

Dr. George S. Diamond  
Fall, 2009

Zinzendorf 37 - 861-1391  
M-W-F 1-2 PM & T 11:00-Noon  
And By Appointment

English 261 Prophets of Doom and Gloom?:  
Science Fiction, Science Fact, and the Contemporary World

I. Although creators of science fiction are often recognized for their predictions of events and technological developments, more important has been their role as prophets and their dire warnings about the dangers of the stark shape of the world to come, a world in which science and technology may very well undermine human values. Many believe that this process is already well under way. The purpose of this course is to gain an understanding of the scientific and technological innovations that define and shape our world and study writers such as Huxley, Orwell, Vonnegut, and others as well as significant sci-fi films to comprehend the nature of their warnings and attempt to formulate a humane and civilized response to the forces shaping and, in many cases, afflicting the contemporary world.

The essence of this course is not a mere comparison of the predictions of sc-fi writers and the reality of the contemporary world but an exploration of the world envisioned by some of the great minds of science fiction and the world in which we actually live. On the one hand, we may discover that the situation is not as dire as we have been led to believe. On the other, we may discover that some of the darker visions of these creative artists are all too real, and our task is to discover what we can do to mitigate and even avert these dark visions.

Although science fiction writers explore many areas of investigation, on earth and in the heavens, and many types of interrelationships among varieties of beings, the focus here will be those areas of science and technology that have direct influence on contemporary life. This course will focus on the following eleven topics or subjects\*:

- (1) The Miracles of Modern Medicine: I never met a cyborg I didn't like.
- (2) Artificial Reproduction: Taking the guesswork, and maybe the fun, out of making babies.
- (3) Modern Media I: From the wireless to the wi-fi.
- (4) Modern Media II: The computer-modern marvel or H.A.L.'s revenge.
- (5) Automation: Does a robot take coffee breaks?
- (6) Civil Liberties (including Privacy): Big Brother is watching (& maybe listening too!)

- (7) Globalization: The global village and its discontents—is the world really flat?
- (8) Ecology & Global Warming; Is the "silent spring" screaming at us already?
- (9) Energy: When will the oil run out?
- (10) Terrorism & Violence: Who let the dogs out? Is anyone safe anymore?
- (11) The Nuclear Age: Hope for the future or the Ultimate (and Final) High?

\*Students are welcome to suggest other topics not covered among the eleven identified above as long as such topics have a direct connection to contemporary science and technology.

II. Students will read science fiction short stories and novels and view science fiction movies to determine what creators of science fiction prophesied about the contemporary world. Through readings and class lectures, some by guest experts, students will gain background and understanding of contemporary science and technology. They will attempt to get to the essence of the works studied and measure how close these creators have come to describing the world in which we live and how we might respond to the challenges they present in their works.

- III. For appropriate participation and credit, students must:
- a. read and view\*\* the assigned works, participate in class discussions, and participate in three graded panel presentations—one interpreting a sc-fi novel, one interpreting a film, and one on some aspect of contemporary life as it relates to the works of science fiction;  
\*\*all films will be available on a Blackboard course shell, and can be viewed at the convenience of the student.
  - b. maintain a journal of twenty pages on material related to aspects of the course. The journal will be collected and graded during the term;
  - c. take two essay examinations, a mid-term written outside of class on a selected aspect of science and technology, and a final written in class on an original interpretation of one or more short story, novel or film. The outline for this examination is prepared in advance;
  - d. write one five page term paper on some aspect of contemporary life as it relates to the works of science fiction, as you identify and understand it.

IV. The grade for the course will be determined by a formula that includes the papers and the oral presentations, as follows:

three panels, journal, and paper, 14% each. The mid-term and final, 15% each.

V. Attendance policy for English 291 is based upon the attendance statement in the Moravian College Catalog. Read, sign, and submit the attendance contract.

VI. All students are expected to adhere to the revised policy on Academic Honesty that appears in the Student Handbook and Moravian College Catalog.

VII. All students are expected to attend a lecture or presentation on the subject of the course, dates and times to be announced, or to view Earth 2100, an ABC TV program on the environmental future of the earth. It will also be on the Blackboard shell.

VIII. Course Films and Texts:

1. Preliminary Works, Selected Stories (distributed) & Film:
  - a. Ray Bradbury, "There Will Come The Soft Rains," 1950
  - b. Curt Vonnegut, "EPICAC," 1950
  - c. Harlan Ellison, "I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream," 1967
  - d. Joanna Russ, "When It Changed," 1972
  - e. *Film: METROPOLIS, 1927*
2. Novels:
  1. Huxley, Aldous BRAVE NEW WORLD, 1932
  2. Orwell, George 1984, 1949
  3. Dick, Philip K, DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP, 1968
  4. Vonnegut, Kurt, Jr. BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS, 1973
  5. Gibson, William NEUROMANCER, 1984
  6. Atwood, Margaret ORYX AND CRAKE, 2003
3. Films:
  - a. *DR, STRANGELOVE, 1964*
  - b. *SECONDS, 1966*
  - c. *SLEEPER, 1973*
  - d. *NETWORK, 1976*
  - e. *ROAD WARRIOR, 1982*
  - f. *BRAZIL, 1985*

IX. Selected Resource Material:

\*on library reserve

1. Carson, Rachel, SILENT SPRING, 1962\*

3. Friedman Thomas, THE WORLD IS FLAT, 2005\*
4. Haraway, Donna, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century" 1991\*
5. Langone, John, THE NEW HOW THINGS WORK: From Lawn Mowers to Surgical Robots & Everything in Between, 2004\*
6. McMahon, Kevin, MCLUHAN'S WAKE,(Video), 2003\*
9. Rabkin, Eric, FLIGHTS OF FANCY: Armed Conflict in Science Fiction and Fantasy,1993\*
10. Rabkin, Eric, COORDINATES: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy, 1987\*
11. Rabkin, Eric, MARS: A Tour of the Human Imagination, 2005\*
12. Rabkin, Eric, SCIENCE FICTION: History, Science, Vision, 1977\*
13. Rabkin, Eric, MINDSCAPES: The Geographies of Imagined Worlds, 1989\*
14. Rabkin, Eric, SHADOWS OF THE MAGIC LAMP: Fantasy and Science Fiction in Film, 1985\*
15. Rabkin, Eric, NO PLACE ELSE: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction, 1983\*
16. Rabkin, Eric, STORM WARNINGS: Science Fiction Confronts the Future, 1987\*
17. Rabkin, Eric, HARD SCIENCE FICTION, 1986\*
18. Science Times, NEW YORK TIMES, (published every Tuesday);
19. Terrance, G. W., MCLUHAN FOR BEGINNERS, 1997\*
20. Toffler, Alvin, CREATING A NEW CIVILIZATION, 1994\*
21. Toffler, Alvin, FUTURE SHOCK, 1970\*

#### IV. Useful Websites:

Epic USA Patriot Act Page:

<http://www.epic.org/privacy/terrorism/usapatriot/>

Science Fiction & Fantasy Films: Books & Articles in the U C Berkeley Library

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/scifbib.html>

Science Fiction Resource Guide

<http://www.sflovers.org/SFRG/>

Science Fiction Studies: Chronological bibliography of Science Fiction Criticism

<http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/biblio.htm>

<http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/index.htm>

The J. Wayne & Elsie M. Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction

<http://www.ku.edu/~sfcenter/>

The Ultimate Science Fiction Web Guide:

<http://www.magicdragon.com/ultimateSF/>

Top Science Fiction Books & Films

<http://home.austarnet.com.au/petersykes/topscfi/>

USA Patriot Act:

<http://www.epic.org/privacy/terrorism/hr3162.html>

CLASS MEETINGS:

1. M Au 31 Course Introduction; "To Boldly Go"—*Star Trek: The Next Generation*; Toward A Definition of Science Fiction.
2. W Sp 2 Toward an understanding of modern science and technology
3. F Sp 4 The "futurist" and the "science fictionist"—shall the twain ever meet?
4. W Sp 9 (2) Artificial Reproduction: Taking the guesswork, and maybe the fun, out of making babies, Dr. Karen Kurvink.
5. F Sp 11 (1) The Miracles of Modern Medicine: I never met A cyborg I didn't like, Dr. Florence Kimball.
6. M Sp 14 (3) Modern Media I: From the wireless to wi-fi, Dr. Deborah Wetcher-hendricks.
7. W Sp 16 (10) Terrorism & Violence in General: Who let the dogs out? Is anyone safe anymore?, Dr. Khristina Haddad
8. F Sp 18 (7) Globalization: The global village and its discontents—is the world really flat? Dr. James West.
9. M Sp 21 (9) Energy: When will the oil run out?, Dr. Carl Salter.
10. W Sp 23. (4) Modern Media II: The computer—modern marvel or H.A.L.'s revenge, Dr. James Green.
11. F Sp 25 (6) Civil Liberties (including Privacy): Big Brother is watching (& maybe listening too!); Dr. Joel Nathan Rosen.
12. M Sp 28 *METROPOLIS, class discussion*
13. W Sp 30 (5) Automation, Robotics, and Artificial Intelligence: Does a robot take coffee break
14. F Oc 2 Stories, class discussion.
15. M Oc 5 (8) Ecology & Global Warming; Is the "silent spring" screaming at us already?, Ms. Keri Mullen.
16. W Oc 7 (11)The Nuclear Age: Hope for the future or the Ultimate (and Final) High? Prof. Joe Powlette.
17. F Oc 9 Organizing Film Panels
18. W Oc 14 Organizing Fiction Panels
19. F Oc 16 a. DR. *STRANGELOVE* Panel

20. M Oc 19 Mid-Term Essay Due
21. W Oc 21 1. BRAVE NEW WORLD Panel
22. F Oc 23 b. SECONDS Panel
23. M Oc 26 2. 1984 Panel
24. W Oc 28 C. SLEEPER Panel
25. F Oc 30 3. DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? Panel
26. M Nv 2 d. NETWORK Panel
27. W Nv 4 4. BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS Panel
28. F Nv 6 e. ROAD WARRIOR Panel
29. M Nv 9 5. NEUROMANCER Panel
30. W Nv 11 f. BRAZIL Panel
31. F Nv 13 6. ORYX AND CRAKE Panel
32. M Nv 16 Organizing the Contemporary Life Panels
33. W Nv 18 Organizing the Contemporary Life Panels
34. F Nv 20 Panel I
35. M Nv 23 Panel II; Journals Due
36. M Nv 30 Panel III
37. W Dc 2 Panel IV
38. F Dc 4 Panel V
39. M Dc 7 Panel VI
40. W Dc 9 Summing Up; Term Paper Due. Course evaluation forms.

OUTCOMES FOR ENGLISH 291 PROPHETS OF DOOM & GLOOM?

At the conclusion of English 291 the student should be able to

- Provide a basic definition of science fiction and understand the fundamental artistic and philosophical impulses behind its creation;
- Have a fundamental understanding of the effect of science and technology on the contemporary world;
- Provide a basic definition of futurism and understand how the futurist can be distinguished from the creator of science fiction;
- Demonstrate an ability to understand works of science fiction as literary or cinematic works;
- Have a fundamental knowledge of the variety and breadth of critical and philosophical works that analyze and interpret works of science fiction as well as the influence of science and technology on contemporary life;
- Demonstrate competence in participating in and working well with others in panel presentations, preparing effective oral and written analyses, and demonstrate competence in other writing assignments, such as journaling.

