ENGL 208B: SCIENCE FICTION

If poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world, science-fiction writers are its court jesters. We are Wise Fools who can leap, caper, utter prophecies, and scratch ourselves in public. We can play with Big Ideas because the garish motley of our pulp origins makes us seem harmless. (Bruce Sterling, preface, *Burning Chrome*, by William Gibson [New York: Ace, 1987] ix)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will examine works that generally fall under the generic heading “Science Fiction.” Paying some attention to the historical development of the genre and its many sub-genres, we will explore some of the following questions: what is science fiction? what differentiates SF from other works that generally fall into the category of “the fantastic” (as works of SF often do)? what differentiates SF from other works that deal with similar issues? what can SF “do” that works in other genres cannot? what are the limitations of SF? how can we study SF critically while recognizing its “pulp” and popular origins? why is it important to study SF critically? is it important at all? The class will conducted as a seminar, with the occasional short lecture to introduce key topics, and all students are expected to attend regularly and to contribute to the ongoing class discussion.

REQUIRED TEXTS


RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Aaron, Jane and Murray McArthur, eds. *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*. First Canadian ed. Don Mills: Addison-Wesley, 1997. (All proceeds from the sale of this text will go into the Department of English Scholarship Fund.)
ASSIGNMENTS

Short Essay (1000; approximately 4 typed, double-spaced pages): 25%
**DUE: Beginning of class Week Five (February 2)**

Research Essay (2000 words; approximately 8 typed, double-spaced pages): 45%
**DUE: Beginning of Class Week Eleven (March 22)**

Final Examination (3 hours): 30%
**Time and place to be scheduled by the University.**

i) Short Essay (Due at the beginning of class Week Five--February 2)
You will be asked to write an essay of approximately 1000 words, or about four (4) double-spaced and word-processed or typed pages. I will provide a selection of suggested essay topics at the beginning of class the second week; included in the "suggestions" will be the option to design, in consultation with me, an essay topic of your own. For the most part, you will be asked to examine one or more of the short stories we have read (or will be reading), and you will be asked to discuss the story (or stories) in relation to one of the course's major themes: for example, SF as social or political commentary, as "popular" fiction, as "experimental" fiction, and so on (see, for example, the list of questions in the course description above). In all cases, you are expected to make an argument: a university-level English essay demands that you take a position, articulate a clear thesis, and defend that thesis using carefully chosen textual evidence discussed in detail. While this is not explicitly designated as a research essay, in almost all cases some research will be necessary; I will discuss this and other aspects of the assignment in more detail when I hand out suggested topics. This assignment is worth twenty-five percent (25%) of your final grade. All essays must conform to MLA guidelines; please ask me if you are unsure how to use MLA properly. All essays not conforming to MLA guidelines or written on a topic not approved by the instructor will automatically be docked 10%.

ii) Research Essay (Due at the beginning of class Week Eleven--March 22)
You will be asked to write a research essay of approximately 2000 words, or about eight (8) double-spaced and word-processed or typed pages. I will provide a selection of suggested essay topics at the beginning of class the fifth week; included in the "suggestions" will be the option to design, in consultation with me, an essay topic of your own. For the most part, you will be asked to examine some aspect one of the novels we have read for the course. In all cases, you are expected to make an argument, to take a position, articulate a clear and explicit thesis, and to defend that thesis using carefully chosen textual evidence discussed in adequate detail. Research will, of course, be a critical component of this essay, and you will be expected to cite a minimum of two (2) secondary sources (but no more than five [5]--I will explain in greater detail when I hand out suggested topics). Remember that material from secondary or critical sources must be handled with the same care and attention as material from primary sources (again, we will discuss this is more detail when I hand out suggested topics). This assignment is worth forty-five percent (45%) of your final grade. All essays must conform to MLA guidelines; please ask me if you are
unsure how to use MLA properly. All essays not conforming to MLA guidelines or written on a topic not approved by the instructor will automatically be docked 10%.

iii) Final Examination
The examination format will be roughly as follows: Part A will ask you to identify (by text, author, and speaker) and discuss key passages from some of the texts we read for class; Part B will ask you to write two brief essays. The examination will be worth thirty percent (30%) of your final grade, will last for three (3) hours, and will take place during the examination period at a time and place to be determined by the University.

iv) A Short Note on Class Policies Regarding Assignments
All assignments are to be handed in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. The late penalty is 5% per day; Saturday and Sunday each count as one day (for example, if an assignment is due on Wednesday, and I get it on the next Monday, it will automatically be docked 20%). No extensions will be granted the day of or after assignments are due: all extensions must be requested and approved before the due date. The instructor reserves the right to request appropriate documentation (for example, a doctor’s note) if a student asks for an extension. Furthermore, the instructor reserves the right to meet with students before papers are returned. Please be aware that plagiarism is a serious academic offense; all cases of plagiarism will be penalized to the fullest extent allowed by the University (please see attached sheet for a fuller description of University Policy regarding plagiarism).

CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

Please note that students are expected to have read the material BEFORE the class in which we will be discussing it. Lectures, discussions, and questions will assume familiarity with the entirety of all the texts to be discussed during that class. Therefore, while it is not required, students are strongly urged to read ahead to avoid falling behind. All titles in quotation marks can be found in our anthology.

Week One (January 5): Welcome and Introduction
Shippey, “Introduction.”

Week Two (January 12): Amazing Stories

Week Three (January 19): Utopias and Dystopias
Zamyatin, We.

Week Four (January 26): Possible Histories, Alternate Futures
Week Five (February 2): Alien Mine
Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Week Six (February 9): “More Human Than Human”

Week Seven (February 16): Spectacular SF
*Blade Runner* (film; place TBA)

Week Eight (March 1): God in the Machine
Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

Week Nine (March 8): The Measure of (Hu)man

Week Ten (March 15): Cyberspaces
Gibson, *Neuromancer*.

Week Eleven (March 22): Societal Visions, Visionary Societies

Week Twelve (March 29): Apocalypse Now
ESSAY WRITING TIPS

Most good essays are not written but re-written. Even if you have thought carefully about your topic, worked out a good thesis statement, and developed your argument as forcefully as possible, consider your first version a rough draft. When the heat of inspiration has cooled, revise your essay at least twice: once for organization (i.e., concept and subject matter), and once for style and grammar. Listed below are a series of questions. After proof-reading your essay, you should be able to answer all of these questions with a "yes."

I. ORGANIZATION

1. Title:
   a) Does the title express the theme of the essay?

2. Introduction:
   a) Is the thesis statement clearly stated?
   b) Does the introduction include all of the ideas which will be discussed in the essay and suggest the order in which those ideas will appear?

3. Body of the Essay:
   a) Does each paragraph include a topic sentence which is clearly related to a point in the introduction?
   b) Does each paragraph include reasons to support the topic sentence, or details and examples to clarify it?
   c) Is each paragraph unified (every sentence dealing with the main topic of the paragraph) and coherent (with clear logical relation between sentences)?
   d) Are the examples discussed in terms of their significance in relation to the thesis?
   e) Is the discussion of examples detailed enough to enter into the finer points of the text?
   f) Does each paragraph confine itself to the main topic of the essay?
   g) Do the paragraphs follow one another logically, in the order suggested by the introduction?
   h) Are there effective transitions from paragraph to paragraph?
   i) Have you avoided jumps in logic by including all of the steps of your argument?

4. Conclusion:
   a) Does the conclusion sum up the evidence presented in the body of the essay and show its relationship to the thesis statement?
   b) Does the conclusion suggest the significance of the relationship between the thesis and the examples discussed?
   c) Does the conclusion avoid the introduction of new evidence or new ideas?
II. STYLE AND GRAMMAR

1. Point of View:
   a) Are you writing to an audience of peers?
   b) Is the essay written in the present tense?

2. Language:
   a) Is the tone appropriate and consistent, neither slangy nor pompous?
   b) Does the sentence structure vary to indicate shifts in emphasis and movement from point to point?
   c) Have you eliminated all unnecessary words?
   d) Have you avoided ambiguous terms such as "these," "those," and "it," and, instead, used specific terms?
   e) Have you avoided the use of qualifiers such as "very," "extremely," "best," "excellent," and so on?
   f) Upon reading your own essay, can you honestly say that it makes sense?

3. Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation:
   a) Have you avoided sentence fragments and run-on sentences?
   b) Are pronoun references clear?
   c) Have you checked for spelling?
   d) Is the punctuation correct?

4. Mechanics and Citation:
   a) Have you correctly numbered all pages?
   b) Have you remembered to document carefully all primary and secondary sources?
   c) Have you remembered to include a list of works cited?
   d) Have you used one style of documentation (MLA, APA, Chicago Style, etc.) consistently and correctly?
   e) Have you included your name, the course number, the instructor's name, and the date?
### Sequence of Items in a Bibliographic Reference

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<td>Author</td>
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<td>Translator.</td>
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**Example:**


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**Note:** the indentation and punctuation pattern and the order of information for the Kafka entry above should be employed for a Works Cited list, while the indentation and punctuation pattern and the order of information for the Gibaldi citation should be employed in endnotes. Check with your instructor about whether Endnotes or a Works Cited list is preferred. Note also that book titles may be underlined or italicized, as in the two examples above.