ENGL 32550

Fall 2016

Professor Benjamin Morgan

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Course website: <https://uchicago.box.com/sf16>

Office Hours: T/Th 12-1pm by appointment via <http://bjm.ycb.me>

**Science Fiction: Theories and Origins**

This seminar explores the history and theory of science fiction, focusing on the moment of its modern emergence from Mary Shelley to H.G. Wells. In historical terms, we will understand the speculative fictions, utopias, and alternative histories of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as approaching questions posed by the natural and physical sciences: how could one imagine the possibility that humans might degenerate or go extinct, that the sun and earth would someday freeze, that years were to be measured at the scale of millions? We will also explore the political significance of early science fiction, which denaturalized the progress of technology, the organization of labor, and notions of gender, often taking on challenging political questions far more explicitly than the realist novel. As we address these questions, we will examine some of the ways in which literary scholars and cultural critics have developed theories and historical narratives to account for the emergence, formal features, and political significance of science fiction.

**Required Books**

**Please notes: you must purchase these exact editions. They are critical editions that include required readings. Please use ISBN if ordering online.**

Course Reader, available in the Humanities Copy Room (Walker Museum basement)

Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) Broadview: 9781554811038

Poe, *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe* (1976, ed. Beaver) Penguin: 9780140431063

Verne, *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864) Puffin: 9780141321042

Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race* (1871) Broadview: 9781551118369

Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895) Broadview: 9781551113050

Abbott, *Flatland* (1884) Broadview: 9781551116907

Gilman, *Herland* (1915) Broadview: 9781551119878

Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974) Harper: 006051275X

A folder of optional reading is available at <https://uchicago.box.com/v/sf16optional>

**Teaching Philosophy**

This is a discussion-based seminar that prioritizes sustained daily engagements with the reading over short bursts of intensive work. A substantial portion of your final grade will therefore be determined by your performance on day-to-day preparation, including your reading notes, presentation, and weekly email posts. A primary goal of this model is to foster scholarly habits of research and interpretation. The classroom is an environment where students are responsible for framing, generating, and exploring questions. My role in the classroom is not to convey information, but to structure, moderate, and deepen a discussion driven by students. I therefore require substantial, focused, and demonstrable preparation on the part of students prior to each class meeting.

**Requirements**

1. *Notes.* (15%) Each Thursday, I will collect the notes you have taken to prepare for that week’s meetings. I’ll give you a recommended template (this will involve identifying formal features of a text, defining key terms, and close reading), but you are free to take notes however you wish as long as you have at least 4pp handwritten or 2pp typed. If you want to write an equivalent number of pages as an essay/response paper, that’s fine too. You must turn in at least twelve of these (meaning that you may skip three, since we have 15 sessions with readings). Hard copy in class or email.
2. *Discussion question to email list*. (10%) Each week you’ll submit a discussion question (~200ww) to the class email list, [sf16@lists.uchicago.edu](mailto:sf16@lists.uchicago.edu). These should propose and explore a question that you want us to think through. They should cite the reading. You may respond to a classmate’s post as your post. Please submit eight of these (i.e., you may skip one). **Due Mondays at 5pm.**
3. *Presentation*. (10%) You will be responsible for presenting some kind of argument about or interpretation of an assigned text (literary and/or critical) and leading a discussion once during the quarter. It’s up to you how to approach this: you might want to give a mini-conference paper, or you may want to guide us through a directed close reading of several passages. You may but are not required to do additional research and reading. Plan on 20-25 minutes including discussion. It’s very helpful if you can give me a sense in advance of what you’ll be talking about (a quick email a day or two before the presentation suffices). **Sign up here by week 2**: <https://uchicago.box.com/v/sf16signupsheet>. If you would like written feedback, please turn in notes or the text of your presentation.
4. *Two papers*. (20%, 45%) You will write two papers for this course. The first will be either a close reading or a response to a critical text (**10/29**, 5pp). The second will be a critical essay addressing at least one literary text and one article/book chapter (**12/5**, 10-12pp). For your second paper, you may also elect to work with me to come up with a comparable alternative; this might include a critical bibliography; a mock CFP and paper for a conference; or a review essay focusing on two or three relevant academic books.
5. *PhD students*. Instead of the above assignments, PhD students may choose to write one 20-25-page research paper. Bear in mind that English PhD students may write only two seminar papers per year.

**Policies**

*Attendance.* You must come to every class. If you miss more than one class, your final grade will drop one level (e.g. B to B-) for each class missed. If you miss more than three classes, you may be given an incomplete. If you miss a class, consult https://uchicago.box.com/sf16 for that day’s discussion notes. Exceptions to this policy are made only for medical or family emergencies.

*Office Hours.* My office hours are **by appointment**, T/Th 12-1pm. I will make additional office hours available prior to paper due dates and I can meet at other times if you have a regular conflict. Make an appointment online at <http://bjm.ycb.me>.

*Technology.* In the interest of maintaining a productive face-to-face discussion, I do not allow laptops or other devices in class. Phones must be turned completely off before class begins.

*Online Submission Policy.* Papers for this course will be submitted via email. Within 2 hours of the deadline, I will send a receipt confirming that I have received and opened your paper. Until you have a receipt, the paper is not turned in. If you have not received a receipt within 2 hours of the deadline, contact me immediately. I won’t send confirmation for discussion questions; you may confirm that they posted by logging in at lists.uchicago.edu.

*Late Papers.* If your paper is late, it will lose a half grade (e.g. B -> B-). The grade will continue to drop every 24 hours. Extensions are available only for significant extenuating circumstances. If you have multiple papers due on the same day, it is your responsibility to plan ahead.

*Formatting.* Papers must be double spaced, in Times New Roman typeface, with 1-inch margins, numbered and include a header and title in MLA format. Papers must also include a works cited page in MLA format.

**Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

It is your responsibility to ensure that all of your written work conforms to accepted standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is not only copying others’ work; any improperly documented use of ideas can constitute plagiarism. Please read the discussion of plagiarism and academic honesty in *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success*, which you may consult on reserve at Regenstein library. It is crucial that you are familiar with these standards, and it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with them. If these standards are in any way unclear to you or if you are uncertain about best practices with regards to note-taking please consult with me.

Any undocumented use of another person’s ideas constitutes plagiarism. This includes copying another text word for word. It also includes summarizing and paraphrasing an original source with similar language and/or syntax, or presenting as your own an argument that you heard in another class or from another person. Please note as well that copying non-copyrighted material (such as Wikipedia or a non-copyrighted webpage) also constitutes plagiarism. Unintentional copying also constitutes plagiarism.

Academic dishonesty includes buying papers online, outsourcing your academic work to someone else (paid or unpaid), and submitting the same paper to more than one course. This is not an exhaustive list of the practices that constitute academic dishonesty and plagiarism. If you are uncertain about how or whether to cite your sources, please contact me. It is crucial that you do so before handing in work.

**Academic dishonesty is a very serious offense, even if it is unintentional. Any form of plagiarism may result in immediate failure of this course and disciplinary action.**

**Schedule**

Novels should be read in their entirety prior to Tuesday meetings.

CR = Course Reader | BX = Box (<https://uchicago.box.com/sf16>)

Week 1

9/27 Introduction; Poe, “Sonnet — To Science”

9/29 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) (Broadview: 9781554811038), 49-77 (through ch. 3)

Paul Alkon, “A Short History of the Future,” in *Science Fiction Before 1900* (BX)

Week 2

10/4 Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) (Broadview: 9781554811038)

Appendices A-D in Broadview edition

“Science” and “Fiction,” in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. (CR)

Optional: Online version at <https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/frankenstein> has excellent annotations. Compare 1831 and 1818 versions: <http://juxtacommons.org/shares/Nme50n>

10/6 *Frankenstein*, cont’d.

Suvin, “Estrangement and Cognition”; “SF and the Novum” in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (CR)

Optional: Suvin, “History” in *Metamorphoses* (BX)

Week 3

10/11 Edgar Allan Poe,

“MS Found in a Bottle”

“The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall”

“The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion”

“The Colloquy of Monos and Una”

“Mesmeric Revelation”

“Some Words with a Mummy”

“The Power of Words”

“The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”

“Eureka” - focus on 221-255 and 299-309

*Please read Introduction and all headnotes (located at the end) in the Penguin edition.*

10/13 Poe, cont’d.

John Tresch, “Extra! Extra! Poe Invents Science Fiction!,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. (CR)

Week 4

10/18 Verne, *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864) (Puffin: 9780141321042)

Look at the images in Louis Figuier, *La terre avant le deluge* (1864) (BX)

10/20 *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, cont’d.

Roland Barthes, “The Nautilus and the Drunken Boat,” in *Mythologies* (CR)

Pierre Macherey, “Jules Verne: The Faulty Narrative” in *A Theory of Literary Production* (CR)

Optional: Foucault, “Behind the Fable” in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, Vol. 2* (BX)

Week 5

10/25 Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race* (1871) (Broadview 9781551118369)

Appendices B-E in Broadview Edition

10/27 *The Coming Race*, cont’d.

Raymond Williams, “Utopia and Science Fiction,” *Science Fiction Studies* 5, no. 3 (1978): 203–214. (CR)

10/28 (4-5:30pm) Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (CR)

Week 6

11/1 Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895) (Broadview 9781551113050)

Appendices A, C, D, E in Broadview edition

**11/2: Paper 1 Due**

11/3 *The Time Machine*, cont’d.

Fredric Jameson, “Progress vs. Utopia, or; Can we Imagine the Future,” in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (CR)

Week 7

11/8 Edwin Abbott, *Flatland* (1884) (Broadview 9781551116907)

Appendices A, B2, B4, D2, D3, and E.

Andrea Henderson, “Math for Math’s Sake: Non-Euclidean Geometry, Aestheticism, and *Flatland*,” *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (March 1, 2009): 455–71. (CR)

11/10 **NO CLASS**

Week 8

11/15 **NO CLASS**

11/17 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (1915) (Broadview 9781551119878)

“Nonfiction” and Appendix C in Broadview edition

Week 9

11/22 Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974) (Harper Perennial 006051275X)

Samuel Delany, “To Read *The Dispossessed*,” in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (CR)

11/24 **NO CLASS** (Thanksgiving)

Week 10

11/29 Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, cont’d.

Fredric Jameson, “Utopia and its Antinomies,” in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (CR)

**12/5 Final Paper Due**