

**ENG 352: Selected Topics in Popular Literature:
Science Fiction**
Spring 2016

Instructor Dr. Kate Lechler
Classroom: TBD
Classtime: T/Th 3:00-4:15pm
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Texts *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn.
Supplementary Texts available on Blackboard

Description and Goals, or My Hopes for Your Education

Welcome, travelers, to this course focused on science fiction. Sci-fi 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 science 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”? What does science 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 established authors, both old and new 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 science fiction, and d) produce essays relating what we’re reading to key themes present in the stories and inherent in science fiction.

Objectives, or Your Hopes for an A

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

- a. Identify key elements of science fiction, especially genre-specific elements of time-travel, space opera, utopia/dystopia, etc.
- 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.

Grading

Quizzes/Discussion Board (at least one every week): 40%
Final Essay: 30%
Final Exam: 30%

Quizzes/Discussion Board: 40%

Each week of the semester, you will have one quiz and one discussion board post.

On Tuesdays, quizzes will consist of two questions in the form of a short writing prompt. One will be about the previous lecture, and the other about the day's reading. If you skip class, you cannot make up a quiz. If you skip the previous class, you are still responsible for getting notes on the lecture from a classmate so that you can take the next day's quiz. Please note: Several questions on the final exam are guaranteed to be taken from the quizzes.

On Thursdays, you will respond in 150 words to weekly prompts on the Blackboard Class Discussion site. These responses are mandatory but informal, designed to help synthesize and deepen your thinking about the readings, and to give you a space to utilize the new literary vocabulary we will discuss in class. 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: 30%

You will write one 1800-2000 word essay for this class. This will consist of literary analysis and interpretation of a segment of a pre-approved speculative fiction novel. Your paper will rely heavily on close reading and three appropriate secondary sources.

Final versions of all essays due must be typed (double spaced), with one-inch margins. Please do not use a font larger than 12 point. Resist the urge to include a cover page; Simply follow MLA essay format. Essays and reading are due in class, in hard copy, on the date under which they are listed. If you cannot meet an essay deadline, please contact me to arrange an extension. Extensions will be given with a penalty of 5% per week.

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 Bb in the Content tab, unless they are underlined, in which case they are from The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction.)

Introducing Short Fiction and Science Fiction

T 1/26—Syllabus, “The Icons of Science Fiction,” 163

R 1/28—“A Word Shaped Like Bones,” Kris Millering

Suggested Reading: “If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love,” Rachel Swirsky

Explorations in Space and Time

T 2/2—“Alternate History,” 209; “The Seventh Voyage,” Stanislaw Lem

R 2/4—“All You Zombies,” Robert Heinlein; “Wikipedia,” Desmond Warzel

Suggested Reading: “The Men Who Murdered Mohammed,” Alfred Bester

Suggested Viewing: “The Girl Who Waited,” *Doctor Who*

T 2/9—“The Time Travel Club,” Charlie Jane Anders; “Celia and Conservation of Entropy,” Amelia Beamer

R 2/11—“Space Opera,” 197; “A Martian Odyssey,” Stanley Weinbaum

Suggested Reading: “Ender’s Game,” Orson Scott Card

T 2/16—“The Heart’s Filthy Lesson,” Elizabeth Bear; “(R+D)/I=M,” by E. Catherine Tobler

R 2/18—“Night’s Slow Poison,” Ann Leckie; “Silent Bridge, Pale Cascade,” Benjanun Sriduangkaew

*T 2/23—*2001: Space Odyssey* “The Sentinel” Arthur C. Clarke, articles on film

*R 2/25—*2001: Space Odyssey*

Suggested Reading: “The Last Question,” Isaac Asimov

Strange Encounters of the Third Kind

T 3/1—“The Colour Out of Space” H.P. Lovecraft, [“His Face All Red,” Emily Carroll]

R 3/3—“Vaster Than Empires and More Slow” Ursula K. LeGuin;

Suggested Reading: “The Second Conquest of Earth,” L.J. Daly; Terry Bisson, “Meat”

T 3/8--“Race and Ethnicity in Science Fiction,” 253; “Way Into the Middle of the Air” Ray Bradbury; “The Comet,” W.E.B. DuBois

R 3/10—“African Sunrise,” Nnedi Okorafor

Suggested Reading: “The Occidental Bride,” Benjanun Sriduangkaew

Spring Break

T 3/22—“Gender in Science Fiction,” 241; “No Woman Born” C.L. Moore

R 3/24—“Each to Each,” Seanan McGuire; “Precious Meat” by Catherine S. Purdue

Suggested Reading: “Die, Sophie, Die” by Susan Jane Bigelow

Utopias and Dystopias

T 3/29—“Utopias and anti-utopias,” 219; “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,”
LeGuin

R 3/31— “Harrison Bergeron” Kurt Vonnegut; “Driftglass” Samuel R. Delany
Suggested Reading: “The Weapons Shop,” A.E. VanVogt

T 4/5—“Repent, Harlequin! Said the Ticktockman” by Harlan Ellison

R 4/7—“Politics and Science Fiction,” 230; “The Gernsback Continuum” William
Gibson

Suggested Viewing: “High Ground,” *Star Trek: TNG*

T 4/12— “Jigsaw Man,” Larry Niven; “Jack,” China Mieville

R 4/14—“Folding Beijing,” Hao Jingfang

Suggested Reading: “Special Economics,” Maureen F. McHugh

The Post-Human

T 4/19—“Robbie” Isaac Asimov; “The Algorithms for Love” Ken Liu

R 4/21—“The New Boyfriend,” Kelly Link; “Here is my Thinking on a Situation that
Affects Us All,” Rahul Kanakia

Suggested Reading: “There Will Come Soft Rains” Ray Bradbury

T 4/26—“Science fiction and the life sciences,” 174; “When It Changed,” Joanna Russ;

R 4/28— “Bloodchild” Octavia Butler

Suggested Reading: “Flowers for Algernon,” Daniel Keyes

T 5/3—“The Meeker and the All-Seeing Eye,” Matthew Kressel

R 5/5— “Secondhand Bodies,” JY Yang; “Forestspirit, Forestspirit,” Bogi Takács