

LIT 145S / ENVIRON 181S (Spring 2012)
TR 2:50 PM—4:05 PM
Location: Bivins 109

Instructor: Gerry Canavan
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Office Hours: by appointment

SCIENCE FICTION AND ECOLOGY

This course pairs thinkers and theorists in the ecological humanities with science fiction texts from the 1970s, 1980s, and today. After several early weeks establishing a shared foundation of critical reference points, we focus on five primary texts for the remainder of the semester: John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), Alan Moore's seminal graphic novel *Swamp Thing* (1982-1987), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Wind-Up Girl* (2009), with additional attention paid to other films, short stories, scientific readings, and theoretical texts as appropriate. Implicit in the organization of the course is a comparison between the environmental politics of the 1970s and the contemporary situation, as well as new consideration of what the "science" of "science fiction" might entail for the twenty-first century.

These novels are interspersed with films, short stories, scientific readings, and theoretical texts that include readings from contemporary ecological and ecocritical writers like John Bellamy Foster, Vandana Shiva, Imre Szeman, and Ursula Heise. We will also consider more skeptical work from authors like Freeman Dyson, *The Skeptical Environmentalist* author Bjørn Lomborg, and *Freakonomics* authors Stephen Dubner and Steven Levitt, as well as evaluate environmental denialism on the Internet and in popular media.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

- Identify and understand various formal characteristics of science fiction
- Apply techniques of critical analysis to science fiction literature and film
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural, historical, political, and ecological contexts in which contemporary science fiction has been produced
- Articulate the relationships between ecological science, environmental politics, and popular cultural production, especially science fiction
- 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 (available at the Regulator Bookshop on Ninth Street)

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (ISBN: 0618249060)
John Brunner, *The Sheep Look Up* (ISBN: 978-1932100013)
Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia* (ISBN: 978-0960432011)
Alan Moore, *Swamp Thing, Vol. 1* (ISBN: 978149122982)
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (ISBN: 978-0385721677)
Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Wind-Up Girl* (ISBN: 978-1597801584)

Additional course materials are available online at blackboard.duke.edu.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- short *weekly* responses (**due by 2 PM** on *either* Tuesday or Thursday) (recommended length: ½ -1 page)
- two longer responses on *The Sheep Look Up* and *Avatar* (recommended length: 2-3 pages)
- one mid-length paper (6-8 pages)
- one five-to-ten-minute in-class presentation, outlining the main claims of your final paper
- one 8-10 page final paper on a topic approved in advance
- class participation

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.

Your final grade in the course will be determined as follows:

20% First Paper

40% Final Paper

15% *Sheep Look Up* and *Avatar* responses

10% Presentation of Research

15% Class Participation, Daily Blackboard Responses, and Attendance

Detailed descriptions of all assignments will be distributed in class in advance of the due date.

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. I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even Blackboard 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 written work should be submitted via Blackboard's Digital Dropbox **by 12:00 PM the day it is due**. Late work will be penalized a half-grade if it is in by class time and a full grade thereafter. Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

ATTENDANCE

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.

Attendance in this class is mandatory. You should plan on attending every class. **You are allowed three unexcused absences over the course of the spring semester. After that, your class participation will drop by a third for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the sixth unexcused absence, you will receive a failing grade for the course.

Missing a scheduled conference with me will count as one absence. Excessive tardiness, or coming to class unprepared, will also count as absences.

Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss class.

BLACKBOARD

This course will make extensive use of the Blackboard site at <http://blackboard.duke.edu>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, Blackboard also features an online forum where we can continue our discussion after class is over.

The Blackboard discussion forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by regular class discussion to share their opinions with the class. I will be reading the discussion forum regularly and I recommend you do the same. **You should write a short post—a five-sentence paragraph is fine—about one of the current discussion topics in the appropriate forum by 12 PM at least once a week.** (Additional posts, and posts that respond to other students' arguments, will be looked upon very favorably when I calculate your final grade.)

CONFERENCES

We will have a short in-person conference mid-semester to discuss your plans for your final research paper. Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss either graded work or work in progress at any other time. See or email me to set up an appointment.

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their Duke email account at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops is permitted. However, students *must* refrain from non-class computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, and so on. I reserve the right to ban individual laptops if this becomes a problem.

HONOR CODE

Students are expected to abide by the terms of the student code of academic conduct, available in your undergraduate bulletin or online at <http://www.integrity.duke.edu>. 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.**

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with learning or other disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class should visit <http://www.aas.duke.edu/trinity/t-reqs/ld.html> to learn about Duke's policies concerning academic accommodations. If you anticipate a need for accommodations due to disability, please contact me as early in the semester as possible. All communication about disabilities will be kept confidential.

WRITING STUDIO

All students in this course are strongly encouraged to visit the Writing Studio, with locations at Perkins, Lilly, and the Art Building on East Campus, at any stage of the writing process. You may also make use of the Writing Studio's e-tutor program. Please visit the Writing Studio's website at <http://uwp.duke.edu/wstudio/> to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

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.

Texts marked “in class” will be introduced or shown in class; all other texts should be read before class. Blackboard responses may respond to either type of text.

DATE	ASSIGNMENTS AND RESPONSES DUE BY 2 PM
R JAN 12	<p>FIRST DAY OF CLASS Charles Stross, “Designing Society for Posterity” (Web)</p>
T JAN 17	CLASS CANCELLED
R JAN 19	<p>Cognitive Mapping Ursula Heise, “From the Blue Planet to Google Earth: Environmentalism, Ecocriticism, and the Imagination of the Global” (Bb) in-class: Fredric Jameson on cognitive mapping (Bb) in-class: Darko Suvin on cognitive estrangement (Bb) in-class: <i>WALL-E</i> (clips); <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> (clips)</p>
T JAN 24	<p>The Birth of Environmentalism Rachel Carson, <i>Silent Spring</i> (excerpts) John Bellamy Foster, “Rachel Carson’s Ecological Critique” (Bb) Club of Rome, “The Limits to Growth” (excerpt) (Bb) in-class: <i>Soylent Green</i> (clips)</p>
R JAN 26	<p>Futures and Anti-Futures: Ecology and Environmentalism Today Johan Rockstrom et. al, “Planetary Boundaries” (Bb) Imre Szeman, “System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster” (Bb) Naomi Klein, “Climate Rage” (Web) in-class: <i>Daybreakers</i> (clips)</p>
T JAN 31	<p>Eco-Apocalypse and the End of the World John Brunner, <i>The Sheep Look Up</i> (December, January, February, March)</p>
R FEB 2	John Brunner, <i>The Sheep Look Up</i> (April, May, June, July)
T FEB 7	CONFERENCES—NO CLASS
R FEB 9	<p>John Brunner, <i>The Sheep Look Up</i> (August, September, October, November, Next Year) SHEEP LOOK UP RESPONSE DUE</p>
T FEB 14	<p>Skepticism and/or Denialism Stephen Levitt and Stephen Dunbar, <i>Superfreakonomics</i>: “What Do Al Gore and Mount Pinatubo Have In Common?” Tim Lambert, “Why Everything in <i>Superfreakonomics</i> about Global Warming Is Wrong” Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, <i>Merchants of Doubt</i> (excerpts) SHEEP LOOK UP RESPONSE DUE</p>

R FEB 16	Utopia Fredric Jameson on utopia (Bb) James Tiptree, Jr., “Houston, Houston, Do You Read?” (Bb) in-class: <i>WALL-E</i> (clips)
T FEB 21	Ernest Callenbach, <i>Ecotopia</i> (p. 1-90)
R FEB 23	Ernest Callenbach, <i>Ecotopia</i> (p. 91-181)
T FEB 28	Deep Ecology Bron Taylor, “Deep Ecology” Alan Moore, <i>Swamp Thing</i> (selections) in-class: “Plastic Bag”
R MAR 1	Alan Moore, <i>Swamp Thing</i> (selections) Evan Calder Williams, “Fecund Revenge: Green Geist Screws Us All” (Web) FIRST PAPER DUE
T MAR 6	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS
R MAR 8	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS
T MAR 13	Margaret Atwood, <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (Chapter 1-4) ½ PAGE “PITCH” FOR FINAL PROJECT DUE
R MAR 15	Margaret Atwood, <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (Chapter 4-8)
T MAR 20	Margaret Atwood, <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (Chapter 9-11)
R MAR 22	Margaret Atwood, <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (Chapter 12-end of book)
M MAR 26	AVATAR SCREENING—TIME AND LOCATION TBA NO CLASS
T MAR 27	Avatar and Others Annalee Newitz, “When Will White People Stop Making Movies Like <i>Avatar</i> ?” (Web) Slavoj Žižek, “Return of the Natives” (Web) AVATAR RESPONSE DUE
R MAR 29	Globalization and Environmental Justice Paolo Bacigalupi, <i>The Wind-Up Girl</i> (Chapter 1-3) Vandana Shiva, <i>Soil Not Oil!</i> (excerpts) in-class: Jorge Furtado, “Ilha das Flores”; Wanuri Kahiu, “Pumzi”
T APR 3	Paolo Bacigalupi, <i>The Wind-Up Girl</i> (Chapter 4-12)
R APR 5	Paolo Bacigalupi, <i>The Wind-Up Girl</i> (Chapter 13-20)
T APR 10	Paolo Bacigalupi, <i>The Wind-Up Girl</i> (Chapter 21-40)
R APR 12	Paolo Bacigalupi, <i>The Wind-Up Girl</i> (Chapter 41-end of book)
T APR 17	FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS (DAY 1)

R APR 19	FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS (DAY 2)
T APR 24	LAST DAY OF CLASS FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS (DAY 3) FINAL THOUGHTS
M APR 30	SCHEDULED EXAM PERIOD (7-10 PM)
T MAY 1	FINAL PROJECTS DUE VIA DIGITAL DROPBOX BY <u>8 AM</u>