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Women's Literature: Fantasy and Science Fiction

This single semester course is focused on works of science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction written by women. We will look at the freedom these genres offer for women writers, discover the values and ideas that inform the stories, and explore themes of identity, gender, race and social justice. Books include works from both YA literature and adult science fiction. Readings may vary, but currently include:

The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula Le Guin

Dogsboddy or *Fire and Hemlock* by Diana Wynne Jones (student choice)

The Fifth Season by N.K. Jemisin

The course will culminate with a self-designed project. This project gives you the opportunity to envision and write, or illustrate, a science fiction story of your own. This course will take approximately 18 weeks to complete.

Lesson 4

Fire and Hemlock, Part Four and Coda

Read

Read the following in *Fire and Hemlock*:

- Part Four: Nowhere presto molto agitato
- Coda: scherzando

Write

1. What do you notice about the meaning of the anagrams or near-anagrams that announce the beginning of each part? How do they connect with the stone vases that Mr. Lynn shows Polly on her uninvited visit to the funeral at Hunsdon House (26–7)?
2. Chose one part and explain how the heading fits. For instance, the first part, New Hero, is about Polly (and Mr. Lynn) exploring the ideas of heroism, and this is clear in several scenes which take place in the beginning chapters.
3. In the essay following the story, Jones writes that, “I knew that what I wanted to do really was to write a book in which modern life and heroic mythical events approached one another so closely that they were nearly impossible to separate” (428). Write a five paragraph essay exploring this topic. Find three episodes in the book

where heroic or mythical events are taking place in modern life “so closely that they were nearly impossible to separate.”

Structure your essay so that there is an introduction, then three middle paragraphs which will each focus on and explore one episode, followed by a concluding paragraph. In your conclusion, please write about how bringing life and the mythic or magical realm so close affects you as a reader.

Lesson 13

World Building

One connecting theme of this course is **world building**.

Ursula Le Guin’s world in *The Left Hand of Darkness* had many differences from Earth, and it was explored by someone who seemed familiar with an earth-like world.

For Diana Wynne Jones's *Dogsbody*, once we leave the celestial realm, the world is Earth, but it is an planet being experienced by somebody who is alien to that world, and therefore it is a new world to the main character. For Jones's *Fire and Hemlock*, the other world is interwoven and sometimes quite indistinguishable from the everyday world.

N. K. Jemisin builds a world in *The Fifth Season* that in some ways resembles Earth, and we experience this fallen world partly through our own knowledge of living on Earth as we know it.

When considering world building within a story, here are some questions to think about:

- How does the author creates a viable world for her characters?
- *Why* does she create the world this way?
- What issues or themes are being raised in this story world?
- Are these issues or themes in any way "women's" issues? Is there a distinctly feminine sensibility that you notice, and if so, how is it noticeable?

Write

Addressing the above questions, please write a 1 to 2 page essay on world building, exploring world building in all three books. Use examples from each to support your ideas.