

English 2071F(650) Syllabus

WESTERN UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & WRITING STUDIES  
English 2071F (650) Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction Online  
Fall 2014

**Instructor: Dr. Mark Stephenson**

**Email: mstephe9@uwo.ca**

**Office: (Old) Ivey Building, 2G28L**

**Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:00-1:30 – or by appointment (see below)**

**TA: Kirin Rogers**

**Email: krogers3@uwo.ca**

**Office: (Old) Ivey Building, 0N20K**

**Office Hours: Thursdays, 11:30-1:30 – or by appointment**

**Please read the following information completely and carefully. You are responsible for it.**

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 Texts**

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 Attebery, Brian, eds. *The Norton Book of Science Fiction*.

### **Assignments and Grade Distribution**

Essay 1	Due Oct. 12	1,500 words	25%
Essay 2	Due Nov. 30	2,000 words	30%
Participation			10%
Final exam	TBA (December examination period)		35%

### **\*\*\*\*Final Grades\*\*\*\***

***STUDENTS MUST PASS BOTH TERM WORK AND THE FINAL EXAMINATION (IN COURSES WITH FINAL EXAMINATIONS) IN ORDER TO PASS THE COURSE. STUDENTS WHO FAIL THE FINAL EXAMINATION (REGARDLESS OF THEIR TERM MARK) AUTOMATICALLY FAIL THE COURSE.***

Students whose term and final exam grades combine to result in a grade of 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. Your final grades are released by the Registrar's Office.

### **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 H.G. 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 H.G. Wells' "scientific romances" (*The Time Machine* and *The War of the 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 Canticle 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).

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS

**You must 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—(Sept. 8-21) Introductory Stories and *Frankenstein*

- William Gibson, "The Gernsback Continuum" *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* (NBSF)

- Eleanor Arnason, “The Warlord of Saturn’s Moons” (NBSF)
- 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” (NBSF)

**Unit 2—(Sept. 22-Oct. 5) *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 Ralpha Boulevard” (NBSF)
- Howard Waldrop, “. . . the World, as we Know’t” (NBSF)

**Unit 3—(Oct. 6-19) *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—(Oct. 20-Nov.2) *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—(Nov. 3-16) *Forever Peace* and the Body**

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

**Unit 6—(Nov. 17-30) *Neuromancer, He, She and It, and Conclusion***

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

**How to Proceed in the Course Generally**

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 menubar 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.

**Contacting your instructor**

## Email

I am happy to communicate with students by e-mail, but there are two provisos. However, I can't always answer emails instantly; please allow 24 hours for a response on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. If you haven't received a response to your email within 24 hours (or 48 on the weekends), resend your email: it may have been overlooked by me, or (as is sometimes the case) it may have gotten lost in cyberspace.

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

## Telephone

Students wanting to engage in an extended conversation about the course work—discussions or questions about lecture material, essay or exam expectations or results, course readings, etc.—may e-mail 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 in person rather than by telephone or e-mail may visit me during my office hours on campus – these are 12:00 – 1:30, Mondays and Wednesdays; my office is (Old) Ivey Building 2G28L. I am also somewhat available for consultation outside of those hours (up until 2:30 on both days, and for a short time after 4:30 on Wednesdays), but only on Mondays and Wednesdays (otherwise, I am not on campus); email me to inquire about meeting with me at these times outside of my regular office hours, to set up an appointment.

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.

## **Assignments**

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. 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 24 hours in advance of the due. No extension will be given to any student on the day the assignment is due. Papers received more than 14 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.

## **University Policy on Academic Accommodation**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 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 Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>.

The full policy is set out here:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

This policy remains in place for all assignments, including those worth less than 10% of a student's final grade.

Please note: instructors are not permitted to review medical documentation; all requests for academic accommodation that include doctor's notes, etc., regardless of the total worth of the assignment to a student's final grade, must be submitted by the student directly to the appropriate Faculty Dean's office and not to the instructor. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

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.

## **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 one week after 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 28 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.

For information on the general structure of the final exam, see the two files related to it in the "Learners Resources" section of the course website. I will re-direct your attention to these as the final exam date draws closer. The exam will be held during the exam period – Dec. 6-17.

### **Citing Sources and Plagiarism**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a 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. This includes Internet sources. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Further details of the University policy on academic offences can be found on pages 19-21 of the 2013 Academic Calendar.

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 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>).

Steps to follow to avoid plagiarism:

- 1) Do as much work as possible *before* beginning your secondary research – read the novel(s), think of a thesis statement, sketch out your argument. Write down your own ideas before reading any criticism.
- 2) Develop a note-taking style that clearly indicates what ideas are your own and what ideas are taken from another source. You can use different coloured pens, cue cards, or any other method that helps you distinguish your own ideas from those of other critics.
- 3) Feel free to disagree with any critic you are reading – don't simply regurgitate somebody else's argument.
- 4) When you are incorporating someone else's ideas into your essay, acknowledge them within the essay itself using
  - (a) quotation marks (whenever you have even part of a sentence that's the same as the original)
  - (b) signal phrases – i.e. According to John Smith...

As Smith points out...

Smith observes that...

(c) a reference in parentheses that indicates the source of the idea (often just the page number, if you've already used a tag phrase)

5) Cite the source in full in your Works Cited list (see guidelines below).

### **MLA Guidelines**

Your essays should follow MLA format:

- 1) In the top left-hand corner of the first page, put your name, the name of your professor, the name of the course, and the date.
- 2) Number your pages in the top right-hand corner.
- 3) Double space.
- 4) If you use a snappy, attention-grabbing title, follow it up with an informative sub-title that indicates your topic and the works you will be discussing (i.e. Robot Sex: Bodies and Intimacy in Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*).
- 5) Titles of books should be *italicized*. Titles of short poems, articles, and short stories should be in quotation marks.
- 6) Introduce quotations in your own words, identifying the speaker and context: i.e. Bruce Sterling argues that cyberpunk embodies an "integration of technology and the Eighties counterculture . . . when authority still had a comfortable margin of control" (311). Use ellipses to indicate where you have omitted material.
- 7) If the quotation is longer than four lines, do not use quotation marks; instead, indent the passage ten spaces (or two tabs) from the left and continue to double space.
- 8) For short quotations, indicate the page number(s) in parentheses after the quotation marks and before the end punctuation. For long, indented quotations, place the parentheses after the end punctuation. Do not use abbreviations such as p. or pp. or include the author's name if the identity of the author is clear from the context.
- 9) List all the works you have referred to in a Works Cited list at the end of your paper. Use the following format for the entries in your Works Cited list:

Author's last name, Author's first name. "Title of article or short story." Title of Book.

City of publication: Publisher, date of publication.

There is a useful online guide to MLA format at the following address:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>



See the Guidelines for Properly Citing Sources (MLA style tips) on Western's Department of English website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/MLAstyletips.html> for more detailed information.

### **Further Information for Students**

For English Department regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please consult "Information for Students" on our Department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/info-for-students.html>

### **University Policy on Prerequisites**

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees.

Please note that English 134E is an antirequisite to this course; hence, if you have taken English 134E, you cannot receive credit for English 2071F/G.