

**LIT2020: Introduction to the Short Story:
Speculative Fiction, Sci-fi, and Fantasy**
Spring 2011

"Do you know," Peter asked "why swallows build in the eaves of houses? It is to listen to the stories."
~J.M. Barrie

Instructor Kate Lechler
e-mail: kal09d@fsu.edu

Texts *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror 2008: Twenty-first Annual Collection*. Eds. Ellen Datlow, Kelly Link, and Gavin J. Grant, 2008.
Science Fiction: Stories and Contexts. Ed. Heather Masri, 2009.
Supplementary Texts available on Blackboard (*)

Course Description

Welcome, travelers, to Lit2020: Introduction to the Short Story. The goal of LIT2020 is to introduce and practice critical ways of reading, thinking about, and discussing literary texts. In this course, we will focus specifically on speculative fiction.

What is speculative fiction? It is a wide-ranging collection of genres, especially identified with fantasy, horror, and science fiction. It is fiction that *speculates*, or asks "What if?" It has long been pushed to the fringes, and even the ditches, of literature by "serious" scholars and writers. No longer! This class is predicated on the belief that speculative fiction is not only "real literature" but also that, like all literature, it is artistic, philosophical, political, and communal. What did Arthur C. Clarke mean when he said, "Politicians should read science fiction, not westerns and detective stories"? Could this apply to other kinds of speculative fiction, too? What does speculative fiction offer us in terms of how we think about our universe, our planet, our neighbors, and ourselves? To enter into this discussion, we will a) read stories by foundational as well as fringe authors, b) read supplementary works that contextualize or analyze the stories in order to further class discussion, c) learn about the historical, cultural, and ideological contexts of speculative fiction, and d) produce essays relating what we're reading to key themes present in the stories and inherent in speculative fiction.

Student Learning Objectives

After successfully completing this course, the student should be able to:

- a. Identify key elements of fiction, and understand how different elements work together to create genre.
- b. Summarize and apply tenets of several basic schools of literary criticism.
- c. Respond to literary texts with writing that analyzes, synthesizes, interprets, and assesses meaning and significance.
- d. Produce finished papers which conform to the guidelines of a documentation style manual (MLA) and which conform to standard written American English.

Feedback designed to foster students' writing proficiency will be provided.

*“Any sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic.”
Arthur C. Clarke*

Grading

Preparation/Participation: 10%
Discussion Board Journals (10): 15%
Essays: 50% Total (Essay One: 25%, Essay Two: 25%)
Final Exam: 25%

Attendance and Participation

Your success in this class depends on your own participation and engagement. If you want an A, you should do the assigned reading. There will be frequent pop quizzes, always at the beginning of class; these cannot be made up. Plan to be on time to class, with paper, pencil, and the required reading in hand. Refrain from distracting others or yourself by using phones, personal organizers, mp3 players, or surfing on the Internet. Add something meaningful to the class discussion each day. Students who do this will receive full credit for preparation and participation.

Discussion Board Journals

In lieu of a midterm exam, you will respond in 300 words to 10 short prompts on the Blackboard Class Discussion site. These responses are mandatory but informal, designed to help synthesize and deepen your thinking about the readings. I also hope that this practice will help you make new connections between our reading and your own interests, possibly providing a springboard for paper ideas. Feel free to use this as an outlet for honesty. Do not merely parrot back what I say in class; write your own thoughts and challenge yourself to think more deeply and creatively.

Essay Description and Format

Essay One (25%) will be a 1,500 word literary analysis and interpretation. Essay Two (25%) will be a creative portfolio including an original 1,500 word short story of your own and a short process essay.

Final Exam

The final exam will consist of a short-answer section asking factual questions about characters and plots of stories we read; a quote identification section asking for authors, stories, and significance of important quotes; and a short essay section asking for sustained analysis, interpretations, and application of major themes and literary critical viewpoints we cover during the semester.

*“We tend to think things are new because we’ve just discovered them.”
-Madeleine L’Engle*

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

(All readings are from *Science Fiction: Stories and Contexts* unless they have a *, in which case they are on Bb in the Course Library, or if they are underlined, in which case they are from The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror.)

Introducing Short Fiction, Science Fiction, and Fantasy

T 1/4—Syllabus, Intro to Short Fiction, Intro to SciFi/Fantasy

R 1/6--*"Rocking Horse Winner" by D. H. Lawrence, "The Uncanny" Freud 427

Suggested Reading: *Intro to Short Stories

Roots of Speculative Fiction

T 1/11—Creation Myths (pick two), selection from Lewis and Tolkien

R 1/13—"The Boulder" Lucy Kemnitzer 325, *"Fairies"

T 1/18—*"Someday My Prince Will Come" Lieberman

*"Red as Blood" Tanith Lee, "Rats" Veronica Shanoes 310

R 1/20—Scientific Backgrounds--Alchemy

Suggested Reading: *Snow White, *Sleeping Beauty

Strange Encounters of the Third Kind

T 1/25—*No Class—Brainstorming Conferences*

Read "The Second Sex" Simone de Beauvoir 179, "The Shadow" C. G. Jung 186

R 1/27—"The House of Mechanical Pain" Chaz Brenchley 54

T 2/1—*"William Wilson" E.A. Poe, *"His Face All Red" Emily Carroll

R 2/3—Watch *Let the Right One In*

Suggested Viewing: *Vertigo* by Alfred Hitchcock

T 2/8—Watch *Let the Right One In*

R 2/10--*"The Colour Out of Space" H.P. Lovecraft

Suggested Reading: *"The Call of Cthulhu," Lovecraft *"A Study in Emerald" Gaiman

T 2/15—*"The Raft" by Stephen King

R 2/17—"Vaster Than Empires and More Slow" Ursula K. LeGuin 96

Suggested Reading: "Bloodchild" Octavia Butler 119

Artificial Life and Evolutions

T 2/22—*No class—Conferences on First Draft*

Read "Will Robots Inherit the Earth?" Marvin Minsky 1211

"A Cyborg Manifesto" Donna Haraway 455

R 2/24--"Burning Chrome" Gibson 371, "The Algorithms for Love" Ken Liu 415

Suggested Reading: "Second Variety" Philip K. Dick, 296

T 3/1—"Nonmoral Nature" Stephen Jay Gould 1203

R 3/3—"Bears Discover Fire" Bisson 1194, "Evolution of Trickster . . ." Johnson 423

Suggested Reading: "Rappacini's Daughter" Nathaniel Hawthorne 1029

Spring Break

T 3/15—**Essay 1 (Critical Analysis) Due**, **“Happy Endings”* Margaret Atwood

R 3/17—Jeff VanDerMeer Visits Class

T 3/22—*“Mimsy Were the Borogoves”* Lewis Padgett 1084

R 3/24—**“Familiar”* China Meiville

Time and Apocalypse

T 3/29—*“How to Build a Time Machine”* Michio Kaku 685

R 3/31—*“Vintage Season”* Moore 517, *“The Merchant and the . . . Gate”* Chiang 265

Suggested Reading: * *“The Third Level”*

T 4/5—*“The Imagination of Disaster”* Susan Sontag 1002

R 4/7—*“The Nine Billion Names of God”* Arthur C. Clarke 915, **“There Will Come Soft Rains”* Ray Bradbury

Suggested Reading: *“When We Went to See the End of the World”* Silverberg 561

Utopias and Distopias

T 4/12—*“The Organization Man”* William Whyte 864, *“Progress vs. Utopia”* Fredric Jameson 876 (skim)

R 4/14—*“The Weapons Shop”* A.E. VanVogt 716

T 4/19--*“The Country of the Kind”* Damon Knight 748,

R 4/21—**Essay 2 (Creative Portfolio) Due**, Review

Suggested Reading: **“Harrison Bergeron”* Kurt Vonnegut