
ANG1750

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

WEEK 1

- ▶ Introduction

Winter 2021

Prof. Michael E. Sinatra

ABOUT ME

- ▶ Available to chat after class (one-on-one with students);
- ▶ No virtual office hours but available by appointment;
- ▶ The best way to reach me is by email:
 - ▶ michael.eberle.sinatra@umontreal.ca

ABOUT OUR CLASS

- ▶ Our class will run live every other week, with two blocks of 45' (with a 15' break);
- ▶ Please use the chat to indicate you want to ask a question;
- ▶ Lectures will not be recorded;
- ▶ PDF versions of the slides will be available on the course website immediately after the course;
- ▶ Attendance is not compulsory...
- ▶ But strongly encouraged!

ABOUT YOU

- ▶ Please make sure your full name appears correctly in Zoom (you can modify that easily);
- ▶ You must be muted at all time (except when asking a question of course);
- ▶ Your camera can be on or off;
- ▶ This is when I pause the slide show and ask you to take turn presenting yourself briefly, indicating your program and year of study (i.e “I’m in the first year of the spécialisé in English”)

DESCRIPTION

This course will explore the intersection of fantasy and science fiction to engage with gender representations and popular culture. The latter has a fraught place in academe, with its potentially derogative qualitative label on works of literature and other media (the so-called 'high' and 'low' labels).

Students will be exposed to a range of writings from 1818 to the present in a critical framework that includes cultural studies, new media studies, and gender studies. Discussions will also include the parodic elements inherent in popular culture.

Finally, all the works considered in this course will demonstrate how popular culture constantly engages with contemporary historical and political issues.

Examinations will cover both literary texts and films. Students should note that some of the works under consideration in this class contain explicit scenes of violence and sexuality.

ON POPULAR CULTURE

“Popular culture” is part of a binary with “high culture.” And the binary seems to describe “high culture” in quite a specific way – the artistic cultural productions of a certain educated class fraction – and then leave the label “popular culture” for everything else that’s left over. Everything that isn’t high culture, by definition, becomes popular culture – even minority cultural practices that would be despised by the mainstream [...]; and the radical cultural practices that would reject and attack the mainstream (such as community media).

Alan McKee, ed. *Beautiful Things in Popular Culture*
(Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 207

ON POPULAR CULTURE

“Popular culture is not just easy and accessible. The best popular culture works on a number of levels, is easy and accessible, but also rewards detailed study and appreciation.”

John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Values*
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 208

ON VULGARITY

- OED definition: ‘the quality of being usual, ordinary, or commonplace; an instance of this’.
- From the Latin ‘Vulgus’, meaning ‘of the common people’.
- Now commonly refers to the quality of lacking taste and refinement, as well as profane or indecent.

ON SCIENCE-FICTION

“Fantasy is the impossible made probable. Science Fiction is the improbable made possible.”

Rod Sterling as narrator of the 1962 *Twilight Zone* episode “The Fugitive”

ON SCIENCE-FICTION

“science fiction is something that could happen - but usually you wouldn’t want it to. Fantasy is something that couldn’t happen - though often you only wish that it could.”

Arthur C. Clarke, The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke (2001) 3

ON SCIENCE-FICTION

“Scientific methodology involves the proposition that a well-constructed theory will not only explain away known phenomena, but will also predict new and still undiscovered phenomena. Science fiction tries to do much the same – and write up, in story form, what the results look like when applied not only to machines, but to human society as well.”

John W Campbell Jr, Astounding Stories (1947) 2

ON SCIENCE-FICTION

“Science fiction can be defined as that branch of literature which deals with the reaction of human beings to changes in science and technology.”

Isaac Asimov, "How Easy to See the Future!", Natural History (1975) 5

WORKS STUDIED

- Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (1818)
- William Gibson, Neuromancer (1984)
- Alan Moore and David Gibbon, Watchmen (1985)
- John Scalzi, Redshirts (2012)
- Margaret Atwood, The Testament (2020)
- François Vigneault, Titan (2020)

[Students can purchase the books at any bookstore, though I would recommend Drawn & Quarterly for Titans. Students can also purchase e-version of the books.]

WORKS STUDIED

- ▶ Ghost in the Shell
- ▶ Star Trek: The Next Generation: “Elementary, Dear Data” (2.3), and Star Trek: The Next Generation: “Ship in a Bottle” (6.12)

- ▶ The Matrix
- ▶ The Matrix Reloaded

- ▶ Groundhog Day
- ▶ Dr. Horrible’s Sing-along-Blog
- ▶ The Titans: “Titans” (1.1)

WORKS STUDIED

- ▶ Star Trek: The Original Series: “The Corbomite Maneuver” (1.11) and Star Trek: The Original Series: “A Taste of Armageddon” (1.24)
- ▶ Black Mirror: “USS Callister” (4.1)

- ▶ Black Mirror: “The Entire History of You” (1.3), “Nosedive” (3.1) and “Hang the DJ” (4.4)

[All of these films and TV episodes are available on Netflix.]

SYLLABUS

- ▶ 18/01: Introduction
- ▶ 25/01: Viewing Group #1: Ghost in the Shell, Star Trek: The Next Generation: “Elementary, Dear Data” (2.3), and Star Trek: The Next Generation: “Ship in a Bottle” (6.12)
- ▶ 01/02: Frankenstein
- ▶ 08/02: Viewing Group #2: The Matrix and The Matrix Reloaded

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- ▶ 15/02: Neuromancer
 - ▶ 22/02: Literary assignment #1
 - ▶ 01/03: Reading week / Viewing Group #3: Groundhog Day, Dr. Horrible’s Sing-along-Blog and The Titans: “Titans” (1.1)
 - ▶ 08/03: Watchmen
 - ▶ 15/03: Viewing Group #4: Star Trek: The Original Series: “The Corbomite Maneuver” (1.11), Star Trek: The Original Series: “A Taste of Armageddon” (1.24), and Black Mirror: “USS Callister” (4.1)

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- ▶ 22/03: Redshirts
 - ▶ 29/03: Literary assignment #2
 - ▶ 05/04: Bank holiday / Viewing Group #5: Black Mirror: “The Entire History of You” (1.3), “Nosedive” (3.1) and “Hang the DJ” (4.4)
 - ▶ 12/04: The Testament (Guest-lecture by Gabriella Machado)
 - ▶ 19/04: Titan (Guest-lecture by the author François Vigneault)
 - ▶ 26/04: Literary assignment #3

REQUIREMENTS

- ▶ 3 literary assignments: 75% (3 x 25%)
- ▶ 3 TV and film assignments: 15% (3 x 5%)
- ▶ One question for Vigneault’s lecture: 10%

QUESTION FOR VIGNEAULT’S LECTURE

- ▶ On April 19th, François Vigneault will deliver a talk to our class, with an extensive Q&A
- ▶ 1 question submitted by email by 6pm on April 15th / 10%

TV AND FILM ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ 3 TV and film assignments: 15% (3 x 5%);
- ▶ Contrast the endings of two episodes or film in a short piece (300-400 words);
- ▶ Choose from amongst the five opportunities to do so;

TV AND FILM ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ Submit your piece by **6pm the previous Sunday before our class meeting** (ie. Sunday 31 January for viewing group #1, etc.);
- ▶ **You cannot submit after the deadline** (i.e. if you want to write on The Matrix films, you must submit your piece by 14 February)

LITERARY ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ Literary assignment #1: Frankenstein and Neuromancer (22 February)
- ▶ Literary assignment #2: Watchmen and Redshirts (29 March)
- ▶ Literary assignment #3: The Testament and Titan (26 April)
- ▶ **2 questions** emailed to you via Studium @ 4pm
- ▶ you choose **1 question** and submit by noon the following day your 600-800 words answer

WRITING TIPS

- ▶ Always write about the action that takes place in a text in the present tense;
- ▶ Avoid using "I" or "We" phrases: your essay is about what happens in the text, not what you personally think or how "we readers" react;
- ▶ Answer the question;
- ▶ Avoid repetitions;
- ▶ Avoid contractions;

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- ▶ Avoid vague, general statement;
 - ▶ Avoid being too descriptive;
 - ▶ Length of sentences;
 - ▶ Respect the requirements (length of your answers);
 - ▶ Re-read your essay for grammatical errors (in particular tense based).

PLAGIARISM POLICY

Plagiarism – the stealing or “borrowing” of another person’s written work and passing it off as one’s own – is a very serious academic offence.

Plagiarism occurs when:

- ▶ the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work;
- ▶ an entire work (e.g., an essay), is copied from another source, or parts of the work are taken from another source without explicit reference to the author;
- ▶ an essay copies a sentence or paragraph of another work with minor variations.

Plagiarism occurs not only when direct quotations are taken from a source without explicit acknowledgement, but also when original ideas from the source are not acknowledged. A bibliography or “works cited” is insufficient to establish which portions of the student’s work are taken from external sources; formal modes of citation (i.e., page numbers and the author’s name in parenthetical references) must be used for this purpose.

Professors are required to report all cases of plagiarism to the Dean. The minimal disciplinary measure for cases of plagiarism is an F on the assignment, essay, or exam. Further measures can include an F in the course, suspension from the Faculty, and even the requirement to withdraw from the University.

If you are unclear on the definition of plagiarism or you are unsure about how to avoid it, please do not hesitate to ask me. **Ignorance is not a valid defence.**

Here is the version from the Université de Montréal, with a link to some resources for students:

Problèmes liés à la gestion du temps, ignorance des droits d’auteur, crainte de l’échec, désir d’égaliser les chances de réussite des autres – aucune de ces raisons n’est suffisante pour justifier la fraude ou le plagiat. Qu’il soit pratiqué intentionnellement, par insouciance ou par négligence, le plagiat peut entraîner un échec, la suspension, l’exclusion du programme, voire même un renvoi de l’université. Il peut aussi avoir des conséquences directes sur la vie professionnelle future. Plagier ne vaut donc pas la peine !

Le plagiat ne se limite pas à copier-coller ou à regarder la copie d’un collègue. Il existe diverses formes de manquement à l’intégrité, de fraude et de plagiat. En voici quelques exemples :

- Dans les travaux : Copier un texte trouvé sur Internet sans le mettre entre guillemets et sans citer sa source ; Soumettre le même travail dans deux cours (autoplégat) ; Inventer des faits ou des sources d’information ; Obtenir de l’aide non autorisée pour réaliser un travail.
- Lors des examens : Utiliser des sources d’information non autorisées pendant l’examen ; Regarder les réponses d’une autre personne pendant l’examen ; S’identifier faussement comme un étudiant du cours.

Site Intégrité: <https://www.integrite.umontreal.ca/>