

# Rhetoric of Science Fiction

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Hours

Wed 12-  
14

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## Description:

In this course we will focus on the poetics of science fiction (SF) as a distinctive and creative genre of literary production. What makes SF different from other kinds of literature? Is writing SF the same as writing psychological prose, memoirs or poetry? What constitutes a great SF story?

We will consider theoretical works on the poetics of SF by Darko Suvin, Adam Roberts, Seo-Young Chu and others. We will read a selection of representative SF texts. But apart from theory, we will also engage in creative writing. We will try to shape our own fictional worlds that are both profoundly different from our consensus reality and yet also conform, in some way, to the spirit of science.

**Goals:** Understanding the narrative poetics of SF, acquiring analytical tools for reading and appreciating texts that tax one's cognition and imagination, and developing one's own creative abilities in this unique and intellectually demanding genre.

No experience with creative writing is necessary; however, to benefit from the course in a meaningful way students must possess both interest in SF and the desire to combine literary analysis with creative writing.

**Requirements:**

Class and workshop participation  
A midterm writing portfolio;  
A final portfolio  
Weekly blog post (to be explained in class)

**Resources:**

Web resources will be provided

**Evaluation:**

The final grade will be calculated on the basis of class performance (including blog posts) and the two portfolios

**Attendance:**

Attendance is mandatory. More than 3 unjustified absences will result in the incomplete grade.

**Conduct in class:**

Please respect your fellow students and conduct yourself courteously and professionally. No talking, eating, Facebooking or any other extraneous activity in class.

## **Syllabus**

Please note that other texts may be added and/or substituted

**Week 1-2. What is SF?**

Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (excerpt); Mark Rose, *Alien Encounters* (excerpt), Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (excerpt);

Joanna Russ, "Toward an Aesthetic of Science Fiction"

Robert Heinlein, "All You Zombies"

Gwyneth Jones, "Identifying the Object"

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:** "What does SF mean to me?"

### **Weeks 3-4. Creating a World**

Gregory Benford, "Real Science, Imaginary Worlds"

From *Medea: Harlan's World*

Greg Benford, "Exposures"

Ted Chiang, "Tower of Babylon"

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:** "A world of your own"

A workshop on world-construction

### **Week 5-6. Give me some action! Constructing a plot.**

Istvan Csiscery-Ronay *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (excerpt)

Ian Watson, "The Very Slow Time Machine"

William Gibson, "Burning Chrome"

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:** "Thought or action?"

Midterm portfolio is due

### **Week 7-8. Characters: human and alien**

Ursula Le Guin, "Nine Lives",

Gwyneth Jones, "Saving Tiamat"

Pat Murphy, "Rachel in Love"

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:** "If I were an alien"

### **Week 9. Point of view**

Gene Wolfe, "The Fifth Head of Cerberus"

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:** "First person, third person, or no person?"

## **Week 10. Ideology**

Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild"

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:** "Where do I stand?"

## **Week 11. Philosophy**

Stanislaw Lem, "The Mask"

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:** "What does it all mean?"

## **Week 12-13.**

**WORKSHOPS:** discussing and critiquing your project

The final portfolio is due

