

Fall 2013
ENGLISH 4710-102 / 5710-102
STUDIES IN GENRE

Thematic Title: *21st Century Science Fiction*
TTh 2:00-3:15 PM
Cudahy Hall 120

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Office Hours: MW 11:00 AM-1:00 PM or by appointment

This course will consider science fiction film, television, prose, and graphic narrative of the last decade. How have the creators of various science fictions commented on such contemporary crises as climate change, the financial collapse, undocumented immigration, 9/11, and the Iraq War? What is the role of science fiction in articulating these debates? What is the relationship between science fiction, politics, and culture in the contemporary moment? William Gibson has noted that “the sort of thing we used to think in science fiction has colonized the rest of our reality”; our task will be to investigate how and why we read science fiction in an era when, in the words of Kim Stanley Robinson, “we are now living in a science fiction novel that we are all writing together.”

LEARNING GOALS

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and understand various formal characteristics of contemporary science fiction;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which various works of science fiction have been produced;
- Apply techniques of critical analysis as appropriate to diverse literary forms, genres, and media;
- Use literary study to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
- Read and discuss science fiction on the levels of both form and content.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Ted Chiang, *Stories of Your Life and Others* (ISBN 978-1931520720)
China Miéville, *The City and the City* (ISBN 978-0345497529)
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (ISBN 978-0385721676)
Octavia Butler, *Fledgling* (ISBN 978-0446696166)

Additional readings and course materials will occasionally be made available via ARES and D2L. Evening film screenings will be available for students who would prefer to watch the films in a group setting.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation	25%
D2L Forum Posts	15%
First Paper (4-6 pages)	20%
Second Paper (4-6 pages)	20%
Final Paper (6-8 pages)	20%

Detailed descriptions of the three papers will be distributed in class well in advance of the due dates.

GRADING

Grades will follow the following rubric:

* To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A C essay may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or analysis of its sources. C essays are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.

* To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A B essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B essays are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.

* To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

* A **D** means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.

* **AB, BC, and CD** grades fall squarely in the gaps between the above categories.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Written work must be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-firstpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even D2L forum posts. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

Please give each piece of writing an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page. Insert page numbers if your work spans more than one page.

All sources relied upon for the writing of your paper, including the primary text, must be appropriately cited.

PAPER SUBMISSION

All written work should be submitted via D2L's Dropbox by class time on the due date. **Late papers will be penalized a full grade for each day that it is late; late final papers will not be accepted at all.** Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar. It is important that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it. **Consequently, attendance in this class is mandatory.** You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

You are allowed **three absences** over the course of the fall semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the seventh unexcused absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

Merely being present in class is insufficient to earn an “A” for class participation. Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

DISCUSSION INAUGURATOR

Beginning with *Superman: Red Son*, each member of the class will have one day in which they are expected to inaugurate our discussion. The requirements for this are necessarily very loose, as each day of the course will have a very different type of text to be discussed; in general, however, the discussion inaugurator will be asked to (1) articulate a brief response to the material and (2) direct our collective attention to one or two problems in, questions about, or particularly important moments from the reading for that day.

A signup sheet for this role will be distributed in class.

D2L FORUMS

This course will make extensive use of the D2L forums at <http://d2l.mu.edu/>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, D2L also features an online forum where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The D2L discussion forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. I will be reading the discussion forum regularly and I recommend you do the same. I encourage you to think of your D2L posts as “seeds” for the longer papers; feel free to begin to develop your thoughts there. You may choose either to begin a discussion thread on a new topic or to respond to a post composed by one of your classmates.

Before class *this* Thursday, every student is required to upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile.

Before class *next* Thursday, every student is required to have written a post responding to Chiang, Roberts, *Avatar*, and/or another text that we have discussed.

After that, students must write **four short posts** responding to **any four** texts across the remainder of the course. These posts should be completed either by noon before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by the noon before the following class.

Additional posts beyond the requirement, and posts that respond substantively to other students' arguments, will be looked upon very favorably when I calculate your final grade.

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L and CheckMarq send their emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts, for notetaking, and for in-class research. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. No use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please set your phones to silent and put them out of sight.

CONFERENCES

All students are required to meet with me in a short one-on-one conference at my office at least once during the semester to discuss the course and your work within it. Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss either graded work or work-in-progress in excess of this requirement as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly office hours, or see or email me to set up an appointment.

WRITING CENTER

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, located in Raynor Library Room 240, at any stage of the writing process. Please visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.marquette.edu/english/writingcenter/> to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

People enrolled in the graduate-level version of this course will have different requirements. Please see me privately to discuss assignments that will best support your course of study.

FLEXIBILITY

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who believe they will require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met. Per university policy, you are required to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services. If you are unsure of what you need to do to qualify for services, you can begin by

visiting the Office of Disability Services in Marquette Hall, Lower Level, Room 05, or by visiting their website at <http://www.marquette.edu/disability-services.index.shtml>.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Full details of Marquette’s academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#academichonestypolicy>.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

Tuesday, August 27	INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS
Thursday, August 29	Ted Chiang, “Liking What You See: A Documentary”
Tuesday, September 3	Defining SF: Space Empire Adam Roberts, “Defining SF” [D2L] in class: <i>Star Trek</i> , <i>Firefly</i> , <i>Battlestar Galactica</i>
Thursday, September 5	Case Study: Avatar Annalee Newitz, “When Will White People Stop Making Movies Like <i>Avatar</i> ?” [web]; Slavoj Žižek, “Return of the Natives” [web]

Tuesday, September 10	Superheroes <i>The Dark Knight Rises, The Avengers, X-Men, Man of Steel, etc.</i> Spencer Ackerman, “Iron Man vs. the Imperialists” [web]
Thursday, September 12	Superman, <i>Red Son</i> (first half)
Tuesday, September 17	Superman, <i>Red Son</i> (second half)
Thursday, September 19	Guest Lecturer: Tanya Cochran on Fan Culture
Tuesday, September 24	Language and Thought Ted Chiang, “Understand”
Thursday, September 26	Ted Chiang, “Story of Your Life”
Tuesday, October 1	Cognitive Estrangement China Miéville, <i>The City and the City</i> , Part One (first half)
	FIRST PAPER DUE
Thursday, October 3	<i>The City and the City</i> , Part One (second half)
Tuesday, October 8	<i>The City and the City</i> , Part Two (first half)
Thursday, October 10	<i>The City and the City</i> , Part Two (second half)
Tuesday, October 15	<i>The City and the City</i> , Part Three
Thursday, October 17	FALL BREAK—NO CLASS
Tuesday, October 22	Science Fiction and Ecology Margaret Atwood, <i>Oryx and Crake</i> , chapters 1-4
Thursday, October 24	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> , chapters 4-8
Tuesday, October 29	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> , chapters 9-11
Thursday, October 31	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> (whole book)
Tuesday, November 5	Science Fiction and Religion Ted Chiang, “Hell Is the Absence of God”
Thursday, November 7	Afrofuturism Mark Bould, “The Ships Landed Long Ago” [D2L] Wanuri Kahiu, “Pumzi”, <i>District 9</i>
	SECOND PAPER DUE
Tuesday, November 12	Mutants and Monsters Octavia Butler, <i>Fledgling</i> , chapters 1-8
Thursday, November 14	<i>Fledgling</i> , chapters 9-15 LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW
Tuesday, November 19	<i>Fledgling</i> , chapters 16-23
Thursday, November 21	<i>Fledgling</i> (whole book)

Tuesday, November 26	<i>THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS</i>
Thursday, November 28	<i>THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS</i>
Tuesday, December 3	<p style="text-align: center;">The Singularity Ray Kurzweil, <i>Transcendental Man</i> (clips) Joss Whedon, <i>Dollhouse</i> (clips) Nalo Hopkinson, “A Habit of Waste” [D2L]</p>
Thursday, December 5	<p style="text-align: center;">No Future <i>The Hunger Games</i>, <i>The Walking Dead</i>, <i>The Road</i>, etc. <i>The Walking Dead</i>, Episode 1 (Telltale Games)</p>
Wednesday, December 11	FINAL PAPERS DUE VIA DIGITAL DROPBOX BY 10 AM