

Department of English & Writing Studies

**Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction**

**English 2071F (001)**

Fall 2019

**Instructor:** Professor Alyssa MacLean

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UC 4429

**Course Location:** University Community  
Centre 37

**Course Date/Time:** Monday 11:30-12:30 pm,  
Wednesday 11:30-1:30 pm

Course Description

Science fiction is a speculative art form that deals with new technologies, faraway worlds, and disruptions in the possibilities of the world as we know it. However, it is also very much a product of its time—a literature of social criticism that is anchored in a specific social and historical context. This course will introduce students to the narrative conventions and tropes of science fiction, starting with three highly influential works from the nineteenth and early twentieth century—Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* and Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*—that are preoccupied with humanity’s place in an inhospitable universe. 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. Building on these important precedents, our next texts use discussions of alien species and alternative futures to explore the nature of human identity. Ursula Le Guin’s novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* uses the trope of alien contact to explore the possibilities of an androgynous society unmarked by the divisions of gender. *Arrival*, a film portraying the appearance of mysterious spacecraft on Earth and the subsequent threat of war, revisits many of the concerns raised by Wells in a postmodern context, and poses new questions about identity, language, and free will. Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* portrays the horrors of colonialism in an apocalyptic future, and offers an indigenous response to systems of oppression. We will finish the course with two novels examining the relationship between humans and technology. Joe Haldeman’s *Forever Peace* examines the utopian possibility for achieving peace and eliminating war in the mid twenty-first century, while William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* foregrounds what many critics see as a crisis in defining human identity.

**Learning Objectives:**

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Identify different generic qualities of science fiction, recognize the evolution of the genre, and situate individual works within wider debates about the genre
- Appreciate and analyze the aims and accomplishments of individual works using appropriate literary terminology (for example, plot, character, point of view, theme, setting, imagery, symbols, tone, and diction)
- Analyze individual works of science fiction in relation to their historical, political, and cultural context; compare how different works critique their respective societies
- Communicate ideas clearly and succinctly in multiple contexts, including oral discussions, written discussion boards, and literary analysis essays. This course will focus especially on the development of effective written communication skills. Students will learn to frame a research question, respond constructively to peer review, and produce formal essays that have a clear, persuasive, well-argued thesis supported by appropriate textual evidence.

### Course Materials (Tentative)

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf. Peterborough: Broadview, 2012. 978-1554811038 [n.b. please buy this edition of this text; any other edition based on the **1818 version** of the text would be acceptable.]

H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*. Toronto: Del Rey, 1968. 978-0449300435

Walter M. Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Toronto: Bantam, 2007. 978-0553273816

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Ace, 2010. 978-0441478125

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*. Canada: Dancing Cat, 2017. 978-1770864863

Joe Haldeman, *Forever Peace*. New York: Ace, 1997. 978-0441005666

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace, 1984. 978-0441569595

Villeneuve, Denis. *Arrival*. 2016. [N.B. We will have a screening in class. Students who would like to write an assignment on this film are highly encouraged to acquire their own copy for private screening.]

### Methods of Evaluation (Tentative)

Essay # 1 (5 pages)	20%
Essay # 2 (8 pages)	30%
Written participation assignments	5%
In-class participation	10%
Final Exam	35%

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/Student%20Information.html>.

### 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](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](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](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/>

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.

Timetable

TBA