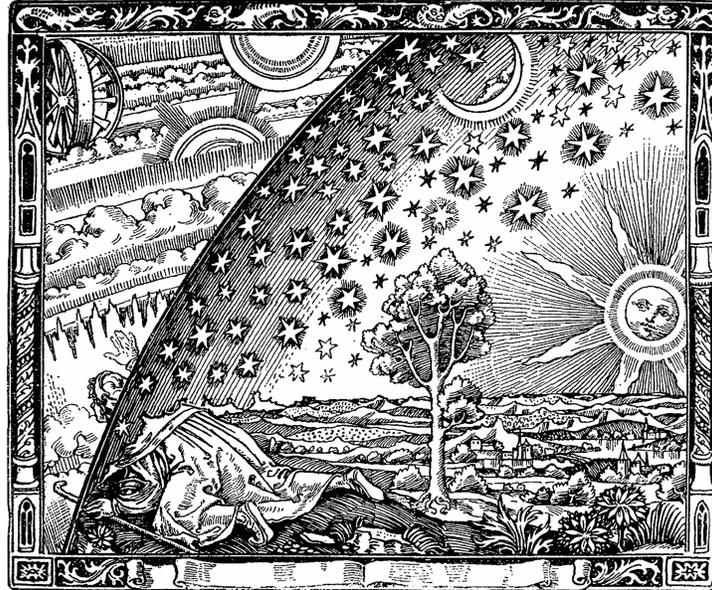


ENGLISH 123: LITERATURE AND GENRE



FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION SUMMER 2018 RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

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It's an old genre, stretching back to the earliest literary texts, and yet still, for some reason, one that's been frowned upon in modern times by 'serious' literary thinkers and creative writing professors. One of the latter, an old friend of mine, always liked to begin her Creative Writing course with a simple admonition: "No Hobbits!" Which may seem odd, since she was and is a huge fan of Tolkien; her aversion likely had more to do with not wanting to read a stack of creative pieces which, in addition to their other issues, were set on strange new worlds.

But the larger bias -- the feeling that Fantasy and Sci-Fi (and here we could include comics, graphic novels, and much of the rest of the geekazoid literary universe) are somehow juvenile, somehow not quite suited for grown-up readers, somehow lesser than 'literary' fiction -- is still out there. Sci-Fi has its own awards (the Hugo and Nebula), but Sci-Fi and fantasy writers rarely show up on the list for any major literary awards, unless they're for children's literature. Some noted writers have dabbled in it -- Doris Lessing with her *Shikasta* series, or Margaret Atwood with *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* -- but they were both established writers before they did so. Atwood, pointedly, does not like the phrase "science" fiction -- she prefers "speculative" -- because, as she puts it, her novels don't have "things in them that haven't been invented yet."

This summer session, we'll be reading five texts -- most of them short ones -- that are classics of the genre, and viewing six films that, directly or indirectly, take up the same themes.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Each week, we'll have one reading – usually a short novella or story – and one film. Some of the films – the ones that can't easily be seen online or via streaming services – will be shown in class. There will be a blog post for each week, and each student will be responsible for posting a 1-2 paragraph response to either the text or the film. There will be just one formal essay, due in draft form in Week 4, and final form at the end of Week 6, on a topic of the student's choosing related to the readings and films we've considered.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week one. Text: Lucian, *The True History*. Film: *The Adventures of Baron Münchhausen* (Terry Gilliam, 1988).

Week two. Text: Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Film: *Return to Oz* (Walter Murch, 1985).

Week 3. Text: Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Film: *The Forbidden Quest* (Peter Delpeut, 1993).

Week 4. Text: Tolkien, *Leaf by Niggle*. Film: *The Hobbit* (Rankin-Bass, 1977)

Week 5. Text: Millhauser, "Eisenheim the Illusionist." Film: *The Illusionist* (Neil Burger, 2006)

Week 6. Film: *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973)