

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND WRITING STUDIES
WESTERN UNIVERSITY

ENGLISH 2071F/G (SPECULATIVE FICTION: SCIENCE FICTION)
ONLINE--2014--Section 650

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 TEXTS

- * 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*.
- * Instructor's selection.

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. The UWO Bookstore will have these texts in stock, and you can order them on-line from the Bookstore. For more information, go to <http://www.bookstore.uwo.ca>. You may also find the books at a local bookseller.

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.

COURSE OUTLINE

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 . 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.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

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

PLAGIARISM

There is **ZERO** tolerance for plagiarism in this course.

Please read the official University of Western Ontario notice below. A first offence will result in a mark of **zero** on the assignment, and the Department of English as well as your Faculty will be notified (this is the minimum penalty); a second, or very blatant, offence will result in **failure** of the course and debarment from all further Department of English courses. The Department of English also takes seriously internal plagiarism; you should be aware that the department keeps a database of all internet essay sites. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to consult with the instructor or the English Undergraduate Office.

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 by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

Students must pass the course work and final exam to pass the course.

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.