



ENGL 151: Studies in Popular Fiction

Instructor Information

Instructor Contact Information

Instructor name: Alexander McKee
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**NOTE: Professor McKee will be using Zoom to host his virtual office hours during this course.

About the Instructor

Alexander McKee is an Assistant Professor of English who specializes in 19th- and 20th-century British and Irish literature. He came to the University of Delaware in 2009 after completing his PhD at the University of California in Santa Barbara. Dr. McKee has published essays on Samuel Beckett, Peter Greenaway, and Billy Roche, among others. His current book project examines the relationship between autobiography and fiction in 20th-century Irish literature.

Course Description

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Are you one of the millions of people who turned out to see *Nope*, the 2022 horror film written and directed by Jordan Peele? Did you grow up reading dystopian sci-fi novels like *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Maze Runner*? Have you ever streamed *Sherlock* or *Elementary*, two of the most recent T.V. shows built around Arthur Conan Doyle's world-famous sleuth? If so, then you already have some familiarity with three of the genres of popular literature—Gothic horror, science fiction, and detective stories—that we will be looking at in ENGL 151. This class focuses on the final decades of the 19th century as the period in which these genres first appeared in their modern forms. During this course, you will get to read some of the most famous examples of genre fiction from this time, including Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man*, as well as the Sherlock Holmes mysteries. By the end of this course, you will understand the lasting influence of these works, which have inspired numerous adaptations and updates over the years. Beyond that, however, you will get to respond creatively to one of these texts, as you produce a work of fanfiction that riffs directly on it.

Course Delivery

This online course features a series of learning modules for you to work through on your own. While you will have some live exchanges with your instructor and your classmates, most of the instruction will be delivered asynchronously.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the demographic and economic factors that gave rise to popular fiction in the late nineteenth century;
2. Differentiate between major genres of popular fiction (e.g., mystery, science fiction, horror);
3. Analyze genre texts in relation to their historical and/or sociocultural contexts;
4. Recognize the value of genre fiction as a highly topical form of writing that is uniquely engaged with contemporary sociocultural issues and deeply relevant to individual readers' concerns.
5. Explain how and why contemporary authors and filmmakers have redeployed iconic characters and narrative motifs from classic works of genre fiction.

Learning Assessment

Final Grade Breakdown

The final course grade will be calculated using the following components:

Course Component	Percentage of Total
Fanfiction Assignment	25%
Close Reading Assignment	20%
Discussions	20%
Quizzes	20%
Group Work	10%
Peer Review	5%

Fanfiction Assignment

The final assignment in ENGL 151 asks you to produce a piece of fanfiction (approx. 2000 words) that borrows directly from one or more of the texts that appear on the syllabus. After completing your story, you will produce a short essay (500-750 words) that explains precisely how your work

illustrates the genre you have chosen, listing the conventions you deploy and explaining the central message of your story. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that (1) you understand the conventions of the genre, and (2) you have used them to make a critical point of some kind.

Close Reading Assignment

This short essay assignment (750-1000 words) encourages you to consider the relationship between form and content in one particular work from the course. As an exercise in close reading, it requires you to build an argument that is supported primarily by close attention to and analysis of the words the author chose in a particular passage, rather than by claims about the text as a whole or its broad historical or cultural contexts (although these can certainly be mentioned).

Discussions

This course relies heavily on asynchronous online discussions to create a sense of community. You will have regular opportunities to share your thoughts on the course material with your classmates. Individually, these discussion posts do not count for much, because they will be graded out of 10 points each. But taken together, they are worth as much as a longer essay. So you should put some real thought into your discussion posts and take some time writing them.

Quizzes

You will be required to take 10 quizzes during this online course. These multiple-choice quizzes will cover lecture material, as well as the reading assignments. If you're disappointed by your initial performance on one of these quizzes, you're more than welcome to take it a second time. But you should be aware that many of the questions are likely to change. You will only be allowed to see the correct answers after you've completed your final attempt.

Group Work

There will be five group-work assignments in this course. As part of these assignments, you will use Zoom to hold live conversations with your classmates and to produce answers to a particular set of questions. This group work is designed to create a sense of community in the online learning environment. But even more importantly, it will give you a chance to think more critically and explore alternative perspectives on the course material.

Peer Review

In working to produce a piece of fanfiction for the final assignment, you and your classmates will have the opportunity to read and respond to each other's stories. If you wish to earn high marks on this assignment, you must aim to do three things: (1) respond thoroughly and thoughtfully to both drafts for which you are responsible; (2) comment exclusively on global revision issues in each case; and (3) identify specific passages from your peers' work to illustrate your points.