

ENGL 3795-90 FANFICTION AND ADAPTATION

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH, SPRING 2021

Anne Jamison anne.jamison@utah.edu Maria Alberto maria.alberto@utah.edu

What makes “fanfiction” different from Shakespeare basing his plays on sources, or Milton basing *Paradise Lost* on the Bible? What can amateur, unauthorized stories about other people’s characters or worlds do for readers and writers that paid, official culture can’t or won’t? In this course, we’ll be reading a lot of fanfic as well as looking at other cultural uses of adaptation and appropriation in literature, television, and digital media. Through it all, we will examine official, sanctioned works of adaptation; acknowledged and unacknowledged inspiration and borrowings; and transformative works shared in fan cultures, with an emphasis on contemporary fanfiction, its controversies, and its ever-increasing cultural influence.

Course Objectives

In this course, students will learn to:

- Situate fanfiction and adaptation today in relation to the historical tradition of “writing from sources” and the broader popular cultural landscape
- Consider how media, economics, and the circumstances of production, distribution, and consumption affect texts and our experience of them
- Analyze fanfiction and adaptation as modes of literary and critical production
- Examine relationships between and among texts and communities, including: genres, tropes, and tags; people, identities (sex, gender, ability, race), and cultures
- Interrogate ideas of originality, value, authorship, intellectual property, criticism, agency, representation, and reading.

Course Outcomes

In this course, students will improve their abilities to:

- Work independently and collaboratively to interact with and generate course material
- Integrate creative and critical processes in writing and thinking
- Distinguish and apply different modes of verbal and visual communication
- Analyze textual and cultural details and patterns
- Identify and pursue independent interests and research questions
- Navigate digital archives and platforms to find information and resources while remaining mindful of community norms and ethical considerations

READINGS AND VIEWINGS

Detailed information about readings and assignments are to be found in the modules.

Required texts:

- Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens* (novel)
- Television Episodes:
 - *Star Trek (TOS)*: “Mirror Mirror”; “Amok Time”; “This Side of Paradise”
 - *The X-Files*: “José Chung’s *From Outer Space*”
 - *Good Omens*, the series (Amazon Prime)
 - *The Untamed* (select episodes)
 - Entire episodes: #3, #4, #37, #38
 - Partial episodes: #2, #5, #10, #18, #36, #39
 - **NOTE:** all episodes will be linked on Canvas, with timestamps, when we reach this unit!
- **Canvas and online readings**

All other texts listed on the syllabus, including critical readings and works of fanfiction, are also required and available on Canvas or online. Primary access to readings and assignments is via the Course Modules.

Notes on the readings

Unlike most professional, commercial adaptations, fanfiction itself is not designed to “stand on its own.” It’s designed for readers deeply familiar with the source material. Some fanfiction does stand on its own, but that isn’t its intention, and it isn’t the standard by which it should be judged. For the purposes of this course, I’ve tried to find stories either that are comprehensible on their own, or I’ve provided some source material. We can learn a great deal from stories written for unfamiliar universes, but the reading experience will be very different from reading works based on sources we know well.

Your fandom your way

To get the most complete understanding of fanfiction, students are asked to “find a fandom” (or return to one or more they know well) and read in that fandom throughout the semester (you need not stick with *only* one source—but get to know at least one in depth). You’ll have freedom to pursue your own interests for credit and read with increasing investment and familiarity. Keep a journal of your process, experience, and reactions (see How to Get Credit in Fanfiction Class for more details). Journals will be shared only with the instructors, but you may use material from your journals as the basis for other assignments.

Different kinds of reading, different ways of reading

Often in an English class, we invest great amounts of time in close reading single, well-known, apparently autonomous texts. We'll do some of that, but often this course asks students to read very differently. We'll look across texts, analyzing patterns, or "read around" to get a sense of a "trope" (what fandom calls a plot device or kind of story), a system of texts, or a very long fic. Hint: if the story is 500,000 words long, I am not assigning the whole thing. If you are not clear about what kind of reading is appropriate to a particular assignment, just ask.

Treat fan authors with respect, keep it positive, or do not interact

In class discussion, you are free and encouraged to critique anything we read. However, students are asked to respect the amateur, unpaid nature of fan writing. These writers did not sign on to be studied in our course, but rather shared their work in a community with its own norms and guidelines. In your role as U of U students, you are required to respect these communities. As course students, you may not make negative comments about the assigned material to the fan authors, be publicly disrespectful or critical about individual fan authors, or leave negative comments on their stories. This holds true even for material you find offensive or ethically wrong.

In other words, don't barge into a stranger's home and start yelling at them in front of their family, even if the door is unlocked.

Trigger Warnings and explicit material

Every conceivable trigger you could possibly think of is likely to come up in fanfiction and hence in this course, including issues of consent, rape, coercion, violence, explicit sex, and all of these things in combination. If you have specific concerns, please feel free to discuss them with the instructors anonymously or in person. In the case of some readings, graphic material may be present, but not our focus, so you can skim in those instances, but sometimes in this course, the graphic material *is* the focus. Sexually explicit and potentially disturbing material is central to fanfiction as it exists today, and to this class. We can vigorously debate the ethics of presenting this material, and such debates are common in fandom, but you will not be able to succeed in this class without being able to engage and discuss this material.

Ethics: Donate/ Participate

Much of the course material is shared for free and the authors/creators receive no compensation. Consider making a small donation to the non-profit [Organization for Transformative Works](#) (which runs Archive of Our Own). If you like something you read, let the author know in your capacity as an individual reader (anonymously, if you choose). Consider sharing your own work with a fandom (as anonymously as you choose), or contributing in some way that feels comfortable to you.

COURSEWORK AND GRADING

Contract Grading

This course will apply contract grading. This means that individual assignments will not be given grades or numbers, but rather will reflect the amount of work you do and effort you put in.

This does not mean you will not be expected to do high quality work or will not receive feedback. Students will receive regular feedback and are expected to follow up on and implement the feedback in future assignments to fulfill their contract. it.

See the “What is Contract Grading?” and the “Grading Contract” pages/handouts or more details.

Student Contracts are due Week 2

Course Work

- Short Papers

1) DIY Fanfiction (2-3 p + 1-2 paragraphs, Due February 4) Do both:

- Write a “missing scene,” “alternate ending,” “alternative point of view (POV)” or “what if” in-universe and in-character fanfiction for a source of your choice (with instructor approval for non-course sources—I’ll need some familiarity with the source or you’ll need to provide an introduction and some samples) .
- In one or two additional paragraphs accompanying your work, explain how your creative work also performs a critical function. Exact length and format depends on the nature of the piece and the source.

2) Some *Good Omens* (4-6 p Due March 7) Choose One:

- a) source study: read a source the novel draws on and examine its use and role; may be adapted from but may not replicate group work/presentation
- b) consider the role of the medium (kind of media) in any given *Good Omens* adaptation, or compare two in different media
- c) comparative close reading of passage(s) from a source and an adaptation. How do they differ, and why does it matter?

3) Issues and Tropes (4-6 p Due April 2) Choose One:

- a) Analyze how a work of fanfiction from the syllabus takes a stance on a particular issue that isn’t specific to fandom. That is, how does the story work as criticism of its source or of a broader issue (political, aesthetic, ethical, social)? You may look at one story or compare two different approaches to the issue.
- b) Research and analyze a trope we have studied. Narrow topic in consultation with professor.

- Final Project: Traditional Research paper OR Fanwork as Coursework
 May take a variety of forms and formats, including visual, video, podcast, wiki entry, etc..
 Subject to professor/preceptor approval by written proposal.

- Attendance and Participation (in accordance with your contract)
 1. Thoughtful, enthusiastic, and generous weekly informal discussions on the course Discord server
 2. More formal posts or presentations on Canvas (if you do choose not to participate in the Discord server, all of your participations may happen on Canvas)
 3. Small group presentations and discussions as assigned
 4. Weekly self-assessments to be turned in on Canvas. This will include a summary of your discussion activity, reading, and any other kinds of participation. This is how you will receive credit for all of the above. Be sure to do this.

- Fic Journal (approx 1 page/week, due Feb 19, March 26, April 27)
 Notes on your reading in “your fandom.” Confidential. Discussion posts and other assignments may be adapted from your journal (or not). Submitted for three times during the semester (2 progress checks and one final submission)

- Individual or Group Assignments
 Each module will include an individual assignment, short paper, or group assignment or presentation due--analogous to in-class work in addition to lecture/discussion

- Quizzes/Preparation assessments (Tuesdays as needed).
 - Quizzes/preparation assessments “to help students prioritize their reading.” Quizzes turn out to be important for having good participation in discussion-based courses, especially online. Only students can provide good discussions.
 - Quiz results will not impact your grade as they would in a traditional course, but results need to demonstrate that you do the reading, and if they don’t, we’ll need to address how to improve them to meet your contract.
 - Quizzes will reflect the nature of the reading assignment (might be: “tell me about one of the fics you browsed” or “what makes Spock act so strangely” or “does Steve Rogers like bananas?”). Quiz standard is “evidence of having done the reading” not “evidence of critical brilliance.”
 - If you feel your quiz results do not reflect your actual preparation, address this in your weekly self-assessments and we will discuss ways to improve your preparation.

COURSE SCHEDULE

A note on the schedule: sometimes the schedule may adjust to reflect current topics of interest, recent events, or strong fandom interests.

I. History

Week 1

Introductions; History: Writing from Sources

Week 2

Sherlock Holmes--Canon and Apocrypha

Week 3

Media Fandom from Zines to Usenet

Watch: *Star Trek (TOS)* episodes "Mirror Mirror"; "Amok Time";

BROWSE: Jacqueline Lichtenberg et al., [Kraith](#) (group selections)

Jacqueline Lichtenberg, "Memories of a Collating Party"

II. *Good Omens* and/as adaptation

Week 4

Good Omens (novel)

Week 5

Good Omens (Amazon series)

Week 6

Bookfic and South Downs

Podfic: Crown of Thorns (fic and poddrama)

Queer Theologies

Week 7

Social Media AU

Human AU

Historical (canon compliant-ish)

III. Transcultural Fandoms & Fanfiction (*The Untamed*)

Week 8

Introduction to Transcultural Fandom(s)

Case Study: *The Untamed*

Thinking about Transcultural Fanfiction & Adaptation: Background & Contexts

Fics: revisiting canon-compliant (i.e., negotiating “historical”)

Week 9

The Untamed, continued

“Common” ground?: or, what counts as adaptation?

Translation, Identity, & Prerequisite Labor

Fics: revisiting social media!AU, modern!AU

Week 10

The Untamed, concluded

Cross-cultural fanworks & issues

Fics: revisiting canon-divergent!AU

IV. Tropes and topics: Choose your own adventure

In the last weeks, students will analyze and explore common tropes in fandom-centered groups. These are examples, but students may “draft” other tropes to the syllabus.

Week 11

A Trope is Born: *This Side of Paradise* and Sex Pollen

Hogwarts AUs and Crossovers

Week 12

Beloved Tropes: Hurt/Comfort, There Is Only One Bed, Fake Dating, Arranged Marriage

Week 13

Controversial Tropes: dark!fic, whump, dubcon

Week 14

Modern/Mundane AUs: Coffee shops, high school, rock/movie stars, social media, etc.

Week 15

Final papers/projects due