Department of English & Writing Studies

Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction
English 2071F (650)
Summer 2022

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 form 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%
Forum Discussion   5%
Final Exam   35%

Attendance
Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

<u>Intellectual Property/Copyright</u>
All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

<u>Accommodation Policies</u>
Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence:
Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty**.

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see:
[Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)
For the **Student Medical Certificate (SMC)**, see:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Religious Accommodation:
Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

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.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

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/
Academic Support & Engagement 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.

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.