

Department of English & Writing Studies

English 2071F (650)
Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction
Summer 2023

Instructor: Dr. John Kelly

Office Hours: Zoom Wed. 1:00 to 3:00

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.

Objectives:

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

- Think critically about science fiction literature and culture, and understand the historical and literary contexts of works.
- Be able to distinguish between periods, movements, and styles of science fiction literature.
- Write an essay about a work of literature, containing an effective thesis supported by adequate evidence from the original text and documented following the Modern Language Association method.
- Organize and present ideas clearly and effectively.

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*.

The short stories can be found in the tab **Course Readings** on the OWL site.

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 (500 words / 2 pages) May 22	15%
Essay # 2 (1000 words / 4 pages) June 30	20%
Essay # 3 (1500 words / 5 pages) July 14	25%
Forum Discussion	5%
Final Exam	35%

Intellectual Property/Copyright

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.

Accommodation Policies

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](#).

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 https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The full policy is set out here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Academic Integrity Tutorial

All students are required to enroll in and complete the Centre for Teaching and Learning's Academic Integrity Tutorial. To access the tutorial, please use the link provided in the Resource tab in the course OWL site. Once the tutorial has been completed, you will receive a downloadable certificate. You must upload the certificate and submit it through the course Assignments tab in order to complete this assignment. The tutorial must be completed by Friday in the second week of term. This tutorial is mandatory in order for you to complete and pass the course. If you have completed the tutorial already for another course, you may upload the same certificate for this course; you do not need to repeat the tutorial.

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/>

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

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 stories. Begin *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

WEEK 8— *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

WEEK 9— Alien Encounter stories. Begin *Forever Peace*.

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

WEEK 11— William Gibson, *Neuromancer*.

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