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Department of English & Writing Studies

Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction English 2071F (650) Fall 2013

Instructor: Dr. Clarissa Suranyi

Antirequisites: English 134E; hence if you have taken English 134E, you cannot receive credit for English 2071F/G.

Course Description

Welcome to Science Fiction Online! This course explores a selection of science fiction short stories and novels by focusing on the authors' imaginative recreation of the human world. The course focuses upon critical science fiction themes such as the creation of artificial intelligence, the reconstruction of a conventional social and political order, the breakdown of traditional gender definitions, alien encounters, and explorations of otherness.

Important information about this online course

This course demands as much time and effort from you as a conventional lecture-based university course in literature. You are expected to read the assigned work and to engage with the material, the instructor, and the other students in the course. You are required to participate in the course regularly, as you would in a regular classroom. This participation will take the form of active reading of course materials, asking questions of the instructor, and contributing to online discussions. All of this means that you have to devote a minimum of five hours per week to the course in order to keep up with the reading and complete the assignments. Assignments will be submitted online, so be sure to work out any technical problems quickly by contacting ITS at 519-661-3800.

This course is designed for OWL, which operates as an online classroom. Ten percent of your grade depends on regular participation (more on participation below). You must have regular online access to do this; this access can be from home, from a computer lab on campus, or from a public library, but you must ensure that you have access to the internet on a regular and consistent basis. (This means that, in the event of a service interruption to your internet connection at home, you are expected to find another way to access the course materials.)

Course Materials

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*.

Wells, H. G. *The Time Machine*.

---, *The War of the Worlds*.

Miller, Walter M. *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

Le Guin, Ursula. *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Haldeman, Joe. *Forever Peace*.

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*.

Piercy, Marge. *He, She and It*.

Le Guin, Ursula and Attiebery, Brian, eds. *The Norton Book of Science Fiction*.

A Note on the Texts and How to Approach Them

This course is one of three derived from the former English 134E “Science Fiction, Fantasy, Utopian and Other Forms of Romance and Satire.” This course, English 2071F/G, focuses specifically on science fiction, though it touches upon genres that are examined more fully in the other two courses: English 2072F/G (Fantasy) and English 2073F/G (Utopias and Dystopias).

Due to the brevity of the course, difficult choices needed to be made considering the specific texts chosen and how to approach these texts. Hence, famous and influential authors such as Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Stanislaw Lem, and Frank Herbert have not been included. Instead, the texts were chosen to reveal the evolution of science fiction as a literary genre in the twentieth century and to explore the critical themes that define this literature. While reading through the materials, students should remember that the texts reflect and respond to very specific historical conditions and are not merely sites for imaginative speculation. This means that when HG. Wells describes the conflict between the Eloi and the Morlocks as representing the future development of English society, he is critiquing the oppressive Class structure of late Victorian England. Similarly, when the literary and cultural critic Fredric Jameson identifies William Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer* as a crucial expression of the contemporary era, he is referring to the recent development of Cyberpunk as an expression of transnational corporate realities and global paranoia. It is crucial to keep in mind that science fiction constitutes a literature of social criticism anchored in its historical context.

The course is roughly organized chronologically, beginning with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and ending with two contemporary novels-William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It*-that offer a dialogue on the possible effects and changes brought about by the technological advancements in what many define as the present age of information or the postmodern age. Between these novels, the course explores two of HG. Wells’ “scientific romances” (*The Time Machine* and *The War other Worlds*) that are preoccupied with humanity’s place in an inhospitable universe. Wells’ thought was influential at the time and embodied a synthesis of evolutionism, pragmatism, and strands of socialism. Next, we examine Walter Miller’s novel *A Cantide For Leibowitz*, a Cold War novel that reflects both the apocalyptic sensibility of the era of nuclear confrontation in the sixties and the feelings of historical inevitability that marked the era. Following Miller, we turn to Ursula Le Guin’s novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which explores the possibilities of an androgynous society unmarked by the divisions of gender. And after Le Guin we turn to Joe Haldeman’s novel *Forever Peace*, which examines the utopian possibility for achieving peace and eliminating war in the mid twenty-first century. Again, the course ends with William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It*, novels that foreground what many critics see as a coming crisis in defining human identity.

Though it follows a rough historical narrative, the course also develops thematically by examining related motifs and concerns. The short stories are situated between the novels as segues to either introduce a new thematic concern or to develop a particular theme or issue. In addition, many of the short stories are accompanied by contextual information used to establish the historical or cultural context of a particular image or concern. These stories are meant to be in active dialogue with the novels that surround them. As well, though many of the stories and novels are given fairly precise interpretations, these interpretations are meant to offer examples of how to approach the texts and not to foreclose discussion. Hence, in preparing your responses to the texts and planning your essays, you should draw upon your readings of the texts, the course lectures, and your own analysis of the materials. An analogy that may aid you throughout the course is to remember to read like a detective-searching for clues, contradictions, subtleties, and problems-and write like a lawyer by constructing a clear and cogent argument and supporting it with evidence from the texts.

You will discover that for the most part the lectures include few detailed references to illustrate the arguments. The point of the lectures is to provide some literary analysis, some context, and some theory in order to provide students with a perspective on the texts under discussion. In contrast, when writing your essays, you need to prove your points by direct reference to the text under discussion. Students sometimes make one of two common errors: either they assume that if they read the lectures they will not need to read the assigned texts; or, they assume that in their essays all they need to do is demonstrate that they have read the texts by summarizing them. These choices lead to two major problems that undermine the strength of an essay. In the first case, the essay will be too abstract and unfocused, engaging entirely in the analysis of ideas but not clearly demonstrating how the ideas relate to the texts. The second, equally grave problem is many students believe that if they demonstrate repeatedly that they have read the text, then they will achieve a passing grade. This problem is identified as *description* or *plot summary*. Instead of making these two common errors, you need to be both judicious and selective, developing a sharp and focused argument (interpretation) of the text(s).

Methods of Evaluation

Essay 1	Due Oct. 11	1,500 words	25%
Essay 2	Due Nov. 29	2,000 words	30%
Participation			10%
Final exam	TBA (December examination period)		35%

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the office of the registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html#grade>

Timetable:

You should complete one unit for every two full weeks of the Fall term. Please read the texts (listed below) and make notes on them before reading the lectures for each unit.

Unit 1-Introductory Stories and Frankenstein

- William Gibson, “The Gernsback Continuum” (NBSF)
- Eleanor Arnason, “The Warlord of Saturn’s Moons” (N ESP)
- Barry N. Malzberg, “Making it all the Way into the Future on Gaxton Falls of the Red Planet” (NBSF)
- Mary Shelley, Frankenstein
- Greg Bear, “Schrodinger’s Plague” (N BSF)

Unit 2-The Time Machine, The War of the Worlds, and Utopian/Dystopian Stories

- H. G. Wells, The Time Machine
- H. G. Wells, The War of the Worlds
- Joanna Russ, “A Few Things I Know About Whileaway” (NBSF)
- Cordwainer Smith, “Alpha Ralpa Boulevard” (NBSF)
- Howard Waldrop, “. . . the World, as we Know’t” (N BSF)

Unit 3-A Canticle for Leibowitz and New Concerns

- Walter M. Miller, A Canticle for Leibowitz
- Paul Preuss, “Half-Life” (NBSF)
- Marion Zimmer Bradley, “Elbow Room” (NBSF)

Unit 4-The Left Hand of Darkness and Alien Encounters.

- Ursula Le Guin, The Left Hand of Darkness
- Margaret Atwood, “Homelanding” (NBSF)
- John Kessel, “Invaders” (NBSF)
- Octavia Butler, “Speech Sounds” (NBSF)
- Philip K. Dick, “Frozen Journey” (NBSF)

Unit 5-Forever Peace and the Body

- Joe Haldeman, Forever Peace
- Molly Gloss, “Interlocking Pieces” (NBSF)
- Eileen Gunn, “Stable Strategies for Middle Management” (NBSF)
- Candace Jane Dorsey, “(Learning About) Machine Sex” (N BSF)

Unit 6-Neuromancer, He, She and It, and Conclusion

- William Gibson, Neuromancer
- Marge Piercy, He, She and It
- Ursula Le Guin, “The New Atlantis” (N BSF)

Assignments:

For each unit in this course, you should begin by reading the assigned text(s) (listed above). When you have finished the text(s), you should click on the learning module for that unit (these can be found on the left-hand menu bar on the OWL course site). Within the learning module, you'll find a document containing notes on the assigned readings. These notes are designed to play the role that a lecture would play in an on-campus course.

Assignments must be submitted online. Go to the Assignments tab and click on the appropriate assignment to see the instructions/essay topics and to attach your assignments. Your papers will automatically be uploaded to turnitin simultaneously. I am using their software to comment on papers, so when the papers are returned (if you can see it in your gradebook, you can see the assignment too) check the turnitin version, grade mark tab for further commentary. Check to ensure your paper has uploaded properly. It is your responsibility to ensure its delivery.

Late Penalty and Extensions

Late essays will be penalized 2% per day, including weekends, unless the student has received an extension. Students must ask for extensions at least a week in advance of the due date and offer a good reason for the extension (academic workload, job schedule conflicts, and vacations are not good reasons). No extension will be given to any student on the day the assignment is due. Papers received more than 10 days late will receive a grade of 0.

If you miss an exam or an essay due date, or if you require an extension at the last minute on medical or compassionate grounds, you must notify your academic counsellor immediately and follow the procedure below.

The Participation Grade and Discussions

The one great drawback to an online course is the lack of classroom discussion. I therefore encourage students to use the Forums feature in OWL, which gives you the opportunity to discuss a text with your classmates. Your participation in these discussions is worth 10% of your grade.

Discussion questions are posted in the forums. You may use these questions to get a discussion of a text started, although you may certainly raise other questions or issues not included in the questions. Once a discussion is posted, you may respond to it or raise another issue. Post as many discussions and responses as you like.

Remember, these discussions replace in-class discussions and should, therefore, be seriously considered and analytical. Avoid using the Forums just to state whether you liked or disliked a text or to simply agree or disagree with a previous post. I will be checking the Forums at least three times a week, and I expect you to do likewise. Posting responses to questions without first reading your fellow students' responses is not discussion: it's a monologue, and it does not meet the criteria of this on-going assignment. You'll get the most out of this assignment by treating it as an academic conversation.

For the most part, the Forums page is for students; however, I will interject if a student has posted a problematic reading or an error, if I want to emphasize a particular point or issue that has been raised, or if students seem to need some help to push their ideas further. I try to keep my interventions brief, so often they will take the form of a question stemming from the previous discussions.

I will be locking the discussion threads at the end of each unit so that the discussion stays on track. For example, the discussion thread for Unit 1, which corresponds to the first two full weeks of classes, will be locked on Sunday, September 22 at 10:00 pm EDT. I will lock the next unit's discussion thread two weeks later, and so forth.

Your participation grade will reflect both the quantity and quality of your contributions to the discussion board. Remember that any message posted in the Forums can be read by any member of the class. Use appropriate language and observe proper netiquette.

Final Exam

The final exam will be written in person at the approved exam centre that you selected when you registered for the course (see the Distance Studies section of the Academic Calendar for more information). It will not be an online exam. The final exam is scheduled by the Registrar. You must be prepared to write the exam on the dates assigned: do not make travel plans until the final exam schedule is posted.

Contacting your instructor

Email: I am happy to communicate with students by email, but there are two provisos. (1) I can't always answer emails instantly; please allow 24 hours for a response on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. (2) I will respond to short emails only.

Students must check their UWO email regularly for messages pertinent to the course.

Messages sent from email providers such as yahoo, gmail or Hotmail will not be answered, so please use our UWO email account for messages to your instructor. In addition, please ensure that your emails conform to the rudimentary standards of university discourse: emails should be written using correct grammar, complete sentences, and a professional tone. Rude or harassing emails, or emails from students requesting information readily available on the course outline, will not be answered.

Telephone: Students wanting to engage in an extended conversation about the course work – discussions or questions about lecture materials, essay or exam expectations or results, course readings, etc – may email me to set up a time that is convenient for both of us to have a telephone conversation. Either I will call you (if the call is not long distance) or you can call me at a phone number I will give you, depending on where I am the day of the appointment. Please note that I cannot return long-distance calls.

In person: Students who are in the London area and who would prefer to talk with me rather than by telephone or email may email me to set up a time that is convenient for both of us to meet at my office on campus.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to talk or ask questions about any topic or issue, including assignments, difficulties you are having with the course, suggestions for further reading, or clarification and expansion of issues raised in the readings or lecture notes. Unfortunately, most students wait until the last minute or until all hell is breaking loose before consulting their instructors. Please see me well ahead of deadlines and the onset of nervous breakdowns.

Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.