

Department of English & Writing Studies

Speculative Fiction: Science Fiction**English 2071F (650)**

Fall 2023

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. A series of short stories by authors such as Ray Bradbury will reflect the apocalyptic sensibility of the era of nuclear confrontation in the sixties. 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 novels examining the relationship between humans and technology. William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* foregrounds what many critics see as a crisis in defining human identity in a technological age. Victor LaValle’s graphic novel *Destroyer* comes full circle to re-examine many of the ideas about artificial intelligence brought up in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, repositioning the creature’s desires for love and vengeance in the embittered atmosphere of the contemporary United States. Short stories by authors such as Phillip K. Dick and Octavia Butler will round out our exploration of prominent narrative conventions and tropes of science fiction.

Course delivery: this course is an asynchronous online Distance Studies course. Units of the course material will be posted as Word files on OWL, under the “Lessons” tab. Please see the “Getting Started” tab on OWL to learn how to proceed through the units of the class. Our class discussions will take place asynchronously on OWL Forums.

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
- 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 discussion boards and literary analysis

essays. This course will focus especially on the development of effective written communication skills. Students will learn to answer an essay question, analyze literary texts independently, and produce formal essays that have a clear, persuasive, well-argued thesis supported by appropriate textual evidence.

- Demonstrate academic integrity in all research processes—i.e. show an understanding of how new knowledge is created in the discipline, cite sources ethically and transparently, acknowledge the ideas that are theirs and not theirs, and make that difference clear to their readers.

Course Materials

All texts below are required.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus*. 3rd ed. Ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf. Broadview, 2012. 978-1554811038 [NOTE: 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*. Del Rey, 1968. 978-0449300435

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

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

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*. Ace, 1984. 978-0441569595

Villeneuve, Denis. *Arrival*. 2016. [NOTE: this film is available on the *Criterion* service via the UWO library website.]

Lavalle, Victor. *Victor Lavalle's Destroyer*. Illustrated by Dietrich Smith with Joana Lafuente. BOOM! Studios, 978-68415-055-7.

Additional course readings are posted on our OWL course site under “Course Readings.”

Methods of Evaluation

Academic Integrity tutorial (certificate submission required)	Due Oct. 2	pass/fail
Essay 1 (1000 words)	Due Oct. 13	20%
Essay 2 (1200 words)	Due Dec. 1	30%
Participation in Forum Posts (best 7 of 12) (500 words min.)*		15%
Final Exam (December exam period)		35%

*The 500-word requirement for forum posts is for the total number of words in all posts, not per post

Note: The Department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

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/info%20for%20students.html#grade>.

General Information

Land Acknowledgement:

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and

Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Contact Information:

I am happy to communicate with students by e-mail. Please allow 24 hours for a response on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. Students must use their @uwo.ca email address and check it regularly for messages pertinent to the course. Messages sent from email providers such as yahoo, gmail or hotmail will not be answered, so please use your Western email account for messages to your instructor or TA. In addition, please ensure that your emails conform to the rudimentary standards of university discourse, using correct grammar, complete sentences, and a professional tone. Rude or harassing emails, or emails from students requesting information readily available on the course outline, will not be answered.

Students wanting to engage in an extended conversation about the course work—discussions or questions about lecture material, essay or exam expectations or results, course readings, etc.—may e-mail me to set up a time that is convenient for both of us to have a telephone or Zoom conversation.

Intellectual Property/Copyright:

All instructor-written materials (e.g. lecture notes, forum questions, assignment topics) 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.

A Note on Our Class Content:

Our course readings and discussions will often focus on serious, difficult, and potentially challenging topics that may ask you to step out of your normal comfort zone. Almost every work on our syllabus depicts mature, provocative, or even deliberately offensive content of some kind, such as trauma and gender-based violence, racist ideology, racial epithets, suicide, substance abuse, and forms of self-harm.

Readings and discussions might trigger strong feelings—anger, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, humour, and even boredom. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers' understanding of the readings. Nonetheless, we are all responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful, and I ask all students to participate in discussions in a spirit of intellectual curiosity,

honesty, and empathy. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom.

Overview of Course Requirements, Policies, and Assignments

Attendance and Illness Policy:

This class will not have any synchronous elements such as attendance. All class participation will take place in the Forums on OWL (Note: there are deadlines for posting in the Forums each week, as explained in “The Participation Grade and Forum Posts” below). However, if there is a reason why you’re not keeping up with the class, please speak to me about it. The process for requesting academic accommodation on medical or other grounds is described in the “Accommodations” section below.

Academic Integrity Tutorial on OWL:

All students are required to enrol in and complete the Centre for Teaching and Learning’s Academic Integrity Tutorial. To access the tutorial, please use the link provided in the Learner Resources tab on our OWL course site. Once you’ve completed the tutorial, 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 Monday, October 2 at 11:55 pm. This tutorial is mandatory in order for you to pass the course. If you’ve already completed the tutorial for a previous course, please upload your certificate from the past time you completed it.

The Participation Grade and Forum Posts:

The class is divided into three groups for forum discussion and marking purposes. Each group will have its own leader (me or one of your teaching assistants). You must post in the Forums in at least 7 of the 12 weeks. Each forum will be open for only one week, and you must contribute to it before it’s locked. Each week’s forum will open on Mondays at 8:00 am ET and close the following Sunday at 11:55 pm ET. Specific opening and closing times are noted on the calendar and in the Forums on our OWL course site.

Please note that this schedule means that you must keep on top of the readings in this course! You will need to complete the reading well before the end of the unit to give yourself enough time to post in the forum. If you miss posting in a discussion forum for ANY reason, including illness, you can’t make up for it. Also, never try to post in the forum or submit an assignment at the last minute: give yourself extra time in case of computer or internet problems. Unless OWL is down for everyone, which almost never happens, I won’t extend a deadline for computer/internet issues.

Discussion questions are posted in the forums. You may use these questions to get a discussion of a text started, although you may certainly raise other questions or issues not included in the questions. Once a discussion is posted, you may respond to it or raise another issue. Post as many discussions and responses as you like.

Remember, these discussions replace in-class discussions and should, therefore, be seriously considered and analytical. Avoid using the Forums just to state whether you liked or disliked a text or to simply agree or disagree with a previous post. Your group leader will be checking the Forums at least three times a week, and we expect you to do likewise. Posting responses to

questions without first reading your fellow students' responses is not discussion: it's a monologue, and it does not meet the criteria of this on-going assignment. You'll get the most out of this assignment by treating it as an academic conversation.

For the most part, the Forums page is for students; however, your group leader will interject if a student has posted a problematic reading or an error, if the leader wants to emphasize a particular point or issue that has been raised, or if students need some help to push their ideas further. Group leaders will try to keep our interventions brief, so often they will take the form of a question stemming from the previous discussions.

Your participation grade will reflect both the quantity and quality of your contributions to the discussion board. You can find the grading rubric for discussion forum posts in the Learner Resources folder on our OWL course site.

General considerations of "netiquette":

- 1) Keep in mind the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the course. We have students from all cultural backgrounds, sexual orientations, and identities in the class. Be mindful of who you mean when you use the word "we." In fact, the word "we" is a pet peeve of mine. While I use it sometimes to refer to our class as a whole, it's best if you use "I" for all your writing in the course (forum posts, essays, etc.). You can speak only for yourself.
- 2) Be respectful of the diversity of viewpoints that you will encounter in the class and in your readings. The exchange of diverse ideas and opinions is part of the scholarly environment. "Flaming" is never appropriate. Be professional and scholarly in all online postings. Cite the ideas of others appropriately
- 3) Given that the OWL forum is our learning space (and therefore private given that you need a password to log in), it is inappropriate to share the posts of other students or discuss the learning of other students in non-scholarly contexts such as social media.

Final Exam:

This course will have a 3-hour online final exam scheduled by the Registrar during the final exam period in December. The exam will be comprehensive (i.e. will cover all of the texts and course material of the term). Further details will be announced later in the semester.

Statement on remote proctoring software:

Tests and examinations in this course will be conducted using a remote proctoring service. By taking this course, you are consenting to the use of this software and acknowledge that you will be required to provide **personal information** (including some biometric data) and the session will be **recorded**. Completion of this course will require you to have a reliable internet connection and a device that meets the technical requirements for this service. More information about this remote proctoring service, including technical requirements, is available on Western's Remote Proctoring website at: <https://remoteproctoring.uwo.ca>.

Essays:

There are 2 essays due for this class: one short essay (1000 words) and a research paper (1200 words). Papers in English should be written in MLA format (including page layout and citation style); this method of documentation is described in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research*

Papers, 9th ed, which is available as a digital download on the university's library website. It's also available for purchase at the bookstore. The OWL at Purdue website also has an abbreviated guide to MLA guidelines at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>. See also "Documenting Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism" on the Learner Resources page.

Assignments must be submitted online through OWL. Go to the Assignments tab and click on the appropriate assignment to see the instructions/essay topics and to attach your assignments. Your papers will automatically be uploaded to Turnitin simultaneously. Check to ensure your paper has uploaded properly. It is your responsibility to ensure its delivery. Assignments will not be accepted by e-mail.

You will be evaluated based on your ability to write clear, well-argued essays. Elements such as grammar, organization, argumentation, citation, and editing are all important and will affect your grade. The complete essay grading criteria is on the Learner Resources page on our OWL course site.

I encourage you to send your thesis statements or introductory paragraphs to your group leader by email for feedback well before the due dates. On the day the essay is due, please upload a copy of your assignment as a Word doc (no pdfs please) to the "Assignments" page on OWL.

Late Penalty and Extensions:

Late assignments will be penalized 2% per day, including weekends, unless the student has received an extension. Students must ask for extensions well in advance of the due date and offer a good reason for the extension (academic workload, job schedule conflicts, and vacations are not good reasons). No extension will be given to any student on the day the assignment is due. Assignments that are more than 7 days late will not be accepted.

If you miss an exam or an assignment due date, or if you require an extension at the last minute on medical or compassionate grounds, you must notify your academic counsellor immediately and follow the procedure below.

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.

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](#).

Statement on Academic Integrity:

We (i.e. students in this course, Professor, teaching assistants, the Department of English and Writing Studies, Western University, and the scholarly community at large) share an understanding of the ethical ways that we use to produce knowledge. A core practice of this shared value of academic integrity is that we acknowledge the contributions of others to our own work. However, it also means we produce our own contributions that add to the scholarly conversation: we don't buy or copy papers or exams or have someone else edit them. We also don't falsify data or sources, or hand in the same work in more than one course.

One of the learning outcomes of this course is to cultivate a clear sense of what academic integrity is: what academic integrity means for this discipline, why it matters, and how to practice it in our research. Please contact me any time you have questions about how or why we engage in the practices of attribution and citation. As part of this course you will be required to complete Western's Academic Integrity tutorial on OWL.

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. (Note: The use of AI such as Chat GPT is also prohibited in this course. Any assignment or exam that is found to be written with the aid of Chat CPT or any other AI technology will receive a grade of zero.)

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/>

If you need help:

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.

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca or call 519-661-3568.

Timetable

I recommend completing the assigned reading before reading the lecture notes for that week. The lecture notes contain spoilers!

UNIT 1: THE ORIGINS OF SCIENCE FICTION	
Week 1: (Mon, Sept. 11)	Stanley Grauman Weinbaum, "A Martian Odyssey" Eleanor Arnason, "The Warlord of Saturn's Moons"
Week 2: (Mon, Sept. 18)	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> (warning: it's long) and Appendix I: Introduction to Shelley's 1831 Edition (pp. 347-352).
UNIT 2: UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS	
Week 3: (Mon, Sept. 25)	H. G. Wells, <i>The Time Machine</i> and <i>War of the Worlds</i>
Week 4: (Mon, Oct. 2)	Cordwainer Smith, "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" Joanna Russ, "A Few Things I Know about Whileaway" Aliette de Bodard, "Immersion" Please complete the Academic Integrity tutorial on OWL and upload your certificate to "Assignments" by Monday Oct 2.
UNIT 3: COLD WAR ANXIETIES	
Week 5: (Tues, Oct. 10) (Oct. 9 Thanksgiving Holiday)	Ray Bradbury, "There Will Come Soft Rains" Donald Barthelme, "Game" Avram Davidson, "The House the Blakeney's Built" Isaac Asimov, "The Gentle Vultures"
UNIT 4: THE ALIEN AND THE OTHER	
Week 6: (Mon, Oct. 16)	Ursula Le Guin, <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> (warning: it's long) ESSAY 1 DUE FRIDAY, OCT 13, at 11:55 pm
Week 7: (Mon, Oct. 23)	Denis Villeneuve, <i>Arrival</i> (film)
Mon, Oct. 30 – Fri, Nov. 3 READING WEEK	
UNIT 5: LESSONS FROM THE APOCALYPSE	
Week 8: (Mon, Nov. 6)	Cherie Dimaline, <i>The Marrow Thieves</i>
Week 9: (Mon, Nov. 13)	Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds" and "Bloodchild"

UNIT 6: CYBORGS, AI, AND THE POST-HUMAN	
Week 10: (Mon, Nov. 20)	Philip K. Dick, "Frozen Journey" Eileen Gunn, "Stable Strategies for Middle Management"
Week 11: (Mon, Nov. 27)	William Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> (warning: it's long) ESSAY 2 DUE FRIDAY, DEC. 1 AT 11:55 PM ET
UNIT 7: AFROFUTURISM + CONCLUSION	
Week 12: (Mon, Dec. 4)	Victor LaValle, <i>Destroyer</i> Nalo Hopkinson, "The Easthound" Paul Preuss, "Half-Life"
TBA	Final exam (cumulative) during December exam period