

ENGL 373, “Science Fiction and Fantasy”:
Death and the Undying
Maggie Rebecca Myers

Description:

Vampires! Zombies! Liches! Evil AIs! Again and again, science fiction and fantasy return to issues of death and dying. Even when not inventing new and terrifying ways to die (and come back from it), these genres speculate on more than death alone. In this class, we will examine the ways in which speculative fiction uses tropes of the dead, the undead, and the undying to discuss issues very central to those of us who are still alive. We will examine female sexuality demonized into vampirism, queer desire processed through necromancy, the echoes of colonialism both on a spaceship and in a (haunted?) gothic mansion, and how one might come of age in a time of (un)death. While our focus is on death and the undead, these texts will ultimately ask us to examine life and the living.

Outcomes:

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify key terms in speculative fiction through regular quizzes and class lectures
2. Analyze the use of death and undeath in course texts through classroom discussion and short explication essays
3. Compose a creative research project that reimagines and repurposes one aspect of a course text into a new genre

Required texts:

- *Binti* trilogy, Nnedi Okorafor. DAW Books, 2019. 0756416930
- *All Systems Red*, Martha Wells. Tordotcom, 2017. 9780765397539
- *Reaper Man*, Terry Pratchett. Harper, 2013. 0062237357
- *Dracula*, Bram Stoker. Dover, 2000. 9780486454016
- *Mexican Gothic*, Silvia Moreno-Garcia. Del Rey, 2021. 052562080X
- *Gideon the Ninth*, Tamsyn Muir. Tordotcom, 2020. 125031318X
- *Sabriel*, Garth Nix. HarperTeen, 2008. 9780061474354

The ISBN numbers for these texts reflect the paperback editions. Other editions are okay to buy if you can find them for a cheaper price, but **please try to order the same edition of *Reaper Man***, as there are no chapter headings to standardize page numbers.

All supplemental texts will be available on Brightspace (noted as BS in the course calendar).

Assignments:

- 15%: Quizzes: You will be quizzed regularly on course readings, classroom discussion, and lectures. All quizzes will be available on Brightspace.
- 20%: Discussion prompts: You will sign up to be a discussion leader for two class periods. You will come to class with 3-5 prepared questions to spark discussion and will help guide the conversation around your questions. Questions will be due by 9 am on your assigned days via Brightspace. We will conduct sign-ups during the first week of class.
- 30%: Explication essays (2, each 3-5 pages): You will examine and explicate one significant moment from one of our course texts. You will explain how and why the moment is important as to the understanding of the overall text by using the close reading skills we will develop in class. One will be due before fall break, the other will be due before Thanksgiving break.
- 20%: Creative project: You will select one aspect of a syllabus text and remediate it into a different form, accompanied by a short paper explaining the context for your text and explaining your creative choices. This project will be due during finals week.
- 15%: Professional ethos: This category includes attendance, homework, and participation in class.

Course policies:

- Grading scale:

A+ 97-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69
A 93-96	B 83-86	C 73-76	D 63-66
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62
F 0-59			

- Assignment and format guidelines: Assignments should be written in either MLA or Chicago format, using 12-point Times New Roman font. Papers should be double spaced with 1" margins. All papers should be submitted electronically as a Word doc (.doc or .docx) or PDF.
- Missed or late work: I expect work to be submitted on time. Late work will be docked a third of a letter grade for every day late (so after one day an A will become an A-, etc.). **I am happy to grant extensions, but you must reach out to me at least 24 hours before the deadline.**
- Attendance: As much of our time together will be spent discussing the day's reading, you are expected to attend every class. If you must miss class for a religious or military obligation or if you are sick, please let me know ahead of time so the absence may be excused. **If you are sick, please do not come to class.** Email me ahead of time and let me know, and then stay home and rest. More than 3 unexcused absences will negatively impact your participation grade. If you are

isolated or quarantined, we will use discussion boards (graded under Professional Ethos) to supplement in-person discussion.

Schedule:

Unit 1: Death and the Dead

Week 1: Introduction to Speculative Fiction
M 8/23: Syllabus, introductions
W 8/25: “A Machine, Unhaunted,” Kerstin Hall (available on Brightspace (BS))
F 8/27: “The Specialist’s Hat,” Kelly Link (BS)

Week 2: Afrofuturism
M 8/30: *Binti* pp. 1-29
W 9/1: *Binti* pp. 29-end
F 9/3: *Binti: Sacred Fire*

Week 3: Cyborgs!
M 9/6: **LABOR DAY—NO CLASS**
W 9/8: *All Systems Red* Chapter 1-4
F 9/10: *All Systems Red* Chapter 5-end

Week 4: The Grim Reaper
M 9/13: *Reaper Man* pp. 1-51
W 9/15: *Reaper Man* pp. 51-102
F 9/17: *Reaper Man* pp. 102-162

Week 5: New Death
M 9/20: *Reaper Man* pp. 162-224
W 9/22: *Reaper Man* pp. 225-283
F 9/24: *Reaper Man* pp. 283-343

Unit 2: The Undead

Week 6: The Gothic
M 9/27: *Dracula* Chapter 1-4
Guest lecture: Vanessa Iacocca
W 9/29: *Dracula* Chapter 5-9
F 10/1: *Dracula* Chapter 10-15

Week 7: Gender and the Undead
M 10/4: *Dracula* Chapter 16-19
W 10/6: *Dracula* Chapter 20-23
F 10/8: *Dracula* Chapter 24-end

Explication paper 1 due by 11:59 pm on Brightspace

Week 8: (Post)colonialism and Fantasy
M 10/11: **FALL BREAK—NO CLASS**
W 10/13: *Mexican Gothic* Chapter 1-5
F 10/15: *Mexican Gothic* Chapter 6-11

Week 9: Race and Undeath
M 10/18: *Mexican Gothic* Chapter 12-16
W 10/20: *Mexican Gothic* Chapter 17-22
F 10/22: *Mexican Gothic* Chapter 23-end
Guest lecture: Alejandra Ortega

Week 10: The Undead in Other Media
M 10/25: *What We Do in the Shadows*
W 10/27: *What We Do in the Shadows*
F 10/29: Dungeons and Dragons (BS)

Unit 3: The Undying

Week 11: Necromancy and Science Fantasy
M 11/1: *Gideon the Ninth* Chapter 1-8
W 11/3: *Gideon the Ninth* Chapter 9-11
Nnedi Okorafor reading at 7 pm (not required, but it will be cool!)
F 11/5: *Gideon the Ninth* Chapter 12-16

Week 12: Queerness
M 11/8: *Gideon the Ninth* Chapter 17-21
W 11/10: *Gideon the Ninth* Chapter 22-25
F 11/12: *Gideon the Ninth* Chapter 26-30

Week 13: Death and Rebirth
M 11/15: *Gideon the Ninth* Chapter 31-34
W 11/17: *Gideon the Ninth* Chapter 35-end
F 11/19: Media TBD

Explication paper 2 due by 11:59 pm on Brightspace

Week 14: Turkey Time
M 11/22: Catch up day (*wink wink*)
W 11/24: **NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK**
F 11/26: **NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Week 15: Coming of Age
M 11/29: *Sabriel* Chapter 1-7

W 12/1: *Sabriel* Chapter 8-14
F 12/3: *Sabriel* Chapter 15-20

Week 16: Endings
M 12/6: *Sabriel* Chapter 21-26
W 12/8: *Sabriel* Chapter 27-end
F 12/10: Wrap-up

Finals week

W 12/15: **Creative project due by 11:59 pm on Brightspace**