

## The Imaginary and the Actual: Possible Worlds and Fictional Worlds (ENPW75)

7.5 hp Spring 2018

On the next page you will find the course description and a preliminary reading list and seminar plan (listing all the primary works, but some critical essays will be added) for the MA course “The Imaginary and the Actual: Possible Worlds and Fictional Worlds.”

You will receive the detailed seminar plan later. Please do not let this stop you from getting the books on the list and start reading. We will cover a lot of ground in this course, and I want you to have **prepared for the first seminar** by reading excerpts from *Beowulf* and John Gardner’s short novel *Grendel*. You may have read *Robinson Crusoe* in some form or another, but we will want to re-read it and make sure it is the unadulterated original version, which is quite long, so you may want to start reading it before the semester starts. Do try to get the editions of the books listed below as far as possible: it is such a great experience when we are all on the same page.

The schedule and deadlines for registration before the start of term can be found on [www.english.su.se/education/courses](http://www.english.su.se/education/courses)

See you in the spring,

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will consider a number of narratives from different periods with a focus on the relations between the fictional and the actual, what exists and what may exist, with the help of theories of possible worlds and of fictionality. To analyze literature in terms of fictional worlds implies a different approach than the conventional one characterized by close reading and interpretation. It leads to different questions: instead of asking, what does this novel mean? we will ask, what kind of world is built by this text? That sort of questioning will force us to consider what we mean by a “world” in the first place. We will read a number of literary works whose distinctive fictional worlds claim a reality at least in our ability to imagine what is not the case.

Central concepts: Possible worlds; fictionality; referentiality; spatiality; utopia/dystopia

## COURSE LITERATURE

### Primary works

*Beowulf* (in Seamus Heaney’s translation, available in many anthologies or as a paperback). We will focus on the first part, lines 1-1250.

J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*. Penguin (ISBN: 9780241950111)

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*. Penguin Classics (ISBN: 9780141439822)

Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle*. Penguin (ISBN: 9780141186672)

John Gardner, *Grendel*. Vintage (ISBN: 9780679723110)

David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*. Random House (ISBN: 9780375507250)

Flann O’Brien, *The Third Policeman* Dalkey (ISBN: 9781564782144)

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (ISBN: 9780441478125)

Virginia Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. Mariner (ISBN: 9780156212502)

### Secondary material (a preliminary list):

Brown, Bill. “The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism).” *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999) 1-28.

Dick, Philip K. “How to Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later.” in Lawrence Sutin, ed., *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 259-81. (available on the web; hand-out)

Doležel, Lubomír. *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998. 199-226. (Hand-out)

Festa, Lynn. “Crusoe’s Island of Misfit Things.” *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 52.3-4 (2011 Fall-Winter): 443-471.

Gallagher, Catherine. “The rise of fictionality.” *The Novel, vol. I, History, Geography and Culture*. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. 336–63. (Available in Google Scholar)

Hayot, Eric. “On Literary Worlds.” *Modern Language Quarterly* 72.2 (June 2011): 129-161.



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- Jameson, Fredric. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2013. (Chapter III: "The Historical Novel Today: Is It Still Possible?")
- McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Methuen, 1987. (Excerpt: 26-40, Hand-out)
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. "Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations: A Semantic Typology of Fiction," *Poetics Today* 12:3 (Fall 1991). (online through the library web site)
- Suvin, Darko. "Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies." *Utopian Studies* 1.2 (1990): 69-83. (Excerpt: Sections 3-4, 76-83, also available through SUB subscription)

Additional material according to the teacher's instructions.