

ALL274 SUPERNATURAL LITERATURE

Assessment Tasks 2013



Summary

There are several kinds of assignment in this document:

- Some traditional essay questions and some traditional prompts for creative responses
- Some more imaginative scenarios, calling for reviews, reports, briefings and so forth
- Some very open-ended Calls for Papers (critical, creative), with the option of publication in some edited collections

BEWARE: These are listed in order of difficulty. All students must attempt a more traditional question (Q1) before perhaps trying something else.

There are some common rules for all assignments:

- You must write assignment one and assignment two on *two different texts* (plan ahead!);
- You must write assignment one and assignment two on *two different questions* (so you have to do assignment one on question N on text A, and assignment two on question M on text B);
- Your critical essays should aim to satisfy the criteria listed in the marking guide (e.g., analyze ideas, apply principles, modify positions, relate concepts to text, contrast different interpretations, etc.);
- Your creative responses should aim to satisfy the criteria listed in the marking guide for creative work;
- An *absolute minimum* set of references (pass standard) would include two critical articles or chapters that are “highly recommended” in the study guide, plus two that you source yourself from the Norton Critical Edition, some books in the library, or an online database (e.g., JSTOR, Expanded Academic ASAP, Literature Resource Center);
- The assignment should be in an 11-point font (or larger) with double spacing, or a 12-point font (or larger) with 1.5 line spacing, and include a 3cm page margin, in addition to Faculty assignment submission requirements and good practices for citation and bibliography entries;
- The assignment should have your **name**, **student number** and **assignment number** (“Assignment 1,” “Assignment 2”) in the document header, the page number in the document footer, and the question number at the beginning of the assignment.



Assignment One	2,000 words	29 April 2013	Critical Essay
Assignment Two	2,000 words OR, 1,500 words + 500 word exegesis	19 June 2013	Thematic Essay OR, Creative Response

Assignment One

Question 1

Traditional Essay Questions for Assignment One.

Classic Fairy Tales

- 1A. Are contemporary (post-1950s) revisions of the classic fairy tales valid efforts to reimagine these stories for a new audience? In responding, analyze and contrast any two revisions with their originals, discussing their relation to fairy tale conventions and to ideologies of gender, class or ethnicity.
- 1B. Choosing a revisionist fairy tale (post-1950s) from the Tatar collection, what sort of person is the implied reader of your selected revision of a classic fairy tale? How do you know?
- 1C. To what extent can Vladimir Propp's theory of the structure of fairy tales be applied to a contemporary text such as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*? Demonstrate your case through careful narrative analysis.



The Epic of Gilgamesh

- 1D. What is the connection between the theme of mortality and the supernatural encounters in Gilgamesh's story? In responding to this question, focus on a sequence of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* that involves a supernatural encounter, and analyze its significance by considering context, genre, imagery and its position in the narrative.

The Gospel according to Matthew

- 1E. In *The Gospel according to Matthew*, does the story of Jesus as a wonder worker have a narrative logic that obeys the same principles as do fairy tales—i.e., is the narrative at least partly structured like a fairy tale—and how does this connect with, or contradict, the story of Jesus as a teacher of spiritual wisdom?
- 1F. In Morton Smith's provocative reconstruction of the historical Jesus, Jesus is primarily a professional exorcist who also engages in mystical practices (the "mysteries of the kingdom of God" understood as quasi-magical initiation rites). By focusing on two key events in the gospel, discuss the extent to which *The Gospel according to Matthew* supports—or refutes—this interpretation.

The Tales of Hoffmann

- 1G. Using Freud's essay on the uncanny as a model and source of ideas, together with an introductory level knowledge of psychoanalytic concepts such as repression and the ego, sketch a Freudian reading of one of the other tales in the Hoffmann collection.

The Bloody Chamber

- 1H. Carter maintains that she does not put sex into her revised fairy tales—she simply makes manifest what was formerly latent, but then alters the power relations involved in sexuality. Discuss Carter’s transformation of a fairy tale by comparing her version to her targeted originals.

The Master and Margarita

- 1I. Focusing on Book One of the text, discuss the interpretation of *The Master and Margarita* as a critique of Stalin’s Russia in the 1930s. Are there aspects of the text that go beyond the time and place of the novel’s formation, and that deal with the human condition?
- 1J. Discuss Bulgakov’s creative revision of *The Gospel according to Matthew* in *The Master and Margarita*. What do you take to be the aims of this revision?

Frankenstein

- 1K. Beginning from close consideration of the monster’s first appearance to Frankenstein (Shelley, 1996: 34-35), go on to analyze the monster’s most important dialogues with his creator. What does the metaphor of the monster mean? Is the monster intended by Shelley as a critique of science’s displacement of religion, as a criticism of society’s treatment of visible differences, or something else?

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

- 1L. According to GK Chesterton, “the real stab of [Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde] is not in the discovery that one man is two men; but in the discovery that the two men are one man” (Stevenson, 2003: 183). Decide whether this claim is plausible or implausible, and discuss the significance of your decision for the interpretation of the text.

A Game of Thrones

- 1M. In *A Game of Thrones*, George RR Martin constructs a medievalist, low-technology world that is rooted in the fantastic. Given this supernatural framework, what is the effect of incorporating historically medieval power dynamics (such as patriarchal power and white privilege) in an alternative world?

The Daylight Gate

- 1N. “The North is the dark place. It is not safe to be buried on the north side of the church and the North Door is the way of the Dead. The north of England is untamed. It can be subdued but it cannot be tamed. Lancashire is the wild part of the untamed” (p1). Examine how Winterson links place to experience and uses geographical locations as a gateway between the natural and supernatural worlds.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

- 1O. According to Farah Mendlesohn, “the main plot of the Harry Potter books ... is that of the returning prince, deprived of his birthright by the actions of a usurper, who has come to claim

his throne, and with it, a new age of happiness”. Do you accept this reading of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*?

- 1P. Analyze the quest motif in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and discuss its relationship to the theme of emotional and psychological development. In your response, focus on a close reading of a chapter or episode from the text.

Assignment Two

Question 2

Traditional Essay Questions for Assignment Two.

Select a thematic topic and discuss it with reference to two set texts from the Unit. Support your argument with critical material, historical/background information and your own critical analysis.

- 2A. “The message of supernatural literature is calm resignation to the existential realities of birth, death, sexuality and individuation, not a utopian call for cultural change”. Analyze and debate this claim.
- 2B. “Supernatural representations of gender portray the sexed other as a source of anxiety. But this must not be interpreted as denigration, for sexuality is always fraught with uncertainty, and it is this that we must come to terms with.” Analyze and debate this claim.
- 2C. “The utopianism of supernatural literature is best regarded as an escapist compensation for one’s personal limitations, rather than as a raft of possibilities for cultural renewal.” Analyze and debate this claim.
- 2D. “The wish-fulfillment structures of supernatural literature mean that it is the least valuable guide that we have for coping with reality”. Analyze and debate this claim.
- 2E. “Feminist revisions of supernatural narratives have the paradoxical effect of perpetuating the very stereotypes that they seek to dismantle.” Analyze and debate this claim.
- 2F. “The truths disclosed by supernatural literature are not bound by historical situations and cultural contexts, for they ultimately all speak of the same set of spiritual realities: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the quest of individuals to define their spiritual identity”. Analyze and debate this claim.
- 2G. “The perennial motifs of supernatural fiction—the double, magic and the monstrous—have deep psychological roots in unconscious symbolism, not in historically-specific social concerns.” Analyze and debate this claim in relation to one such “perennial motif” in two set texts.



Question 3

Traditional Creative Response Topics for Assignment Two.

Choosing a form that you prefer (prose, drama or poetry), and responding to one of the set texts, write a creative piece on one of the following prompts:

- 3A. A female heroine of supernatural literature would do it differently
- 3B. The monstrous is the self, made strange
- 3C. The supernatural is the protest of the oppressed
- 3D. The ultimate “gift for humanity” is death itself
- 3E. “The Locked Door stands as an Eternal Temptation”
- 3F. The task of supernatural art today is to make habitable a universe that is ultimately indifferent to humanity
- 3G. Progressive supernatural art today must challenge the limited conventions of past narratives to make space for contemporary desires for liberation

The creative piece must be accompanied by a critical appendix, which is an additional two page explanation of your narrative aims in relation to the essay topic, the set text and concepts studied in the unit. Your assignment should also contain a reference list, as specified at the start of this document.



Question 4

Imaginative Scenarios for Assignment Two.

Your response should take the form specified in the assignment question. This implies a mode of discourse that is different to standard academic prose, although it calls for the same critical, analytical and research skills. If in doubt, find some samples of the discursive mode online or in the library. You should include a bibliography, as detailed at the start of this document, with your assignment.



4A. The *New York Times* (a highbrow magazine with an educated readership) is inviting book reviews of any one of the books set on this unit. The editor is looking for a deep and insightful review that will highlight the author's treatment of the supernatural and its relation to the themes of the narrative, as well as discussing the critical reception of the book and its success (or otherwise) with its target audience. The submission that she is looking for will succeed in bringing out the most important aspect of the book and illustrating this with a carefully chosen close reading of a short section of the book, as well as documenting and analyzing the debates that the book has sparked.

4B. *National Geographic* (a middlebrow magazine with an international readership) has finally decided to risk a short article (2,000 words) on recent scholarship on *The Gospel according to Matthew*, focusing on the best evidence regarding when the text was written, what the sources for the text were, how it was written, who wrote it and for whom, and what the basic meaning of a key section of the text is. Needless to say, therefore, respectfulness and accuracy are crucially important. So is the ability to present complex ideas to the magazine's target audience. The submission that she is looking for will succeed in using textual evidence in a simple but effective way to support its points, so that the readership will be able to see for themselves what the experts are arguing, and it may also introduce some competing viewpoints to let the audience know that this is a set of arguments, rather than a fixed conclusion.

4C. The literary program on the British public broadcaster BBC2 (the highbrow wing of BBC TV) has scored an absolute coup: they have recruited a first-rate interviewer with a Ouija Board capable of contacting the dead, who has a persona so compelling that no author whatsoever will say "no" to an interview request. There is a slot available for an interview with an author of one of the supernatural texts set for this unit. The commissioning editors will select the interview subject based on the strength of the briefing notes that they receive from external submissions. They are looking for a list of interview questions, each one backed by a concise and accurate paragraph or two detailing what is known about the topic of the question itself, and any anticipated follow-up questions. This *must* be fully referenced and scrupulously balanced. The

editors are particularly interested in the symbolism of the supernatural. Other topics might include the actual identity of the author themselves, the reasons behind the creative decisions that they made in the text, important influences in the production of the text and where and how this shows in the narrative, controversies generated by the text (the commissioning editors are particularly excited about this one) and the author's response to these, and what the author's response is to the range of meanings discovered in the text by later readers. Each briefing should begin with a summary paragraph, giving the interviewer advance warning about the author (difficult person? sensitive issues? etc.) and providing an overview of the main issues.

4D. The *Uqbar Encyclopedia of Literary Interpretations* is an online encyclopedia run from the prestigious University of Uqbar, in the Republic of Tlön. It is seeking entries documenting major interpretations of important texts. The entries should be capable of surviving expert scrutiny, as this university-based encyclopedia has a review process to ensure quality. The texts set for ALL274 Supernatural Literature are all on their list. They are looking for informative and accurate content. Entries must be strictly factual and strongly evidenced from reliable sources, although evaluations of interpretations, provided they are supported by textual evidence and clear argument, will be welcomed. Information literacy skills, such as the ability to distinguish between reliable expert knowledge and unreliable claims or mere opinion, will be highly valued by the editors. A suggested sequence of topic headings is: summary of the interpretation; plot synopsis as it relates to the interpretation; the main argument(s) behind the interpretation; textual evidence for the position; critical responses to the interpretation; anomalies and residual problems with the interpretation (if any); references. Hyperlinks are not necessary for the draft article, and references should be by in-text citation using the Deakin University style. Footnotes adding extra information should be avoided.

Question 5

Calls for Papers for *The Journal of Supernatural Literature Volume One*, for Assignment Two.

The Perspective from the Margins: Call for Papers

The inaugural volume of *The Journal of Supernatural Literature* will focus on the role of marginal—and marginalized—figures in supernatural narratives. According to Rosemary Jackson, “fantastic literature,” which includes supernatural literature, “points to ... that which lies outside of the law, that which is outside the dominant value system. It traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent” (*Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p4). Perhaps this is best thought of as a reversal of perspective, where what is central to the dominant value system is suddenly thrust aside, and what had been marginal takes center stage. What does the perspective of the marginalized—of the denigrated other, of the “monstrous,” and of alterity or otherness in general—reveal about the dominant value system in supernatural texts? Furthermore, this reversal of perspective can operate *within* supernatural texts as well as *between* the supernatural text and its cultural environment. What does the perspective of the figure on the margins of the text—the helper in the quest, the donor of magical aid, the secondary character—reveal about supernatural narrative and its role in disclosing the invisible and silenced?

The Journal of Supernatural Literature is seeking analytical contributions on this theme that contribute to critical knowledge, or creative responses that show something new or do something surprising. Essays in the collection will open up new angles of vision, reveal something new about old texts, and provide good quality critical or creative material that can be used by secondary and tertiary students in researching supernatural narratives, dealing with any of the texts set for this unit. Good essays will analyze key passages, contrast different readings, modify positions in the debate to accommodate new insights or to look at characters who have not yet been critically discussed, and relate interpretive principles and theoretical categories to textual evidence. Excellent essays will generate new arguments within existing interpretations and intervene in existing debates, by questioning current assumptions, raising new perspectives, and synthesizing positions in the critical literature through working with theoretical concepts. Good creative pieces and excellent creative pieces will *show* this process of critical thinking through innovative representations of supernatural themes, responding to the texts set for this unit. Creative responses on living authors and Angela Carter *cannot be accepted for publication—don’t do it!*



Question 6

Calls for Papers for *Supernatural Literature: Critical Essays on Jeanette Winterson's The Daylight Gate* by Deakin University Students, for Assignment Two.

The Daylight Gate: Call for Papers

Jeanette Winterson's recent novel, *The Daylight Gate* (2012), lives up to her reputation for controversy and complexity. The book is controversial. Just as Angela Carter, a generation before her, had been accused of "pornography" for her feminist representations of sexuality in fairy tales, so too today, Winterson is criticized for "lurid" and sexually exploitative material that detracts from the historical elements of the novel.

But the book is also complex. The novel is at once an intervention into representations of women and men in the historical era of Jacobean England, and a supernatural narrative involving a Faustian Bargain and the theme of the double. And it combines alternative sexualities with marginalized gender and social identities, in a potent—and potentially confrontational—political critique of the beginning of the modern era as marked by exclusion and persecution.

The critical reception so far, exclusively in book reviews rather than academic journals, seems to "shoot too soon," leaping in to evaluative judgements before the work of interpretation and analysis has been done. This collection starts the process of thinking critically about Winterson's latest work. It seeks to contribute to scholarly knowledge about an important aspect of *The Daylight Gate*, exploring what sorts of new possibilities in supernatural literature Winterson's fascinating text opens up.

Topics may include, but are by no means limited to:

- The Faustian Bargain
- The motif of the double
- Familiars, poppets and spells
- Love and sexuality
- Masculine sexual violence
- The politics of alternative sexualities
- The use of Thomas Potts' *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches* or other contemporary sources in the narrative
- Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's witches, and/in Winterson's text
- The historical witch trials and Winterson's representation of key figures
- Contrasts with other novelistic representations of the Pendle Trials



- The Catholic Underground

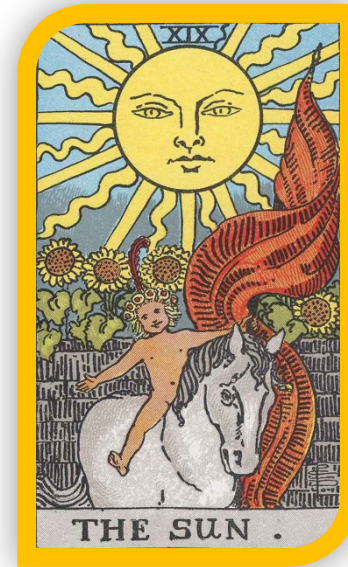
This edited collection will be the first critical work on *The Daylight Gate*. As such, it aims to be a resource for others in the field (secondary and tertiary students, researchers and creative writers) seeking to work seriously with Winterson's text. Good essays will analyze key passages, contrast different readings, modify positions in the debate to accommodate new insights or to look at characters who have not yet been critically discussed, and relate interpretive principles and theoretical categories to textual evidence. Excellent essays will generate new arguments within existing interpretations and intervene in existing debates, by questioning current assumptions, raising new perspectives, and synthesizing positions in the critical literature through working with theoretical concepts. *For reasons of intellectual property rights and copyright issues, the editors are not seeking creative pieces.*

Question 7

Calls for Papers for *Supernatural Literature: Critical Essays on George RR Martin's A Game of Thrones* by Deakin University Students, for Assignment Two.

A Game of Thrones: Call for Papers

Although the critical reception of *A Song of Ice and Fire* has begun to step up in both quality and quantity of publications, there is still space for an innovative and critical student contribution. Accordingly, this collection of critical essays aims to publish good quality critical work that makes a contribution to the scholarly reception of George RR Martin's work, and which aims to be a resource for others in the field (secondary and tertiary students, researchers and creative writers). The collection will focus exclusively on the novels—excluding, therefore consideration of fan fiction, merchandise, artwork, graphic novels, and the HBO television series—and concentrate on volume one, *A Game of Thrones*.



The perspective taken by analytical essays in this collection will be critical. It will focus on the supernatural elements of the text, and relate these to the broader tradition of supernatural literature, as represented in this unit. The enthusiastic response to Martin's series has tended to describe him as an "American Tolkein" while at the same time maintaining that the realistic treatment of medieval chivalry and fantasy themes does something entirely new. Is that really the case? Or is it the case that by placing the innovative realist narrative at the center of the novel, Martin has successfully distracted attention from a relatively conventional supernatural narrative as the frame for the series? What is the relation between the marginal characters who are the focus of identification and interest, and the central characters who carry the narrative forward? Other contributions will analyze aspects of the novel in detail, or will generate parts of an interpretation of the whole.

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- Animals with supernatural powers (shape-shifting, shamanistic participation, intelligent ravens)
- Magical beasts (dragons)
- The marginal hero/ine of a supernatural narrative (Arya, Bran, Tyrion)
- Magical knowledge and the power of enchantment (maesters, magicians and witches)
- Relations between *A Game of Thrones* and other fantasy and epic precedents
- The Others
- Sexuality and the supernatural (reproduction, queerness, eunuchs, prostitution, incest)

- Religion and magical power

Good essays will analyze key passages, contrast different readings, modify positions in the debate to accommodate new insights or to look at characters who have not yet been critically discussed, and relate interpretive principles and theoretical categories to textual evidence.

Excellent essays will generate new arguments within existing interpretations and intervene in existing debates, by questioning current assumptions, raising new perspectives, and synthesizing positions in the critical literature through working with theoretical concepts. *For reasons of intellectual property rights and copyright issues, the editors are not seeking creative pieces.*

Publication (Q5, Q6, Q7)

Students can get a publication from ALL274 Supernatural Literature. The publication will be through Amazon's Kindle software, will have a creative commons license (that protects the copyright of contributors), and will be free (there will be no royalties and there are no fees for inclusion in the publication).

Any student who attempts questions 5-7 and passes the exercise, and also gets a PASS grade or above for the unit, is eligible for inclusion in the edited collections specified in the topics. No student work that meets this condition, is correctly formatted, is free from plagiarism and meets the criteria set forth in the topic will be rejected.

Additionally, the edited collections need volunteer editors, whose names will be on the publication. The selection process for editors will be announced toward the end of trimester, following a call for expressions of interest. Editors will have to ensure that any revisions suggested by examiners are adequate, check formatting, and prepare the manuscript for uploading. Other additional duties may also arise from time to time.

Here are the rules governing all three publications.

1. Geoff Boucher, the unit chair of ALL274 is the editor-in-chief. His decisions are final and no discussion will be entered into.
 - 1.1. The titles of the works will be as specified in this document.
 - 1.2. If the editor-in-chief decides that there are too few contributions to make any publication viable, that publication will be cancelled, and the contributions will instead be included in *The Journal of Supernatural Literature, Volume One*.
 - 1.3. In all events, *The Journal of Supernatural Literature, Volume One* will be published.
2. The works will be published through Amazon Kindle's self-publishing facility as a free e-book, with a Creative Commons license.
 - 2.1. The works will be "Attribution-Non-commercial-No-derivatives-3.0-unported".
 - 2.2. Individual contributors will retain copyright over their chapter.
 - 2.3. Individuals will be required to sign an e-contract setting these conditions forth and stating that the individual's work is free from plagiarism.
3. Submission of chapters is entirely voluntary and participation or non-participation in no way affects the grades that students get for ALL274. It is simply an opportunity to have a publication arising from coursework.
4. Submission of manuscript chapters will be via the CloudDeakin site for ALL274 with a deadline of Monday 1 July.
 - 4.1. A special dropbox will be created for each publication
 - 4.2. A style sheet for the publications will be made available by week 8 of trimester
 - 4.3. Late submissions will not be included in the publication.
 - 4.4. There are no extensions whatsoever for any reason at all.
 - 4.5. Students should submit the assignments that they did for Questions 5-7
 - 4.5.1. Any changes to incorporate a response to feedback from examiners must be in tracked changes mode.
 - 4.5.2. Detection of any changes that are not in tracked changes mode will result in rejection of the chapter.

Credits:

The Tarot card illustrations are from Sacred Texts (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/tarot>), and are scans of a 1909 card deck that have been done by Holly Voley (<http://home.comcast.net/~vilex/>) for the public domain. The artwork on the cards was done in 1903 by Pamela Coleman Smith, although the Tarot deck became known as the Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot. The images in this document are intended as decorations only. Their use does not imply belief in, or endorsement of, the occult.