

Summer 2015
ENGLISH 2010-701

Thematic Title: *Science Fiction and Genre*
MW 5:30-9:00 PM
David Straz Hall 575

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Office Hours: before or after class, or by appointment

What is a “genre”? How does the idea of genre impact the way we read and understand literary texts? In this course we will explore these questions by studying the development of the science fiction genre in the twentieth century. What defines science fiction? What makes science fiction different from other sorts of fictions, or other types of texts? Does the name “science fiction” designate a certain set of intellectual concerns, a certain set of narrative and visual clichés, even perhaps a certain type of reader? Is it all just a marketing strategy? What makes one text “science fiction,” another text “literary fiction,” and still other texts “fantasy,” “horror,” or “fairy tale”? Does science fiction imply a certain type of politics, or a particular sort of ethics? Can it teach us anything? Is it good for us or bad for us? We will draw from a wide variety of short stories, comics, novels, games, television series, and films as our archive as we seek to understand how science fiction has adapted and thrived as a genre, even as the “real world” itself becomes more and more indistinguishable from science fiction with each passing year.

LEARNING GOALS

Upon completing English core studies in literature, Marquette University students will be able to:

- Produce oral and written assessments of literary and cultural texts and / or performances using the language and concepts of one of these two knowledge area disciplines.
- Articulate how literary and cultural texts and/or performances can transform one's understanding of self, others, and communities.
- Apply the methodologies of literary criticism to representative works of literature.

In addition, upon completion of this particular course, students will be able to:

- Identify and understand various formal characteristics of the science fiction genre;
- 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

All texts are available at the BookMarq bookshop on 16th Street, though you are not required to purchase them there.

Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Lucky Strike*

Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*

Octavia Butler, *Dawn*

Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore's *The Walking Dead* vols. I & II

Additional readings and course materials will occasionally be made available via ARES and D2L, or during class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Class Participation: 30%

Weekly D2L Posts: 20%

Discussion Inaugurator Day: 10%

Take-Home Midterm: 20%

Take-Home Final: 20%

Additional details on all assignments will be distributed in class well in advance of the due date.

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

Your take-home exams should 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 and the assignment* in it, for example, yourlastname-firstpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work. 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.

EXAM SUBMISSION

Your exams 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; due to university policy late final papers will not be accepted at all.** Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

Your other written work (which will primarily take the form of discussion forum posts) will be posted on the D2L forums. These mini-papers will have **flexible due dates** driven by your own interests and responses. **It is thus your responsibility to make sure you are properly keeping up with this portion of the course.**

Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often; save backup copies of essential documents, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is therefore crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

Consequently, attendance in this class is absolutely 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 **two absences** over the course of the summer semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by a letter grade for each additional absence.** Upon the fifth absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

Merely being present 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

Each member of the class will have one day in which they are expected to inaugurate our discussion by articulating a detailed, five-to-ten minute response to the day's reading. 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 thoughtful and critical response to some aspect of 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 will be distributed in class.

D2L FORUMS

This course will also 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. 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 next Monday, every student is required to take the following actions:

- * **upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile**
- * **write a short, two-page response to either *Avatar*, the critical pieces about *Avatar*, or Kim Stanley Robinson's short story “The Lucky Strike”**

After that, students must write **at least one two-page post per week** 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 sends its emails to—at least once the afternoon before a scheduled class meeting, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. 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 turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

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.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF SUMMER SCHOOL

College courses that take place during the summer session are, by their nature, quite different from classes that take place during the fall or spring semesters. That situation is compounded, in our case, by the fact that ours is a night class that meets for several hours at a time only twice a week.

I have endeavored as best I can to schedule the course so that the readings will not be onerous; we will use in-class readings, as well as film and television screenings, to supplement the material you read at home. (I have also attempted to select material that I hope will be interesting and engaging, so that it never *feels* onerous.) I have also—as a pedagogical experiment—eliminated long papers in this class in favor of extended, two-page-minimum D2L forum posts, daily in-class presentations, and two take-home examinations. In doing all this I am trying to be realistic about what is possible for us to achieve together within a six-week summer course, and to develop the richest intellectual experience possible within those constraints.

Despite all of the above, however, I must stress that this course is still *serious business*: it is meant to be the equivalent of the fall or spring fifteen-week course. The fact that the course has been paced for summer should *not* be mistaken for an excuse for you to blow this class off or fail to take it seriously. I hope, instead, that you will embrace the unique opportunity this course's unusual pacing offers for intense scholarly engagement with your peers. What will make this class both most fun and most useful to you as emerging scholars is a collective commitment to diving into this experience and getting the most that we can get out of it, together.

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.

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| M | June 29 | INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE <i>in class:</i> Ted Chiang, “Liking What You See: A Documentary” [D2L] <i>in class:</i> excerpts from <i>Star Trek</i> , <i>Star Wars</i> , <i>Firefly</i> , <i>Battlestar Galactica</i> (2000s), <i>Interstellar</i> , <i>Mass Effect</i> , etc. |
| W | July 1 | <i>in class:</i> film, <i>Avatar</i> (2009) |
| M | July 6 | <i>Avatar</i> discussion continues: Annalee Newitz, “When Will White People Stop Making Movies Like <i>Avatar</i> ?” [web]; Slavoj Žižek, “Return of the Natives” [web] Kim Stanley Robinson, “The Lucky Strike” <i>in class:</i> Kim Stanley Robinson, “A Sensitive Dependence on Internal Conditions” |
| W | July 8 | Kurt Vonnegut, <i>Slaughterhouse Five</i> (chapters 1-3) |
| M | July 13 | Kurt Vonnegut, <i>Slaughterhouse Five</i> (chapters 4-6) |
| W | July 15 | Kurt Vonnegut, <i>Slaughterhouse Five</i> (whole book) |
| M | July 20 | TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE TO D2L BY 5:30 PM James Tiptree, Jr., “Houston, Houston, Do You Read?” [D2L] <i>in class:</i> Ursula K. Le Guin: “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” [D2L] <i>in class:</i> film, “The Space Traders” (1994) |
| W | July 22 | Mark Bould, “The Ships Landed Long Ago” [D2L] Samuel R. Delany, “The Star Pit” [D2L] <i>in class:</i> TV, <i>Star Trek: Deep Space 9</i> : “Far Beyond the Stars” (1998) |
| M | July 27 | Octavia E. Butler, <i>Dawn</i> (parts one and two) |
| W | July 29 | Octavia E. Butler, <i>Dawn</i> (part three) |
| M | August 3 | Octavia E. Butler, <i>Dawn</i> (whole book) <i>in class:</i> excerpt from Octavia E. Butler, <i>Adulthood Rites</i> [D2L] |
| W | August 5 | Robert Kirkman, <i>The Walking Dead</i> , Volumes 1 & 2 <i>in class:</i> zombie film and television, zombie games LAST DAY OF CLASS |
| M | August 10 | TAKE HOME FINAL DUE TO D2L BY 12:00 PM |

Additional Reading

Students interested in diving deeper into genre study about science fiction might be interested in some of the following texts as starting points:

Single-Author Monographs

Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*

Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*

Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*

Samuel Delany, *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*

Adam Roberts, *History of Science Fiction and Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom*

Sherryl Vint, *Science Fiction: A Guide for the Perplexed and Bodies of Tomorrow*

Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*

Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*

John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*

Edited Collections and Anthologies:

Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction

Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction

Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction

The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction

The Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction

The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction

The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction

Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader

The Science Fiction Film Reader

Speculations on Speculation

Academic Journals

Science Fiction Studies

Science Fiction Film and Television

Extrapolation

Foundation

The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts

Utopian Studies

FemSpec

Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology

Blogs

io9.com

Blastr.com

Tor.com

SF Signal

The New Inquiry

Jacobin

The Los Angeles Review of Books