

Department of English and Writing Studies

Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction

English 2071F (650)

Summer 2020

Instructor: John Kelly

Course Description

The science fiction course explores a selection of science fiction short stories and novels by focusing on the author's 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.

Course Materials

- * Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*.
- * Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine*.
- * --. *The War of the Worlds*.
- * Miller, Walter M. *A Canticle for Lebowitz*.
- * 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*.

A **course pack** that includes the short stories from the Norton Anthology should be available soon. I will send the link when it becomes available.

Reading and working with these specific editions is preferred, especially for essays and in discussing the texts. If you already have some or all of the texts in different editions, then inform me what edition you will be using on your essays.

During the course, you are expected to read the relevant sections of the course package in combination with the texts. The package provides important background information on and interpretations of the texts in order to guide you through the readings.

Readings:

Due to the short length 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 like Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Stanislaw Lem, and Frank Herbert have not been included. Instead, the texts presented in the course package 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. In the course of reading through the materials, students should remember that the texts are not simply sites for imaginative speculation, but rather reflect and respond to very specific historical conditions. 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 metaphorically discussing 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. What these references should remind students as they read is that science fiction constitutes a literature of social criticism anchored in its historical context.

The course is roughly organized in an historical timeline 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. In 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* that 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* that 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.

Methods of Evaluation

Essay # 1 (1,500 words / 6 pages)	25%
Essay # 2 (2,000 words / 8 pages)	35%
Discussion bonus points	1.5%
Final Exam	40%

Timetable

WEEK 1— INTRODUCTION: Introduction and Introductory stories. Begin *Frankenstein*.

WEEK 2— *Frankenstein*.

WEEK 3— Greg Bear, “Schrodinger’s Plague;” and Wells, *The Time Machine*.

WEEK 4—Wells, *War of the World*.

WEEK 5— Utopian / Dystopian stories and begin *A Canticle For Leibowitz*.

WEEK 6— *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

WEEK 7— New Concerns and Women's Science Fiction. Begin *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

WEEK 8— *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

WEEK 9— Alien Encounters. Begin *Forever Peace*.

WEEK 10— *Forever Peace* and *The Body*.

WEEK 11— William Gibson, *Neuromancer*.

WEEK 12— Marge Piercy, *He, She and It* and Conclusion.

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.