

Course Number:
**Aliens, Cyborgs, and Other Others
in American Science Fiction**

Course Days and Time

Course Location

Brian S. Matzke

Office: _____

Office Hours: _____

Email: _____

Course Description:

This class surveys how American science fiction writers use the tropes of the genre to represent cultural contact and the experience of otherness. We will begin with the genre's nineteenth century origins influenced by European colonialism, before examining narratives of the immigrant experience and metaphors of Jewish identity in early American pulps and superhero comics. We will then look at afrofuturism in literature, music, and visual art, and will survey science fiction from Indigenous, Latino, Japanese, and Chinese American perspectives. All the while we will consider the new and diverse ways writers allegorize, critique, and remix ideas of racial and ethnic identity. Along the way, students will be introduced to a range of critical tools from literary and cultural theory with which to analyze the formal features of science fiction as a genre and the sociopolitical implications of literary texts and other cultural artifacts.

Learning Goals:

- To reveal the European colonial roots of science fiction.
- To establish a continuity across the long history of science fiction as a genre invested in fostering an understanding of others and the experience of otherness.
- To explore otherness as a significant theme both in and beyond the materials under consideration in the classroom.
- To build literary and historical claims about the formal features of science fiction.
- To examine science fiction through multiple media.
- To develop basic research skills.

Readings:

- Coursepack, available at _____
- Nalo Hopkinson and Kristine Ong Muslim (eds.), *People of Color Destroy Science Fiction*
- Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
- Grace L. Dillon (ed.), *Walking the Clouds*
- Ernest Hogan, *High Aztech*
- Masamune Shirow, *Ghost in the Shell*

Work Commitments:

- Between 50 and 150 pages of reading per class session. Mostly fiction but some nonfiction, song lyrics, and comics.
- Weekly quizzes. These quizzes will be administered at the start of class every Thursday, and will consist of two short answer questions, one pertaining to the reading and one pertaining to the concepts covered in the previous class session. Each question should be answerable in 3-5 sentences. There will be a total of twelve quizzes. Students' two quizzes with the lowest scores will be dropped and their grade will be out of the remaining ten. Students who miss a quiz due to an excused absence will have the opportunity to make it up; students will not have the opportunity to make up quizzes that are missed due to unexcused absences.
- Three papers of five or six pages each. Assignment sheets with descriptions of the papers are available on the course's Canvas site.
- Film review. A two page review of a science fiction film of your choice.
- Participation. Participation in this course means actively engaging in class discussions and group work. Shorter homework assignments and in-class writing exercises also constitute a significant portion of your participation grade. Participation does not simply mean attendance.
- Final exam. The final exam will consist of a combination of multiple choice questions, identifications, and short answer questions. It will cover material from the entire semester.

Quizzes:	20%
Paper 1:	15%
Paper 2:	15%
Paper 3:	20%
Film review:	5%
Participation:	10%
Final exam:	15%

Course Policies

- **Attendance**

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class by way of a sign-in sheet. If you are late to class and miss the sign-in sheet, it is your responsibility to make sure that your attendance is recorded by approaching me at the end of class.

An excused absence is an absence that is due to an unavoidable commitment. These include religious observances, doctor's appointments, travel for a university activity such as an athletic competition, and family emergencies such as a hospitalization or death in the family. In the case of a religious observance or university-related travel, you must notify me of the absence in advance in order for the absence to be marked as excused. In

the case of a doctor's appointment, university-related travel, or family emergency, you must provide documentation in order for the absence to be marked as excused.

Unexcused absences are absences for all other reasons, including visiting relatives, travel for personal reasons, performing volunteer work, feeling sick but not going to the doctor, and meeting with your academic advisor.

Students are allowed two unexcused absences. Each additional unexcused absence will lower your final grade by $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade (so, an A would become an A-, an A- would become a B+, and so on).

If you are late to class three times, that will count as one unexcused absence.

- **Late Papers**

Late Papers will incur a loss of $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade per day late. I will offer extensions on papers on a case-by-case basis, but only if you speak with me prior to the due date.

- **Preparedness**

Before the start of class you are expected to put away your phone and any other electronic devices, and take out a pen, notebook, the assignment due that day (if any) and your copy of the readings to be discussed in class that day. Not doing these things before the start of class amounts to being late for class, and will be marked as such on the attendance sheet. Using your phone during class or not bringing your copy of the readings to be discussed to class that day amounts to being absent and will be marked as such on the attendance sheet.

- **Laptops**

Weekly quizzes will be administered via Canvas at the start of class on Thursdays. You are expected to have your laptop to take the quizzes. Otherwise, laptops should be put away unless you are asked to take them out for a class activity.

- **Plagiarism**

The definition of and department policy about plagiarism are available online at: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/undergraduate/advising/plagNote.asp>. Department policy states that if you plagiarize, you will fail the assignment and the course. In addition, your case will be sent to the Dean of Student Affairs, who will review the case and may recommend further penalty.

- **Food and Drink**

Feel free to eat or drink in class, so long as it is not loud or otherwise distracting and you keep the classroom clean.

Resources

- **The Sweetland Writing Center**

The Sweetland Writing Center is an excellent resource for help with papers. They can offer you expert one-on-one assistance at all stages of the writing process. Their website: <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/>.

- **Shapiro Library Reference Desk**

The Shapiro Library reference librarians are happy to work with individual students or small groups to help with research projects. You can consult with a research librarian on a walk-in basis, by phone, by appointment, or by email. Their website can be found at: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/shapiro-undergraduate-library/reference-desk>.

- **Disabilities**

If you would like accommodation for a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. Any information you give me will be treated as strictly confidential. I also encourage you to contact the office of Services for Students with Disabilities in order to obtain disability verification and assistance in determining reasonable accommodations. Their website: <https://ssd.umich.edu/>.

- **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**

CAPS is located on the third floor of the Michigan Union. Students can visit their office to schedule an initial consultation, and can often make a same-day appointment. From the website: "Counseling and Psychological Services is committed to creating an environment based on our values of multicultural, multi-disciplinary and multi-theoretical practices that allow our diverse student body to access care, receive high quality services and take positive pathways to mental health. We also strive to find creative ways of reaching out to students and the UM community to nurture and develop a proactive, renewed sense of engagement throughout the campus." Open 8 a.m.-7 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, and until 5 p.m. Fridays. Their website can be found at: <https://caps.umich.edu/>.

- **University Health Service (UHS)**

Located on Central Campus, UHS provides students with both urgent and non-urgent medical care. This link provides instructions for how students can schedule an appointment online, over the phone, or in person: <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/appt>.

Weekly Schedule

- Week 1** Introductions
- 9-5 Introductions
- 9-7 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (excerpts); Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein* (excerpts)
- Week 2** The Victorian colonial adventure narrative
- 9-12 Jules Verne, *The Mysterious Island* (excerpts); H.G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (excerpts)
- 9-14 Edgar Rice Burroughs, *A Princess of Mars*
- Week 3** Immigrants in early American pulps
- 9-19 Bob Olsen, “The Educated Pill”; Eando Binder, “I, Robot”
- 9-21 Isaac Asimov, “Robbie,” “Segregationist,” “Unto the Fourth Generation”
- Week 4** Jewishness in American superhero comics
- 9-26 *Batman* and *Superman* (selections)
- 9-28 *X-Men* and *Spiderman* (selections)
- Week 5** Aliens and cyborgs as allegory
- 10-3 *People of Color Destroy Science Fiction* (selections)
Darko Suvin, “Cognitive Estrangement”
- 10-5 *People of Color Destroy Science Fiction* (selections)
Donna Haraway, “The Cyborg Manifesto”

- Week 6** Slave narratives
- 10-10 Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
- 10-12 Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
PAPER #1 DUE
- Week 7** Afro-futurism in literature
- 10-17 FALL BREAK
- 10-19 *People of Color Destroy Science Fiction* (selections)
- Week 8** Afro-futurism in literature
- 10-24 Samuel R. Delany, “The Star Pit”
- 10-26 Nnedi Okorafor, “Binti”
- Week 9** Afro-futurism in music and visual arts
- 10-31 Lyrics and music videos from Sun-Ra and Janelle Monae
- 11-2 [Visit the websites of these eight artists and come to class prepared to discuss their works](#)
- Week 10** Indigenous voices
- 11-7 Grace L. Dillon (ed.), *Walking the Clouds* (selections)
- 11-9 Grace L. Dillon (ed.), *Walking the Clouds* (selections)
PAPER #2 DUE
- Week 11** Borderlands
- 11-14 Ernest Hogan, *High Aztech*
- 11-16 Ernest Hogan, *High Aztech*

- Week 12** Global contexts for American science fiction films
- 11-21 Kyle Buchanon, “Why Won’t Hollywood Let Us See Our Best Black Actors?”
- 11-23 THANKSGIVING BREAK
- Week 13** Manga, anime, and cyberpunk
- 11-28 Masamune Shirow, *Ghost in the Shell* chapters 7-10
- 11-30 William Gibson, “The Future Perfect”
FILM REVIEW DUE
- Week 14** Translating languages and cultures
- 12-5 Alyssa Wong, “Natural Skin”; Ted Chiang, “Story of your Life”
- 12-7 Ken Liu, “The Paper Menagerie”
- Week 15** Conclusion
- 12-12 Joseph Allen Hill, “The Venus Effect”
PAPER #3 DUE
- Final exam

Reading Quiz Rubric

		2.5	1.5	0
Question #1 Readings	Accuracy	Description of the readings is accurate and detailed, showing clear evidence of close, attentive reading.	Description of the readings is accurate, but fairly general, showing evidence of reading but not necessarily attentiveness.	Description of the readings contains inaccuracies and it is not clear if the reading was completed.
	Thoughtfulness	Answer to the question shows originality and presents an interpretation that could be developed into a paper thesis.	Answer to the question shows some effort at interpretation, but is not particularly original and does not have the potential to develop into a paper thesis.	Answer to the question does not present an interpretation, only description.
Question #2 Lecture/ Discussion	Accuracy	Description of the class discussion is accurate and detailed, showing clear evidence of close, attentive listening.	Description of the class discussion is accurate, but fairly general, showing evidence of listening but not necessarily attentiveness.	Description of the class discussion contains inaccuracies.
	Thoughtfulness	Answer to the question shows originality and builds on the class discussion to present a unique take on the topic.	Answer to the question shows some originality but mostly repeats what was said in class.	Answer to the question does not show originality and only repeats what was said in class.

Paper #1: Definitions and Histories of Science Fiction

Option 1: Find a literary theorist's definition of science fiction as a genre or a definition of a feature of the genre (such as Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement). Then select one of the novellas or short stories we have read and analyze how it relates to the theorist's definition. Does the theoretical definition illuminate something about the story? Does a close reading of the story refute the theoretical definition? Does the story complicate the theorist's definition? Is the theoretical definition useful to an interpretation of the story in some ways but not useful in other ways? Note, do not try to answer all of these questions--instead, use these questions to find your main claim about the relationship between the theoretical definition and the story.

Option 2: Find a literary historian's account of science fiction's history as a genre (such as Brian Aldiss's *Trillion Year Spree*). Then select one of the novellas or short stories we have read and analyze how it fits the history as the historian presents it. Does the context that the historian provides illuminate something about the story? Does a close reading of the story refute the historian's claim? Does the story complicate the history? Is the history useful to an interpretation of the story in some ways but not useful in other ways? Note, as with option 1, do not try to answer all of these questions--instead, use these questions to find your main claim about the relationship between the history and the story.

Begin your paper by quoting and/or summarizing the theorist or historian to whom you are responding. Then provide a clear thesis statement making a claim about the relationship between the story you are analyzing and the theorist's/historian's claim. The majority of the body of the paper should provide a close reading of the story, but the paper should make further reference to the theorist or historian as necessary. The paper should also quote or paraphrase at least one other secondary source in addition to the theorist or historian to whom you are responding. This second secondary source can be another theorist or historian, a critic who has interpreted the story or other stories by the author, or any other relevant scholarly book or article.

The paper should cite all references to both the story and the secondary sources using MLA formatting and should include a list of works cited at the end.

Length: 5 pages, not including works cited.

Note: A bibliography of potential theoretical and historical sources will be provided.

Paper #2: Comparative Analysis of Afrofuturist Artists

Select works by two of the Afrofuturist artists whom we have discussed and compare them. Formulate a thesis that makes a claim about how analyzing the two works alongside one another deepens our understanding of one or both works, or of afrofuturism/science fiction more generally. The works you examine may be two works of fiction, two songs, two works of visual art, or a combination of works from two different media. They may be works that we discussed in class or different works by the same artists.

You can compare the two works with regard to any aspect. Some possibilities include:

- The legacy of slavery
- Queer sexualities
- Depictions of nature
- Images of Africa
- Bodies and embodiment
- Uses of technology
- Etc.

Generally speaking, the more narrowly you focus your comparison, the more in depth you can develop your analysis, which will result in a more insightful paper.

Incorporate at least two secondary sources in your paper. These may be works of history, literary/artistic/cultural theory, or criticism. You may either quote from or paraphrase these secondary sources, as appropriate. However, the majority of the paper should focus on interpretation of the two primary sources. When analyzing fiction or songs, the paper should include quotations from the stories or songs and close read the language of those quotations; when analyzing visual art, the paper should include detailed descriptions of the visual elements being analyzed and an interpretation of their meaning.

The paper should cite all references to both the primary sources and the secondary sources using MLA formatting and should include a list of works cited at the end.

Length: 5 pages, not including works cited.

Paper #3: Manifesto

This is your opportunity to write your own manifesto in the style of those that we have read by Donna Haraway and Nalo Hopkinson and Kristine Ong Muslim. Unlike other genres of academic writing, a manifesto affords writers the opportunity to make bold, ambitious claims. Develop a broad argument about the state of contemporary science fiction or science fiction's place in American history or culture. That argument should still be grounded in close analyses of multiple works, including works by at least three authors about whom you have not previously written. Additionally, you should refer to at least two secondary sources. As with the previous papers, these may be works of history, literary/artistic/cultural theory, or criticism. As with the previous papers, the paper should largely be devoted to close analysis of the primary sources. However, creativity is encouraged, and I recommend coming to me with any questions or ideas you may have about how to develop your argument--this assignment is deliberately open-ended.

The paper should cite all references to both the story and the secondary sources using MLA formatting and should include a list of works cited at the end.

Length: 6 pages, not including works cited.

Film Review

Select a recent or classic science fiction film and write a review of the film that evaluates it on the basis of how it handles one or more of the themes that we have discussed in class. Begin the review with a brief, clear summary of the film, and provide a clear argument that assesses the film's merits (or lack thereof). Develop that argument by analyzing at least one specific scene in detail, explaining how that scene illustrates the film's strengths and/or weaknesses.

You may refer either to other works that we have looked at in class or to secondary sources if doing so will help your argument, but no sources are required other than the film itself. All references should be cited using MLA formatting, and the paper should include a list of works cited at the end.

Length: 1.5 - 2 pages, not including works cited.

Note: some example film reviews will be provided.