

Dr. Christopher A. Shinn
Georgetown University
MTWR 3:15pm – 5:15pm
Maguire 101
Summer 2018

Office Hours: Tues., 1-3pm;
or by appt.
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SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY (ENGL 234-10—CRN: 14804)
3 CREDITS

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will investigate the concept of the future within a global cultural imagination, examining a wide range of literary and cinematic genres in science fiction & fantasy. We will address scientific issues that pertain to the evolution of space and time; the interface of humans and machines; security, technocracy, and militarization; and cyberspace and cybernetics. The class will read a short selection from earlier science fiction writers—H. G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert A. Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov and Philip K. Dick, among others. We will consider how classic works of sci-fi speak to contemporary concerns about the science of geophysical disasters, the destruction of the environment, pandemics and contagions, governmental control and the chilling prospects of nuclear war and global terrorism. Other topics will encompass Afrofuturism, utopia and dystopia, myths and legends, zombies, epic quests in historical and fantasy novels and Japanese anime. We will be watching a series of documentaries and also screening films from the U.S. and Japan. Other writers will include Octavia Butler, Brenda W. Clough, Ted Chiang, Max Brooks and J. R. R. Tolkien.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Provide a broad outline of the history of modern science fiction, noting in particular the impact of classic authors such as Mary Shelley, H. G. Wells, Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Philip K. Dick, Samuel R. Delany and Octavia Butler, among others.
- Explain the roots of sci-fi and fantasy in classic pulp fiction magazines, including *Amazing Stories*, *New Worlds*, *Tales of Wonder*, *Astounding Science Fiction*, and *Analog*, among others.
- Define science fiction by describing its critical significance to other key terms such as “speculative fiction,” “genre fiction,” “fantasy,” “magic realism,” “utopia,” “dystopia,” “apocalypticism,” “post-apocalypticism,” “biopolitics,” “governmentality,” and “panopticism.”
- Connect science fiction in a concrete and detailed manner to traditional topics in time travel; exploration of outer space and extraterrestrial life; the threat of nuclear war; robots, androids and

cyborgs; artificial intelligence; utopia and dystopia; apocalypse and post-apocalypse; governmental and corporate surveillance; mythic and religious visions; and the science of future predictions.

- Situate sci-fi stories in their unique historical contexts, drawing upon a critical awareness of the times (e.g. the antebellum South, the Second World War, the Cold War era, the Cuban Missile Crisis and post-9/11).
- Apply critical theories advanced by Darko Suvin, Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, David Deutsch, and others.
- Draw critical comparisons and contrasts between earlier modern science fiction and current issues regarding the threat of nuclear proliferation, terrorism and the evolution of robots, among others.
- Demonstrate a basic working knowledge of the nuclear threat, robotic engineering, virtual reality and the changing concepts of space and time.
- Give a broad overview of the history of Afro-Futurism and its specific connections to visual art, music, literature and other cultural mediums.
- Address the distinctiveness of the fantasy novel (and fantasy in film—e.g. Japanese anime), offering key examples from literary history and connecting fantasy to myth, magic, religious allegory and folklore.
- Link science fiction and fantasy to philosophical and ethical questions about the nature of consciousness and perception, metaphysics, alternative realities, being and nothingness, evolution, death and immortality.
- Analyze literary works effectively in terms of close reading and be able to think critically and inter-textually.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Brooks, Max. *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*. NY: Broadway Paperbacks, 2006.
ISBN: 978-03073446612.

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2004.
ISBN: 978-0807083697.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*. NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2012.
ISBN: 9780547844978.

On Blackboard: H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*; writings by Ted Chiang, Brenda C. Clough, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon, Robert A. Heinlein and Philip K. Dick; selected articles, book chapters, and critical essays by David Deutsch, Kip Thorne, Mark Dery, Alondra Nelson, Sheree Renée Thomas, P.W. Singer, Kevin Kelly, David Kyle Johnson, W. Christopher Stewart, Charles Taliaferro and Craig Lindahl-Urben. Recommended Reading: *Understanding Contemporary Science Fiction: The Formative Period, 1926-1970*, by Thomas D. Clareson (selections are available on Blackboard).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students will be asked to attend each class meeting promptly and participate actively. Active participation requires the completion of the assigned readings before they are to be discussed in class and joining in small and larger group discussions on the course materials. Attendance and participation are required in order to do well in the class. Should you have any difficulties meeting this requirement, you must see the instructor to insure that the problem can be addressed immediately. The student's success depends upon the level of engagement that she or he brings to the course, and one's grade will reflect the quality and effort each student demonstrates throughout the semester. The student will be asked to write two papers (4-6 pages in length); give a class presentation; complete reading quizzes; turn in a take-home midterm exam; and take a final examination or write a final essay. You have the option of writing a final paper or taking the final examination. The total percentage of your grade will be determined according to the following scale:

- 10% class presentation
- 10% quizzes
- 15% take-home midterm exam
- 20% first paper
- 20% second paper
- 25% final exam or final paper

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM —The university community seeks to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity, and students should be apprised of the consequences of violating these honor codes. Should the student be found guilty of plagiarism or cheating, he or she will be given an automatic "F" for the course and will receive further university disciplinary action. For information on the university's policy on academic integrity, please consult the Academic Honor System, which can be found on the Georgetown University website: <http://library.georgetown.edu/odyssey/plagiarism.htm>.

AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA): Georgetown University complies fully with the ADA requirements and encourages students with disabilities to receive the extra time and/or assistance needed to complete their courses. Please see the instructor about your specific needs and take advantage of the University Services for Students with Disabilities (see <http://ldss.georgetown.edu>).

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

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| Mon., Jun. 4 th | Introduction to Science Fiction & Fantasy |
| Tues., Jun. 5 th | Ted Chiang, "The Merchant and the Alchemist's Gate"
Brenda W. Clough, <i>May Be Some Time</i> |

- Wed., Jun. 6th H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*
David Deutsch, selections from *The Fabric of Reality*
- Thurs., Jun. 7th Video: *The Man in the High Castle*
Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
“Prologue,” “The River,” “The Fire”
- Mon., Jun. 11th Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
“The Fall,” “The Fight,” “The Storm”
- Tues., Jun. 12th Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
“The Rope,” “Epilogue”
Mark Dery, “Black to the Future”; Alondra Nelson, “Introduction: Future Texts”; Sheree Renée Thomas, “Introduction: Looking for the Invisible,” *Dark Matter*
Afro-Futurism Project Due
- Wed., Jun. 13th Theodore Sturgeon, “Memorial” (1946) and “Thunder and Roses” (1947)
Arthur C. Clarke, “If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth” (1951)
Ray Bradbury, “The Million-Year Picnic” (1946); “There will Come Soft Rains” (1950)
- Thurs., Jun. 14th Robert A. Heinlein, “Blowups Happen” (1940)
Philip K. Dick, “The Defenders” (1953); “Second Variety” (1953)
- Mon., Jun. 18th Bomb Shelters, the Cold War, & Doomsday Preppers
Film Screening: Lucy Walker’s *Countdown to Zero* (2010)
FIRST PAPER DUE
- Tues., Jun. 19th Arthur C. Clarke, “The Nine Billion Names of God”; “The Sentinel”;
“The Star”; “Rescue Party”
- Wed., Jun 20th Film Screening: Christopher Nolan’s *Interstellar* (2014)
Selections from Kip Thorne’s *The Science of Interstellar*
- Thurs., Jun. 21st Isaac Asimov, “Bicentennial Man”
Kevin Kelly, “Better Than Human”
P. W. Singer, *Wired for War* (Blackboard)

- Mon., Jun. 25th Film Screening: Hayao Miyazaki, *Spirited Away* (2001)
- Tues., Jun. 26th Discussion: Hayao Miyazaki, *Spirited Away* (2001)
TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE
- Wed., Jun. 27th J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, Ch. 1-11
Charles Taliaferro and Craig Lindahl-Urben,
“The Glory of Bilbo Baggins”
- Thurs., Jun. 28th J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, Ch. 12-19
David Kyle Johnson, “Tolkien’s Just War”
W. Christopher Stewart, “‘The Lord of Magic and Machines’: Tolkien on
Magic and Technology”
- Mon., Jul. 2nd Max Brooks, *World War Z*, pp. 1-136
- Tues., Jul. 3rd Max Brooks, *World War Z*, pp. 137-269
- Wed., Jul. 4th INDEPENDENCE DAY – NO CLASS
- Thurs., Jul. 5th Max Brooks, *World War Z*, pp. 270-342
SECOND PAPER DUE

FINAL EXAM –Friday, July 6th –3-5pm

FINAL PAPER DUE – Wednesday, July 11th at 4pm in my mailbox in New North 306.
No electronic copies or late papers will be accepted unless granted permission by professor.