

Social Science Fiction

In the United States, science fiction owes its genesis to a commercial enterprise, since the first writer/publisher of “scientifiction” stories uses them as a way to add interest to his electronics catalogs. Thus, this course will avoid literary efforts and deal with science fiction as a manifestation of mass culture.

This does not make the genre less significant, however. The magazine science fiction of the 1930s forms a basis for scientists to debate issues of technology policy and scientific innovation. It quickly is pressed into service after the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima to provide a moral education for engineers and scientists in the 1940s and 1950s, yet subsequently is deployed during the Cold War as a means of promoting American values. It meets its end in the 1960s when it becomes an emblem of technocratic social policy, just as it is finding a place in universities. Its lasting legacy is the debate it inspires among audience members.

To study these important milestones, we will read representative authors from the canon of what Isaac Asimov calls “social science fiction,” including short fiction, essays and novels by Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, and Marge Piercy, considering whether the literary design of the genre supports the claims its practitioners make. We will also read excerpts of relevant critical theory that helps us to deepen our understanding of the genre.

Class time will be devoted to lectures about and discussion of the reading assignments. There is a lot of reading for this course, but it is relatively simple and enjoyable if you are a fan of the genre. I will gauge how well you are keeping up with the reading and lectures by means of regular quizzes. During the semester you will also write three papers of at least 1,200 words: an analysis paper, a short story, and an argumentative paper. You will revise one of these into a paper of about 4,000 words. Accordingly, some lectures will cover writing about literature.

Course Grade

Quizzes and spot checks	20% (total)
Three papers	60% (20% each)
Revised paper	20%

Missed quizzes and late papers earn a grade of zero.

Required Texts

We will read the following books. The remaining assignments are excerpts or short stories. Please bring the reading assignment to class with you; I will conduct graded spot checks.

- Asimov, Isaac. The Naked Sun. Spectra (1991). ISBN-13: 978-0553293395.
- Heinlein, Robert. Space Cadet. Orb Books (2006). ISBN-13: 978-0765314512.
- Herbert, Frank. Dune. Ace Trade (2005). ISBN-13: 978-0441013593.
- Hubbard, L. Ron. Final Blackout. Bridge (1996). ISBN-13: 978-1592120550.
- Piercy, Marge. Woman at the Edge of Time. Fawcett (1985). ISBN-13: 978-0449210826.

Course Standards

In order for this classroom community to function, all members must adhere to these rules:

- Attendance – On-time attendance is a strict requirement of the course. Students with more than two absences automatically fail. There is no such thing as “excused absences” and doctor’s notes are not necessary. Students who miss less than 20 minutes of class (arrive late, take a break, or leave early) are recorded as late, the equivalent of one-third of an absence. Missing more than 20 minutes counts as an absence.
- Decorum – Please limit your comments and questions to the material at hand, helping to progress the discussion without distracting the class from it. You should not hold side conversations. All electronic devices must be turned off (silenced is not sufficient); this includes phones, pagers, games, laptops, handhelds, players or recorders. You must pay attention; eating and sleeping are not permitted. Visitors need advance approval.
- Honesty – Cheating and plagiarism are not tolerated and may result in punishment that includes failure of the course. By handing in assignments, quizzes, or exams, you attest that they are your own original work. You may not use notes or other materials during quizzes or exams. Please be advised that a person who allows someone to cheat (by allowing someone to see a test paper or communicating test questions, for instance) is just as guilty as the person who does the cheating and will be equally punished.

- Originality – By handing in work for this class (assignments, quizzes, exams, or other projects) you attest that they are your own original effort. The work you hand in must never have been handed in to fulfill the requirements of another class.
- Plagiarism – Plagiarism is a serious offense that at the least will be punished by failure of the course. To best combat plagiarism, you should close all source materials when writing. In addition, you must cite all sources outside of your own experience, even when you use your own words. You must never use someone else’s exact words in your own document unless you use quote marks and an appropriate citation system.

Tentative Assignment Schedule

- 10/22 Introduction.
- 10/29 Electronics Kits versus Big Science: Hugo Gernsback. Read excerpt from Ralph 124C 1+.
- 11/5 From Pulp Fiction to Science Fiction: C. L. Moore. Read “No Woman Born” and “Tryst in Time.”
Paper 1 due at the start of class Nov. 5.
- 11/12 Social Science Fiction and the Pulp. Read A. E. Van Vogt, “Black Destroyer,” and Robert Heinlein, “The Roads Must Roll.”
- 11/19 The Anthropologist of the Future: John W. Campbell. Read “Twilight,” “Atomic Power,” and “Who Goes There?”
- 11/26 Science for the Masses: L Ron Hubbard. Read Final Blackout, Part 1.
- 12/3 Hubbard, continued. Read Final Blackout, Part 2.
- 12/10 The Republic of Interstellar Letters: Isaac Asimov. Read The Naked Sun, Chapters 1-7.
- 12/17 Asimov, continued. Read The Naked Sun, Chapters 8-end.
Paper 2 due at the start of class Dec. 17.
- 1/7 Space Cadets and Interstellar Citizens: Robert A. Heinlein. Read Space Cadet.
- 1/14 Appropriate Technology and the Future: Frank Herbert. Read Dune, Book 1
- 1/21 Herbert, continued. Read Dune, Book 2.
- 1/28 Herbert, continued. Read Dune, Book 3.
- 2/4 Social Science Fiction and the Women’s Movement: Marge Piercy. Read Woman at the Edge of Time, Chapters 1-9.
Paper 3 due at the start of class Feb. 4.
- 2/11 Piercy, continued. Read Woman at the Edge of Time, Chapters 10-end.

A revised version of one of your three papers is due before March 2, 2009
at 5 p.m. (4,000 words in MLA style).

No late papers will be accepted.

Science Fiction (Sci Fi) is epic, it is varied, it is imaginative, it is rational, and it has something for everyone. Sci Fi, while itself a genre, can be divided further into sub-genres each with its own specific features. Social Sci Fi is primarily concerned with the often problematic effects of technology and science on humans and human society. Isaac Asimov defined Social Sci Fi in 1953 as one of three possible plots for a science fiction story (the others are gadget and adventure). Social science fiction is a term used to describe a subgenre of science fiction concerned less with technology and space opera and more with sociological speculation about human society. In other words, it "absorbs and discusses anthropology", and speculates about human behavior and interactions. ["http://archaeology.about.com/od/fictionstoriesandnovels/Archaeology_in_Fiction_Stories_and_Novels.htm Archaeology in Fiction, Stories, and Novels] ".about.com". See more ideas about Fiction, Sci fi and Science fiction. A freelance reporter writes a fictional story about a tropical island named #Bohemia and sends it to #Twin. There, a talented Earthling descendant illustrates the story comics-style, making it wildly popular with the natives who've never seen anything like that before. #TheTwin. Social science fiction. #TheTwin is an entertaining and engaging #SocialScienceFiction.