

LMC 3214 SS2, SCIENCE FICTION: FINAL PAPER



Final Paper Overview

In lieu of a final exam, you will have an opportunity to write a 5-6 page, MLA-formatted essay that demonstrates your understanding of science fiction (SF) as a debated genre. In your essay, you will perform a kind of experiment that accomplishes these tasks:

- Identify a problem: Choose a work of fiction (book, short story, film, video game, etc.) that: 1) we did not discuss as a class, and 2) has some science fictional aspect—either strongly or weakly. Pose the question: Is this SF (or SF of a particular type)?
- Form a hypothesis about the work being SF or not.
- Choose data for testing your hypothesis: Write about **specific** themes, examples, and scenes from the work that you choose.
- Test your hypothesis: Using at least two of the attached definitions from the list, argue for and against your hypothesis.
- Draw a conclusion: In your discussion, you should: 1) explain why or why not your example work is SF, and 2) build your own definition of SF and write it in your own words.

Your Choice of SF-related Fiction

You may choose any work of fiction that we did not discuss as a class that has some science fictional aspect. This means that it must have some scientific or technological element. It could be something that makes you think, “this is obviously SF,” or “this might not be SF.” The work that you choose to study can be a novel, short story, film, television series, video game, or music album.

Most students choose to write about something that someone else has made. However, you may choose to write this essay about a fictional work that you have made. If you would like to do this, you must: 1) pitch the idea to me after class this week, and 2) turn in a copy of your creative work—a short story, video, animation, video game, etc.—along with your final paper.

Paper Guidelines

Your essay should be 5-6 pages including your Works Cited list and it should be formatted using the MLA Style (reference <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> and the sample paper that I posted on T-Square).

Writing Strategies for Success

There are several things that you can do to improve your writing:

- Substantially revise your essay. This means doing more than simply running spell check and copyediting (though, those things are highly recommended, too). This also means giving yourself the time to rewrite your essay before it is due.
- Read your essay aloud to yourself to give your brain time to consider alternatives and new approaches.
- Bribe friends with coffee, cookies, and pizza to read and comment on your essay. Ask them to stop being your friend for 15 minutes and give you the brutally honest “Simon Cowell” response.
- Make an appointment at Georgia Tech’s first rate Communication Center for advice on improving your writing skills (<http://www.communicationcenter.gatech.edu>). Please note: the tutors there do not provide proofreading or editing services.

Grading

I will grade your essay holistically. This means that I will consider all aspects of the assignment: how well do you accomplish the tasks listed above, how rigorously and thoughtfully do you argue your points, how well formed is your conclusion, how well written is the essay in terms of overall organization, spelling, and grammar, and how well do you follow MLA style.

Deadline

Since this essay is given in lieu of a final exam, it will be due by the end of your class’ final exam period. I WILL NOT ACCEPT LATE PAPERS. However, you may turn in your paper early. Submit your assignment on T-Square. If there are any technological issues, you may email a copy of your assignment to me at jason.ellis@lmc.gatech.edu, but also continue trying to post your work to T-Square. **The deadline for your final paper is Tuesday, July 30 at 2:20PM.**

Definitions to Test and Build On

Below you will find a selection of science fiction definitions. Each definition includes its citation and it is followed by its Works Cited entry. You will have to use these properly in your essay and you will have to demonstrate that you understand what these definitions mean through your discussion. You may use other definitions beyond these listed here, but you will have to include a correct citation and Works Cited entry for those that you find.

Hugo Gernsback. 1926. “By 'scientifiction' I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision ... Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading—they are always instructive. They supply knowledge . . . in a very palatable form ... New adventures pictured for us in the scientifiction of today are not at all impossible of realization tomorrow ... Many great science stories destined to be of historical interest are still to be written ... Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but progress as well” (Gernsback 3).

Gernsback, Hugo. “A New Sort of Magazine.” *Amazing Stories* April 1926: 3. Print.

J. O. Bailey. 1947. "A piece of scientific fiction is a narrative of an imaginary invention or discovery in the natural sciences and consequent adventures and experiences ... It must be a scientific discovery -- something that the author at least rationalizes as possible to science" (Bailey 10).

Bailey, J. O. *Pilgrims Through Space and Time: A History and Analysis of Scientific Fiction*. New York: Argus Books, 1947. Print.

Robert A. Heinlein. 1947. "Let's gather up the bits and pieces and define the Simon-pure science fiction story: 1. The conditions must be, in some respect, different from here-and-now, although the difference may lie only in an invention made in the course of the story. 2. The new conditions must be an essential part of the story. 3. The problem itself—the "plot"—must be a *human* problem. 4. The human problem must be one which is created by, or indispensably affected by, the new conditions. 5. And lastly, no established fact shall be violated, and, furthermore, when the story requires that a theory contrary to present accepted theory be used, the new theory should be rendered reasonably plausible and it must include and explain established facts as satisfactorily as the one the author saw fit to junk. It may be far-fetched, it may seem fantastic, but it must *not* be at variance with observed facts, i.e., if you are going to assume that the human race descended from Martians, then you've *got* to explain our apparent close relationship to terrestrial anthropoid apes as well" (Heinlein 17).

Heinlein, Robert. "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction." *Of Worlds Beyond: The Science of Science-Fiction Writing*. Ed. Lloyd Arthur Eshbach. Reading, PA: Fantasy Press, 1947. 11-19. Print.

John W. Campbell, Jr. 1947. "To be science fiction, not fantasy, an honest effort at prophetic extrapolation from the known must be made. Ghosts can enter science fiction—if they're logically explained but not if they are simply the ghosts of fantasy. Prophetic extrapolation can derive from a number of different sources, and apply in a number of fields. Sociology, psychology, and parapsychology are, today, not true sciences: therefore instead of forecasting future results of applications of sociological science of today, we must forecast the development of a science of sociology" (91).

"Campbell, Jr., John W. "The Science of Science Fiction Writing." *Of Worlds Beyond: The Science of Science-Fiction Writing*. Ed. Lloyd Arthur Eshbach. Reading, PA: Fantasy Press, 1947. 89-101. Print.

John W. Campbell, Jr. 1947. "Scientific methodology involves the proposition that a well-constructed theory will not only explain every known phenomenon, 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" (Campbell 12).

Campbell, John W., Jr. "Introduction." *Venus Equilateral*. George O. Smith. New York: Garland Publishing, 1975. 10-14. Print.

Kingsley Amis. 1960. "Science fiction is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extra-terrestrial in origin" (Amis 8).

Amis, Kingsley. *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction*. New York: Harcourt, 1960. Print.

Rod Serling. 1962. "Fantasy is the impossible made probable. Science Fiction is the improbable made possible" ("The Fugitive").

"The Fugitive." *The Twilight Zone*. Writ. Charles Beaumont. Dir. Richard L. Bare. CBS, 1962. Web.

Judith Merrill. 1966. "Speculative fiction: stories whose objective is to explore, to discover, to *learn*, by means of projection, extrapolation, analogue, hypothesis-and-paper-experimentation, something about the nature of the universe, of man, or 'reality' ... I use the term 'speculative fiction' here specifically to describe the mode which makes use of the traditional 'scientific method' (observation, hypothesis, experiment) to examine some postulated approximation of reality, by introducing a given set of changes—imaginary or inventive—into the common background of 'known facts', creating an environment in which the responses and perceptions of the characters will reveal something about the inventions, the characters, or both" (Merrill 60).

Merrill, Judith. "What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?" *SF: The Other Side of Realism*. Ed. Thomas D. Clareson. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971. 53-95. Print.

Darko Suvin. 1972. Science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin 375).

Suvin, Darko. "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre." *College English* 34.3 (Dec 1972): 372-382. Jstor. Web. 29 March 2012.

Brian Aldiss. 1973. "Science fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode" (Aldiss 8).

Aldiss, Brian. *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973. Print.

Kim Stanley Robinson. 1987. SF is "an historical literature ... In every sf narrative, there is an explicit or implicit fictional history that connects the period depicted to our present moment, or to some moment in our past" (Robinson 54).

Robinson, Kim Stanley. "Notes for an Essay on Cecelia Holland." *Foundation* 40 (Summer 1987): 54-61. Print.

Christopher Evans. 1988. "Perhaps the crispest definition is that science fiction is a literature of 'what if?' What if we could travel in time? What if we were living on other planets? What if we made contact with alien races? And so on. The starting point is that the writer supposes things are different from how we know them to be" (Evans 9).

Evans, Christopher. *Writing Science Fiction*. London, A & C Black, 1988. Print.

Damien Broderick. 1995. "SF is that species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing the epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supersession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal. It is marked by (i) metaphoric strategies and metonymic tactics, (ii) the foregrounding of icons and interpretative schemata from a collectively constituted generic 'mega-text' and the concomitant de-emphasis of 'fine writing' and characterization, and (iii) certain priorities more often found in scientific and postmodern texts than in literary models: specifically, attention to the object in preference to the subject" (Broderick 155).

Broderick, Damien. *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.