Science and Society RAP
Introduction to Science Fiction Syllabus
Comparative Literature 133
Spring 2016

Instructor: Alexander Ponomareff
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Class Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 2:30 to 3:45
Class Location: Mary Lyon House, Room 119
Office Hours: Thursday 4:00 to 6:00 or by appointment
Office Location: Hampshire House, Room 218

Course Description

Science fiction has become one of the most popular genres in contemporary culture in the United States and around the world. Also, science fiction is a genre of the contemporary moment. It is a phrase that first appears in 1851 but that does not become popular until its introduction into pulp magazines in the 1920s. It is also a genre whose stories often respond to issues and problems in the present moment. We will work to understand these works in their historical contexts, while also attempting to understand their relevance to our present day. In order to understand the scope of this genre, we are going to read and watch a series of short stories, plays, films, television shows, comic books, and novels.

This class is discussion-based. You will be expected to participate, both in person and on-line, and to work in small groups throughout the semester. For this reason, one of our main goals will be to create a learning community that allows for free and open conversation and thought. You will all be encouraged to share your thoughts, feelings, and ideas, but you also need to make sure you are a good listener and classmate.

RAP Course Goals

You are a part of a RAP course, which has been specially designed to:

1. Support you in achieving a smooth transition to college life.
2. Ensure that you are aware of the resources and opportunities that are available at UMass Amherst.
3. Develop an awareness and appreciation for the skill that will be developed in every General Education Course.
4. Promote the practice of thinking about, talking about, and making connections between your classes and your life experiences so that you can deepen your understanding and engagement, which will ultimately increase the value of your college education.
5. Provide you with structured guidance in the development of skills that you will use to be successful in your college experience and that will help prepare you to be a member of the global community after graduation.
During our course I will attempt to meet these goals by:

1. I will provide a forum for you to discuss your first semester here at UMass. Periodically we will check in with each other about how both our course and your semester are going.
2. I will introduce you to resources like the Writing Center or the Learning Resource Center, along with the other resources included in your Student Resource Booklet.
3. I will strive to elaborate on when and how our curriculum incorporates the skills involved in General Education courses.
4. I will encourage you to create connections between your life experiences and your understanding of the world outside of our classroom and to include these reflections in your work for our course.
5. I will incorporate material from your Student Resource Booklet and tie it to my own lived experiences to help build a foundation for how and why the skills you are learning here at UMass will relate to both the rest of your college experience and to your life after college.

General Education Statement

As a General Education course, designated for United States diversity (U) and literature (AL), the course includes works by creators from around the world, but focuses primarily on artists from the United States representing the range of voices in science fiction. This will include creators whose work represents the varied ethnic and racial backgrounds, genders, and sexual orientations in the science fiction community. This course also engages with questions concerning surveillance, advertising, urbanization, capitalism, migration, climate change, technology, and war. Furthermore, this course focuses on developing critical thinking and writing skills, alongside an emphasis on public speaking and collaborative work. Improving these skills provides a strong foundation for future scholastic and professional endeavors.

For more information on General Education at UMass Amherst, see the university’s General Education website: http://www.umass.edu/gened.

Assignments

- You are expected to post either a question or a comment for each text to the appropriate discussion forum on our course’s Moodle site. Each of your posts should also incorporate at least one textual example (preferably a quotation). Your posts will be used to facilitate our class meetings. They are due by 10 PM of the night before each class session.
- Three papers
  - The first paper is an opportunity to construct an argument focusing on one text.
  - The second paper provides the chance to craft an argument combining two short texts.
  - The third paper poses the challenge of creating your own argument by bringing two or more texts, including at least one longer one, into a conversation with one another.
  - For both the second and third paper, you will participate in a paper workshop with an assigned partner. These workshops take place in my office. You and your partner will work together on your papers for an hour, instead of our normal class meeting for that week. Your drafts and participation in the workshop are included in your final grade.
During our final class meeting you will give a short (under two minutes) presentation about your final paper.

You are expected to participate in class. Attendance is mandatory and you also need to be an active listener, thinker, and speaker in our class.

Since we are working on building a sense of community in this class, you will be able to make some choices about how you will be graded in the class. The standard grade breakdown is:

10% First Paper
15% Second Paper (Including your draft and workshop)
20% Third Paper (Including your draft, workshop, and final presentation)
5% In-Class Presentation
15% In-Class Participation
15% Reading Group Writing Assignment and (Partially grade by group members)
10% Message Board Posts
10% Attendance

Students can, however, make the choice to not have their first writing assignment count towards their final grade. This allows you a chance to see how I grade written work without the pressure of receiving a grade. You must decide this prior to its submission. If you do, the other two papers will each be worth an additional 5% towards your final grade.

Readings

Students are expected to read, in full, all assigned material prior to the first class meeting relating to each text. **You are also expected to bring copies (physical or digital) of whatever texts we are discussing to class in some format and to refer to them directly during our discussions. Not doing so will result in a zero for participation for the meeting.**

The books for this class will be available for purchase at Amherst Books, a locally-owned small business located at 108 Main Street, Amherst, MA. They will also be at the reserve desk in lower level of the W.E.B. DuBois Library. All other texts are on our course's Moodle site.

Books everyone will read:

Jason Shiga’s *Meanwhile* (ISBN: 978-0810984233)

Reading groups books (You will only have to read one of these for the course):

Daniel Keyes *Flowers for Algernon* (ISBN: 978-0156030304)
Neal Stephenson *Snow Crash* (ISBN: 978-0553380958)
JG Ballard *Crash* (ISBN: 978-0312420338)
CLASS POLICIES

Academic Honesty

Although students are free to study and work together with other students in this course, it is expected that all written work that is turned in will be completed solely by the student whose name is on the work. Furthermore, students must cite sources that they are using in their written work, in order to give credit to the sources for any ideas or observations that they are referencing. This is in keeping with the principles of academic honesty that are followed at this University, and any violations of these standards will be handled according to the University policies. For more information concerning the University’s academic honesty policy, please see: http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/code_conduct/acad_honest.htm.

Accommodations

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If a student has a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disability Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), they may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. Any student with a documented disability that requires an accommodation must notify the instructor, if possible within the first two weeks of the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Please visit the University’s website for more details about student’s rights for accommodations at: http://www.umass.edu/disability/employees/fachandbooks2.html.

Electronics Policy

Students may use laptops or other electronic devices in class in order to take notes, conduct research, or in lieu of print copies of any work that is being discussed, however using electronic devices for other purposes will result in an absence for that class meeting.

Attendance Policy

Attendance in class is a significant part of your grade this semester. This not only means that you are in class every time that we meet, but that you also come prepared and engage as a member of our class community. This includes bringing copies of the texts we are working on, referring to specific passages, and listening and responding appropriately to one another. If you do need to miss a class session, you are expected to notify the instructor prior to the class meeting and to submit valid documentation, such as a doctor's note, for the absence to be excused. Be aware, even if attendance is not explicitly taken during class, I am aware when you are not present. More than six unexcused absences results in a failing grade for the course.

Late Work Policy

No late work will be accepted for the class unless students have made prior arrangements with the instructor or unless the work is late due to excused absences.
Introduction to Science Fiction Fall 2015 Schedule Of Classes

Tuesday, January 19 – Discussion of the Syllabus and the Class

Thursday, January 21 – The first two issues of the original science fiction pulp magazine, the Hugo Gernsback edited Amazing Stories (1926) (Look through both issues and read in full HG Wells’s “The New Accelerator” (1901) and the supplemental material in both issues, such as the Gernsback’s letters and the advertisements)

Tuesday, January 26 – Karel Čapek’s R.U.R. (1920)

Thursday, January 28 – John W. Campbell’s “Twilight” (1934) and Clifford D. Simak’s “Desertion” (1944)

Tuesday, February 2 – Isaac Asimov’s “Reason” (1941) and Ray Bradbury’s “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950)

Reading Group Assigned In Class

Thursday, February 4 – Damon Knight’s “To Serve Man” (1950), Rod Serling’s Twilight Zone episode “To Serve Man,” (1962) and Al Feldstein’s and Joe Orlando’s “Judgment Day” (1956)

Tuesday, February 8 – Philip K. Dick’s “We Can Remember It For You Wholesale” (1966) and Harlan Ellison’s “Repent, Harlequin!” Said the Ticktockman” (1965)

Thursday, February 10 – Pamela Zoline’s “The Heat Death of the Universe” (1967) and Robert Sheckley’s “Can You Feel Anything When I Do This?” (1969)

First Writing Assignment Due (In Class)

Tuesday, February 16 – Monday Schedule, No Class

Thursday, February 18 – Robert A. Heinlein’s “All You Zombies–“ (1960) and Samuel Delaney’s “Aye, and Gomorrah…” (1967)

Tuesday, February 23 – Joanna Russ’s “When it Changed” (1972) and Ursula K. LeGuin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1973)

Thursday, February 25 – First Reading Group Meeting

Tuesday, March 1 – John Coney’s Space is the Place (1974) and Selected Poems by Sun Ra

Thursday, March 3 – Space is the Place (continued)

Friday, March 4 – Second Writing Assignment First Draft Due (By Midnight)

Tuesday, March 8 – Paper Workshops [No Normal Class Meeting]

Thursday, March 10 – Paper Workshops [No Normal Class Meeting]
Tuesday, March 15 – Spring Break, No Class

Thursday, March 17 – Spring Break, No Class

Tuesday, March 22 – John Carpenter’s They Live (1988)
**Second Writing Assignment Final Draft Due** (In Class)

Thursday March 24 – They Live (continued)

Tuesday, March 29 – Paul Verhoeven’s Starship Troopers (1998)

Thursday, March 31 – Starship Troopers (continued)

Tuesday, April 4 – Second Reading Group Meeting

Thursday, April 7 – Jason Shiga – Meanwhile (2010)

Tuesday, April 12 – Joe Cornish’s Attack the Block (2011)

Thursday, April 14 – Attack the Block (continued)

Friday, April 15 – **Third Writing Assignment First Draft Due** (By Midnight)

Tuesday, April 19 – Paper Workshops [No Normal Class Meeting]

Thursday, April 21 – Paper Workshops [No Normal Class Meeting]

Tuesday, April 26 – Euros Lyn’s episode of Black Mirror “Fifteen Million Merits” (2011) and Dolan Morgan’s “Why the Things You Use Every Day Might Kill You # 11” (2013)

Thursday, April 28 – Final Class Meeting
**Reading Group Writing Assignment Due** (In Class)

Friday, May 6 – **Third Writing Assignment Final Draft Due** (By Midnight)