-class writing exercises, typically for a credit/no credit grade (or for a very simple grading scale). For this reason, you should always have some blank paper and a writing implement with you. If you miss an assignment you cannot make it up, but you *can* do extra credit. (See below). A typical day’s assignment will be worth 3-5 points. There will not be an assignment in class every day, but they will be frequent.

Value: 0— 100 points TOTAL.

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 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).

Value: 80 points. Due date: Tuesday, 10/3, at 10 PM, to Course Site.





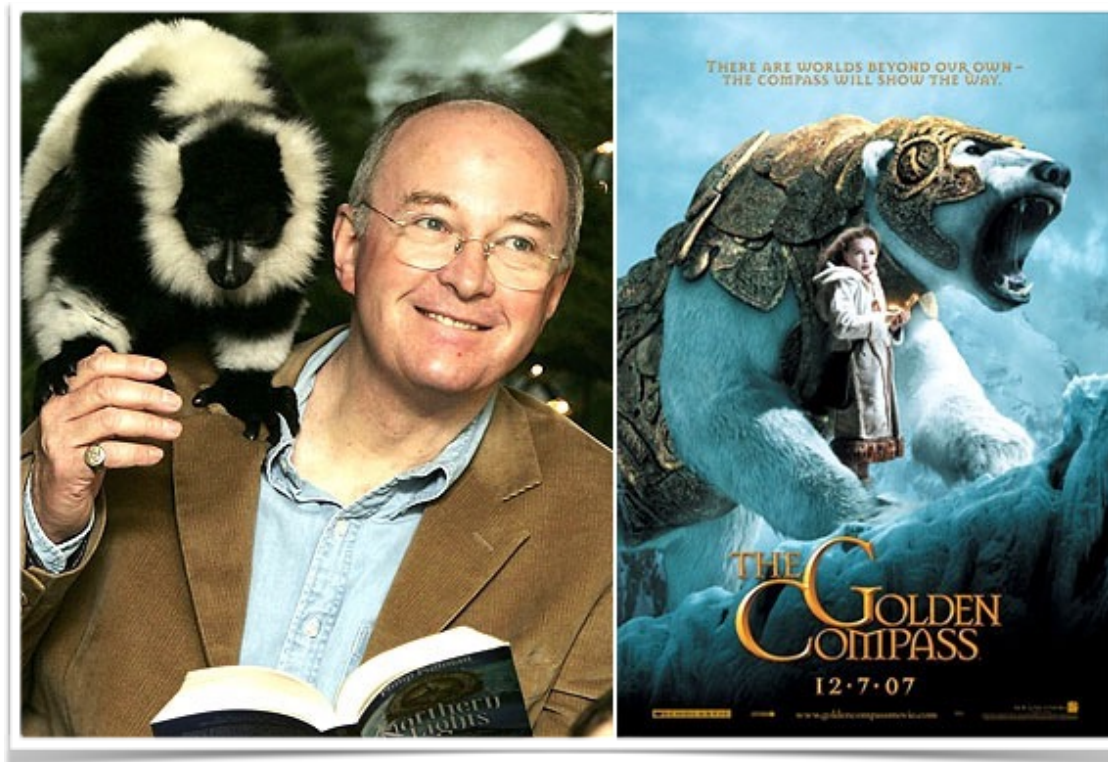
Studies in Fandom and Adaptations: All of the series we are studying this semester have vibrant fan communities; most of these series also have been adapted into some non-literary medium, such as a film. For this second paper, you will have a choice between writing a sophisticated review of a film adaptation, *or* doing a micro-ethnography of a fan community or example of fan fiction or fan discourse. (By that point in the fall you will know what all of these terms mean!) Either choice will help you learn how to think about how texts circulate in the world. **Value: 100 points. Due date: Tuesday 11/14, by 10 PM, to course site**

Imagined Dialogue: For your final writing project, will 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 and the different styles and perspectives of each author. (Alternate option: imagined dialogue *in the form of tweets*. Probably harder to do). **Value: 100 points. Due date: Thursday 12/7, by 10 PM, to Course Site.**

Extra Credit: The study of religion intersects with a host of other fields in the humanities and social sciences, including the study of race, gender, history, sexuality, modern languages and literatures, sociology, and philosophy, to name just a few possibilities. Throughout the semester, I will be sharing mentions of events, typically sponsored by academic departments and programs, that can broaden your intellectual horizons while at Lehigh. You can also ask me about events you have learned about on your own. For extra credit, you may attend *up to 3* such events and write them up in a 2 page typed, double-spaced summary and reflection paper. *The final date on which you may e-mail me such papers is December 4, by midnight, so plan ahead.* Value: 0-5 points per reflection, depending upon its clarity and quality.

Policies

Low-tech life: Try it. You'll like it. We will have a mostly low-tech classroom experience this semester. All readings should be brought in hard copy to the class for which they are scheduled. There will be **no phones, tablets, e-readers, or laptops** permitted in class. I realize that this may sound daunting. However, this provides a focused, interactive, and distraction-free environment in which we can all deeply engage with one another. See, for example, the study discussed in this article: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>



Ch-ch-ch-changes: The instructor reserves the **right to alter readings, assignments, or the schedule below** as dictated by the needs and interests of the class. This is why attending class, finding out if you missed any announcements from a colleague, and checking your e-mail and Course Site are all crucial.

I love e-mail. It is the best way to reach me. That said, I get a lot of it and don't always check it on weekends. Please be patient when awaiting a reply—up to 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. **Always indicate your name and what course you are taking in your e-mail! Your Lehigh university e-mail address is an official form of university communication; check it daily.**

Academic Integrity: Here is the Lehigh University Undergraduate Student Senate Statement on Academic Integrity: “We, the Lehigh University Student Senate, as the standing representative body of all undergraduates, reaffirm the duty and obligation of students to meet and uphold the highest principles and values of personal, moral and ethical conduct. As partners in our educational community, both students and faculty share the responsibility for promoting and helping to ensure an environment of academic integrity. As such, each student is expected to complete all academic course work in accordance to the standards set forth by the faculty and in compliance with the University's Code of Conduct.”

Accommodations for students with disabilities: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact both your instructor and the Office of Academic Support Services, Williams Hall, Suite 301 (610-758-4152) as early as possible in the semester. You must have documentation from the Academic Support Services office before accommodations can be granted.

Lehigh University endorses the Principles of Our Equitable

Community [http://www.lehigh.edu/~inprv/initiatives/PrinciplesEquity_Sheet_v2_032212.pdf]. I expect each member of this class to acknowledge and practice these principles. Respect for each other and for differing viewpoints is a vital component of the learning environment inside and outside the classroom. At times, we will disagree. This is normal. However, we will not engage in mockery, the use of slurs, or other disrespectful behavior.

Odds and Ends

In the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, my ideas for this syllabus came from many sources, including professors who work all over the country. Although syllabi don't need footnotes, they are helped by acknowledgements. I am particularly grateful to Professors Martin Kavka, Ronit Stahl, Heather White, Tahneer Oksman, and my colleagues here at Lehigh for their advice and ideas.

Schedule of Readings

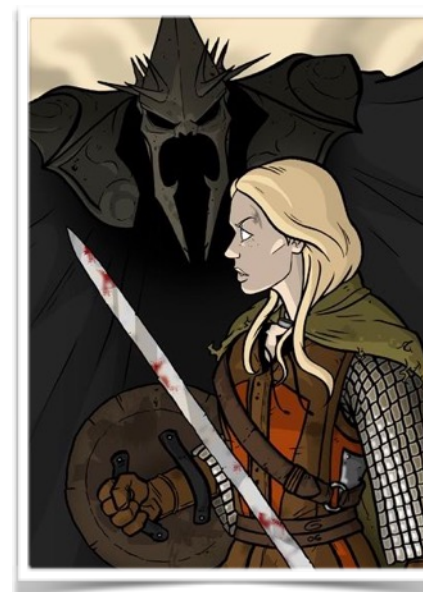
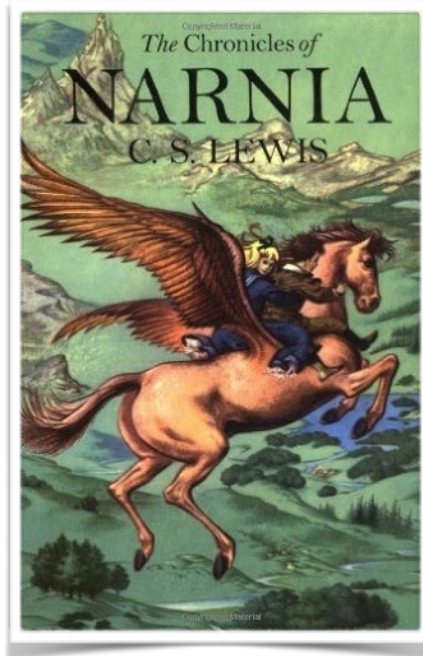
As you will notice, the page count per week for the course is high. After C.S. Lewis, we are looking at some very lengthy tomes, and, in some cases, we are not reading every book in a series, which means that we are not focusing on every moment of a saga. Of course, you will be reading hundreds of pages of fantasy novels, which are much easier to binge read than textbooks, academic journal articles, or philosophy. (You will also have secondary readings, including some academic journal articles and other sources!) In many ways, this course is about balancing the art of the skim with focused close reading of particularly important passages.

Readings are to be completed *before* the date for which they are assigned; come to class with the readings in hand and key passages that you want to discuss flagged, bookmarked, underlined, or bedazzled. I will have some material prepared for us each day, but the more you enter the class with a sense of what you want to discuss, the more *you* can drive our discussions.

Readings with a (CS) in parentheses are available on Course Site. All other readings are available for purchase in University Books and More, or wherever fine books are sold.

T 8/29: First class. Introductions!

R 8/31: Gary Laderman, *Sacred Matters*, xii-22 (CS). C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children." (CS)



T 9/5: Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

R 9/7: Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*



T 9/12: Lewis, *The Last Battle*. Philip Pullman, "The Dark Side of Narnia." (CS)

R 9/14: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (excerpts) and *The Fellowship of the Ring* (excerpts) (CS)

T 9/19: Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (excerpts) (CS). Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories." (CS)

R 9/21: NO CLASS. ROSH HASHANAH. *Use the time to get started on the lengthy readings to come!*

T 9/26: Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 731-864. S. Brent Rodriguez-Plate. "When Do Moviegoers Become Pilgrims?" (CS)

R 9/28: Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 865-1008; and, in the Appendices, 1032-1038.

T 10/3: J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, excerpt (CS). *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 1-302.

R 10/5: Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 303-652. Philip Goff, "Religion and Popular Culture" (CS)

T 10/10: Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 1-267. Kristina Busse and Jonathan Gray, "Fan Cultures and Fan Communities." (CS)

R 10/12: Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 268-553

T 10/17: NO CLASS: PACING BREAK

R 10/19: Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 554-759. Excerpt, *The Gospel According to Harry Potter* (CS). Julie Pond, "A Story of the Exceptional: Fate and Free Will in the Harry Potter Series."

T 10/24: Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass*, 1-203.

R 10/26: Pullman, *The Golden Compass*, 204-399.

T 10/31: Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 1-165.

R 11/2: Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 166-326.

T 11/7: Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1-252. Pat Pinsent, “Unexpected Allies? Pullman and the Feminist Theologians.” (CS)

R 11/9 Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 253-518. Donna Freitas and Jason King, *Killing the Imposter God: Philip Pullman’s Spiritual Imagination in His Dark Materials*, excerpt (CS)

T 11/14 *Catch up Day*

R 11/16: Lev Grossman, *The Magicians*, 1-133. Michael Weingrad, “Why There Is No Jewish Narnia” (CS)

NO CLASS TUES 11/21 or THURS 11/24: THANKSGIVING WEEK

T 11/28: Grossman, *The Magicians*, 134-261

R 11/30: Grossman, *The Magicians*, 262-402. Magicians, Joe Fassler, “Confronting Reality by Reading Fantasy” (interview with Lev Grossman) (CS)

T 12/5: Diane Walsh Pasulka, “The Fairy Tale is True: Social Technologies of the Supernatural in Film and New Media” (CS)

R 12/7: Catch-up/Class Party

