

Bridgewater at Oxford Summer Programme: Oxford Fantasists sample syllabus

Course Description:

In this course, we will explore the two main Oxford-based groups of twentieth-century British fantasy fiction: the 'Inklings' and the so-called 'Oxford School'. The former, and best-known, circle of writers came about as both an academic and literary response to perceived needs of its members, largely Oxford professors, whose main proponents, especially with regards to fantasy literature, were J.R.R. Tolkien (Exeter, Pembroke, and Merton Colleges) and C.S. Lewis (University and Magdalen Colleges). Later on, while never acknowledged as such at the time, the 'Oxford School' encompasses a group of "second-generation" fantasy authors who were mostly taught and strongly influenced by Tolkien and Lewis whilst students at Oxford themselves. Three of the best-loved, award-winning authors associated with this group include Susan Cooper (Somerville College), Alan Garner (Magdalen College), and Philip Pullman (Exeter College). To place readings in context, this course will also explore selected source materials used, both directly and indirectly, by some of these authors, focusing on the profound influence of medieval literature on their work.

Course Requirements and Organisation:

The course is divided into eight sessions of two hours each. Please bring along the set text for each session in either print or electronic form. It is **imperative** that you read each text **prior** to the class in which it will be discussed. To that end, please refer to the outline below, which lists the readings in the order in which they will be covered. There is a fair amount of primary reading involved so please be sure to read as much as possible in advance of the start date. The course will take the form of a series of seminars, each introduced by a brief "lecture", with each student expected to participate actively in discussion thereafter. **Grades will be based on attendance, participation, a short response paper, and one academic essay (25% of the final mark for the first three elements, and 75% for the academic essay).**

The short response paper should be 500–750 words of your thoughts on the first session's three essays to be discussed (more details to follow in that session). The main essay should be **2,500–3,000 words** in length, and it should be properly referenced, including **at least three** secondary/critical sources, a **bibliography** of works cited, and a **word-count**. You must write on **at least two different works** of fiction by **two different authors** in the essay.

Draft Course Schedule (and Required Reading):

1. **July 8th**: Introductory session, 'Approaching Fantasy Literature' – J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories' (1939), C.S. Lewis, 'On Stories' (1966), and Philip Pullman, 'The Writing of Stories' (2017)
2. **July 10th**: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (1937), especially 'An Unexpected Party' and 'Riddles in the Dark'
3. **July 12th**: C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950)
4. **July 15th**: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), especially 'The Ring Goes South' (FR) and 'The Departure of Boromir' (TT)
5. **July 17th**: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), especially 'The King of the

Golden Hall' (TT), and 'The Land of Shadow' (RK)

6. **July 19th**: Alan Garner, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) [Book 1 of the 'Weirdstone' trilogy]
7. **July 22nd**: Susan Cooper, *The Dark is Rising* (1973) [Book 2 of the *The Dark is Rising* sequence]
8. **July 24th**: Philip Pullman, *Northern Lights* (UK)/*The Golden Compass* (US) (1995) [Book 1 of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy]

NB The fantasy novels to be studied are, of course, **required reading**. Familiarity with the various series from which they are taken is *not* essential—hopefully reading and studying these selected best-known texts will whet one's appetite for the rest! As far as editions are concerned, any edition you can get your hands on will do (and all should be readily, and cheaply, available online). Copies of the introductory essays to be studied will be supplied.

Medieval Literature – Select Supplementary Bibliography

The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology [including the complete *Beowulf*], ed. and trans. by Kevin Crossley-Holland, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) [Whilst not required reading, Crossley-Holland's translations of *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, and selected *Riddles* – texts which we will cover – are very accessible, and being familiar with these texts in advance will help!]

Lee, Stuart, and Elizabeth Solopova, *The Keys of Middle-Earth: Discovering Medieval*

Literature Through the Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien, 2nd edn. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
[Photocopies of the key passages to be discussed will be provided, but this book is a worthwhile investment anyway, and the introduction is particularly useful for newcomers to medieval literature.]

The Poetic Edda, trans. by Carolayne Larrington, rev. edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)
[This is also optional reading, but very worthwhile.]

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, trans. by Bernard O'Donoghue (London: Penguin, 2006) [This is also optional reading, but very worthwhile.]