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ENG 2091-099: Literature, Self, and the World: Science Fiction (Honors)

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Syllabus for English 2091.099: Literature, Self, & the World: Science Fiction (Honors), Fall 2014, CRN 95813

Required Texts

Alfred Bester, *The Stars My Destination* (ipicturebooks, 2011)
Thomas M. Disch, *Camp Concentration* (Vintage, 1999)
William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (Ace Trade, 2000)
Heather Masri, *Science Fiction: Stories and Contexts* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008)
Joanna Russ, *We Who Are About To . . .* (Wesleyan, 2005)

* Additional readings will be provided through library reserve or photocopy

Catalog Description

Darko Suvin defines science fiction (SF) as the literature par excellence of "cognitive estrangement." By disrupting normal frames of reference, he argues, SF tends to complicate the distinction between self and other, to unsettle the relationship of self to world. In this course, we will consider SF stories, novels, and films that raise questions about selfhood and identity in precisely these terms. Commercialism and the media, gender and sexuality, science and technology, and race and colonialism will be among the many topics we explore. Readings will be drawn from the work of Alfred Bester, Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delany, Joanna Russ, Thomas M. Disch, James Tiptree, Jr. (pseudonym of Alice Sheldon), and Hiroshi Yamamoto, among others.

Learning Objectives

Our main objective in this course is to read, think, talk, and write about significant works of SF. Along the way, we will analyze SF with reference to related theories and criticism; gain an understanding of various literary and cultural contexts in which the SF tradition has developed; conduct various forms of research on SF; and present the results of such research in written and verbal formats while appropriating documenting sources. The course requires careful preparation of readings, measured contributions to class discussions, and engaged critical thought.

Writing-Intensive Course

Please consider submitting an essay written for this class to the Electronic Writing Portfolio (EWP). Visit the following web address for more information: <www.eiu.edu/~assess/ewpmain.php>. The course deadline for EWP submissions is Friday, December 12, 2014.

Short Descriptions of Assignments

Reading Journal: you will complete twelve entries in a weekly reading journal.

SF Media Analysis: with a partner, you will analyze a scene from an SF film of your choice and present your interpretation to the class.

Annotated Bibliography and Presentation: you will compile a six-item annotated bibliography on an author or topic, and give a presentation based on your reading.

Mid-term and Final Examinations: examinations will test your knowledge of course readings and discussions through a variety of question formats, including identification, short answer, and essay.

Daily Assignments: quizzes, reading responses, peer reviews, in-class writing, and other work may be assigned on a day-to-day basis.

* For full descriptions of major assignments and course policies, see the addenda after the schedule.

Provisional Schedule

Note: Please complete each reading *before* class on the day it is listed.

Science Fiction Stories and Contexts = SFSC

Week One

T Aug 26 Introduction to the course
R Aug 28 Philip K. Dick, "Second Variety" (SFSC 296)
Darko Suvin, cognitive estrangement

Week Two

(one reading journal due, either day)
T Sept 2 Clip from *Alien*
Ray Bradbury, "Mars Is Heaven!" (SFSC 73)
Freud, the uncanny
R Sept 4 Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (SFSC 119)
Beauvoir, self and other; Jung, the shadow

Week Three

(one RJ due)
T Sept 9 James Tiptree, Jr (aka Alice Sheldon), "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (SFSC 342)
Haraway, the cyborg, posthumanism
R Sept 11 Hiroshi Yamamoto, "A Romance in Virtual Space" (provided)
Baudrillard, simulation and simulacra

Week Four

(one RJ due)
T Sept 16 Maureen F. McHugh, "Nekropolis" (SFSC 386)
R Sept 18 SF Media Analysis assignment
Clip from *The Matrix*
From Marx, "The Factory" (provided)

Week Five

(one RJ due)
T Sept 23 James Cameron, *Aliens*
R Sept 25 Cameron, *Aliens*
SF Media Analysis, meeting

Week Six

T Sept 30 SF Media Analysis, presentations
R Oct 2 Alfred Bester, *The Stars My Destination* (1-81)

Week Seven

(one RJ due)
T Oct 7 Bester, *The Stars My Destination* (81-169)
R Oct 9 Bester, *The Stars My Destination* (finish)

Week Eight

(one RJ due)
T Oct 14 Mid-term examination
R Oct 16 Samuel R. Delany, "Aye, and Gomorrah . . ." (provided)
Sedgwick, the epistemology of the closet
Tom Godwin, "The Cold Equations" (provided)

Week Nine

(one RJ due)
T Oct 21 Delany's introduction to *We Who Are About To . . .* (v-xv)
Joanna Russ, *We Who Are About To . . .* (1-39)
R Oct 23 Russ, *We Who Are About To . . .* (40-65)

Week Ten

(one RJ due)
T Oct 28 Russ, *We Who Are About To . . .* (finish)

R Oct 30 Thomas M. Disch, *Camp Concentration* (1-62)

Week Eleven (on RJ due)

T Nov 4 Disch, *Camp Concentration* (62-152)

R Nov 6 Disch, *Camp Concentration* (finish)

F Nov 7 Last day to withdraw with a W

Week Twelve (one RJ due)

T Nov 11 Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1-95)

R Nov 13 Gibson, *Neuromancer* (95-150)

Week Thirteen (one RJ due)

T Nov 18 Gibson, *Neuromancer* (finish)

R Nov 20 Conferences about research projects

Fall Break

TR Nov 25, 27 No classes

Week Fourteen (one RJ due)

T Dec 2 Cahill/Marling, *Another Earth*

R Dec 4 *Another Earth*

Week Fifteen

T Dec 9 Presentations

R Dec 11 Presentations

F Dec 12 Deadline for EWP submissions

Final Exam Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2:45-4:45 p.m.

Major Assignments

Reading Journal (20%)

Due: weekly, excluding weeks one, six, and fifteen*

Use a notebook to engage in close reading of key or difficult passages, and to record various observations and questions that come to mind as you read. Each week (excluding weeks one, six, and fifteen), pick one or two ideas and develop them into a 250-word reading journal (about a page, double-spaced). At the top of the journal, clearly indicate what part of the reading prompted your response. For instance, note the first few words of the passage, indicating the text's author and title, and citing the page number: "This was a Golden Age . . ." (Bester, *Stars* 11). Keep the journal with an eye toward topics for the class to discuss. That is, focus on problems of interpretation, for example: "Why does Bester intercut his prose in chapter one of *The Stars My Destination* with a snippet from a press interview, a repeated 'nursery jingle,' Gully Foyle's Merchant Marine record, and so on? What does he aim to achieve through the use of this collage technique? I would suggest that he aims to . . ." Develop your ideas sufficiently by engaging in close reading and citation of the text. The reading journal should not be a string of disconnected notes. Write clearly and analytically, making specific points, and/or raising specific questions. Type each entry.

You will receive a ✓+, ✓, or ✓- on each entry. These roughly correspond to A, B, or C and below. I will assign the journal a grade *in toto* at the end of the semester.

* You may submit a journal entry on either day of a given week, responding to whichever part of the reading you like, but make sure you turn your journal entry in on the same day we are covering the reading to which it responds.

SF Media Analysis (15%)

Due: Tuesday, September 30

With a partner, analyze a scene from a science fiction film of your choice. Employ close reading to discuss sound (music, sound effects), visuals (lighting, cinematography, costuming, visual effects, etc.), acting, narrative (setting, plot, editing, character development, dialogue, flashbacks, etc.), and theme (meaning) in the scene. Rather than attempting to deliver the final word on the scene, (1) make a specific argument about the scene by breaking down its visual elements and (2) raise issues for the class to discuss. If possible, link your presentation to concepts and ideas introduced in class discussions: cognitive estrangement, the uncanny, self and other, the shadow, the cyborg, posthumanism, simulation and simulacra, and so on.

Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

1. Choose a 5- to 6-minute clip from an SF film. That will be your "scene."
 2. Do research about the film and the director. Consider looking at interviews, articles, and reviews.
 3. At the start of the presentation, briefly introduce your argument. At some point in the presentation (probably early), introduce and show a quality version of the clip.
 4. Employ close reading to analyze sound, visuals, acting, narrative, and/or other elements of the scene. Point out specific features of the scene and explain how they relate to a theme (or themes) apparent in it.
 5. Aim for 15-20 minutes total; dividing speaking time evenly. Be prepared to field questions afterward.
 6. Consider using a visual aid in addition to the clip (for instance, a still image or Prezi, PowerPoint, etc.).
 7. Turn in an outline of the presentation, including an MLA-style Works Cited page listing your secondary sources.
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Annotated Bibliography/Presentation (20%)

Due: Tuesday, December 9 or Thursday, December 11 (as scheduled)

Depending on your preference, your annotated bibliography could focus on an SF author (Joanna Russ, Bruce Sterling, etc.), a specific SF work (Russ's *We Who Are About To . . .*, Scott's *Aliens*), a subgenre of SF (cyberpunk, New Wave, biopunk, steampunk, space opera, science fantasy, horror SF, etc.), or a theme (sexuality in New Wave SF, artificial intelligence in Japanese anime, posthumanism in cyberpunk, etc.). You are not confined to authors or filmmakers on the syllabus.

The point of the assignment is to review primary and secondary material related to your focus. You should annotate at least six sources. At least one source should be primary (a novel, film, etc.) and at least three should be secondary (articles, reviews, chapters of books, etc.). All secondary sources should offer sustained commentary on the subject. (No short, amateurish reviews or blogs from the internet, please.). Look around to find *strong* sources in academic books and journals, in magazines and fanzines, and/or online. Do not "go with" the first six items you come across.

Sample Topics and Sources:

Joanna Russ (author) -- *The Female Man* (her most famous novel), an interview with Russ, two academic articles, one review of *The Female Man* from *The New York Times Book Review* and another from an SF magazine such as *Analog*, the author entry about Russ in *SFE: The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* at the SF Gateway

James Cameron's *Aliens* (film) -- interview with Cameron, three articles from film studies journals, a review of the film from *The New York Times* and Thomas Caldwell's article "*Aliens: Mothers, Monsters and Marines*" from his blog *Cinema Autopsy*

Cyberpunk (subgenre) -- three cyberpunk short stories (by Pat Cadigan, William Gibson, and Bruce Sterling), a chapter from the academic essay collection *Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative*, an interview with Samuel R. Delany

about cyberpunk in the magazine *SF Eye*, and an online article about cyberpunk in *SFE: The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* at the SF Gateway

Annotating Primary Sources

Each annotation of a novel, film, or short story should read like a mini review, consisting of at least one fully developed paragraph. What is the work about? What are some of its main themes? Is it worth reading or viewing? Is it important in the field of SF? Why or why not?

How to Annotate Secondary Sources for the Annotated Bibliography

Each annotation of a secondary source should provide a concise summary of the critic's approach and main idea, and consist of at least one fully developed paragraph.

A good annotation will make a summary statement about a critic's methodology, purpose, and argument (especially the conclusions reached). However, it will also go beyond mere summary to address the quality of the argument. Is the critic's essay or review useful? How? Does the critic contribute to understanding of the topic?

An MLA-Style Entry for an Article in an Anthology (see the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers for citation formats for various kinds of sources)

Senf, Carol. "The Comedy of Class in Stoker's *Dracula*." *Critical Interpretations of Dracula*. Ed. John Kramer. Oxford: Cambridge UP, 1971. 21-29. Print.

A Weak Annotation

The scholarly article, "The Comedy of Class in Stoker's *Dracula*," was written by Carol Senf, a notable literary critic on *Dracula*. This talks about the language of class, which is its central argument. Aspects of *Dracula*'s vampirism are discussed in this context.

A Better Annotation (Though Still Too Brief)

Combining Marxist analysis with close reading of the text, this essay takes the notion of *Dracula* as a bloated aristocrat to its logical extreme, reading Stoker's novel as a metaphor for class relations. In Senf's smart but poorly supported reading, *Dracula* is the supreme aristocrat and his feeding on blood symbolizes the way he saps the lower classes of their economic power. Specifically, she argues that his character is constructed in opposition to the interests of Victorian England's growing middle class.

Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria for the Annotated Bibliography

1. Conduct research to learn more about the topic and appropriately vet sources;
2. Write analytically, demonstrating that you have read your sources closely;
3. Write concise, polished prose;
4. Annotate six sources, at least one primary, three secondary;
5. Format according to MLA style.

Presentation

Present the results of your research project to the class in 12-15 minutes. (Time constraints will be determined by the size of the class—you may have additional time). Ask yourself this question, "What did I learn about the topic through my reading?" Try to convey the most interesting and important of your insights to the class.

Sample Presentations

Focus / author Joanna Russ - provide an introductory overview of the Russ's career, including her current reputation in the field; give a broad sense of the critical reception of the Russ's work at various points in her career, noting key stories and novels; create a PowerPoint or handout to display key passages from *The Female Man* and explicate some of the quotations, making reference to criticism about the novel. What would you argue about the novel?

Focus / gender in James Cameron's *Aliens* - show a clip, using it as a spring board for talking about gender in the film; make reference to criticism about gender in the film and/or explain Cameron's view of gender in the film (as elaborated in interviews). What would you argue about Cameron's treatment of gender?

Focus / cyberpunk - explain the main characteristics of cyberpunk as a subgenre, perhaps using a well-known film such as *Blade Runner* for illustrative purposes; compare and contrast two cyberpunk stories you read in terms of how they "fit" in this subgenre; project significant passages from the stories or critical quotes as a visual aid. What makes a piece of fiction cyberpunk?

Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria for the Presentation

1. Explain the purpose of your presentation at the beginning;
2. Convey important information about the topic;
3. Make interesting, well-supported points about the topic, and engage in close reading;
4. Employ helpful audio/visual aids to illustrate points;
5. Turn in an outline of the presentation.

You will not receive a separate grade on the presentation. I will take the quality of your presentation into consideration when assigning a grade to your Annotated Bibliography. For instance, a "B+" Annotated Bibliography bolstered by an excellent presentation will likely receive a "A-" or an "A." You will not receive a passing grade on the Annotated Bibliography if you fail to do the presentation.

Policies and Statements

Email: Recently, the English Department removed phone lines from most faculty offices. If you need to speak to me outside of class, email me or drop by during my office hours. I try to answer emails quickly, but please do not expect (or depend on) an immediate response to an email. Sometimes my schedule will not permit me to answer emails within a day, much less an hour or two.

Attendance: More than four unexcused absences will result in the loss of your participation grade for the semester. If you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what happened and picking up missed handouts. Absences will be excused only in the case of a documented illness or emergency, or of documented participation in an official university activity. You must provide me with a legible photocopy of your documentation for my records, and if your absence is excused, I will return a copy of your documentation indicating as much. You must provide documentation either before you miss class or on the day you return. Excessive tardiness will result in a reduction of your participation grade for the semester.

Late work: Presentations must be given on the dates for which you have scheduled them, except under the most extenuating of circumstances. Major assignments are due at the start of class on the final due date. If you want an extension on a major assignment, you must seek the extension twenty-four hours in advance of the class period during which the assignment is due and cite compelling reasons for the request; otherwise, you will be penalized one letter grade for not turning it in on time and an additional letter grade for every twelve hours thereafter. After forty-eight hours, the assignment will not be accepted, and you will receive a zero on it. Only in the case of an excused absence may an examination be taken before or after the scheduled date. An absence will be excused in the case of a properly documented illness or emergency, or of properly documented participation in an official university activity. A rescheduled examination may cover different material than the original.

Grading Scale: 100 to 90 = A, 89.99 to 80 = B, 79.99 to 70 = C, 69.99 to 60 = D, 59.99 and below F

Percentages for Major Assignments

SF Media Analysis
Annotated Bibliography/Presentation
Reading Journal

15%
20%
20%

55%

Exams and Other Requirements

Mid-term Examination
Final Examination
Daily Assignments
Participation
+
15%
15%
5%
10%
45%

Assessment: Formal assignment sheets are provided for each of the major assignments (above). Your grade for a given major assignment will be determined by how well your work fulfills the requirements outlined in the assignment sheet. You will receive written or verbal descriptions of daily assignments. Your participation grade will be based on the regularity and quality of your contributions to class discussions, and your level of engagement during group work and class activities.

Academic Integrity: According to the *MLA Style Manual*, the word "plagiarism" has its origin in the Latin term for "kidnapper": plagiarists kidnap other writers' sentences, phrases, or ideas and present them as their own. The *Random House Dictionary* defines "plagiarism" as "The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work." As these sources suggest, plagiarism often results from faulty documentation or careless note taking. Always place quoted materials in quotation marks, and always cite quoted and/or paraphrased sources, even in rough drafts of papers or presentations. Respect for the intellectual work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources. Inexcusable acts of plagiarism include downloading or buying a paper from the internet; copying and pasting phrases or passages from electronic sources into your paper without citing them; submitting a paper written by another student as your own; borrowing the language and content of a website verbatim and using it as an "original" presentation; and so on. The penalty for these types of academic dishonesty is failure in the course. See the Code of Conduct <<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>>. Violations are reported to the Office of Student Standards.

The Office of Disability Services: If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Disability Services (OSDS) as soon as possible. All accommodations must be approved through OSDS.

The Student Success Center: Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center <www.eiu.edu/~access> for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217.581.6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.