

LITR 2110 – Introduction to Literature
Literature as Laboratory: Science Fiction in the Long
Nineteenth Century
Section | Fall 2023

Class Details

Instructor: Kari Daly

Email:

Office:

Office Hours:

Course Description

Arguably, evidence of science fiction can be found as far back the second century, but the genre didn't begin to proliferate until the nineteenth century when the advent of the Industrial Revolution and advancements in technology sparked the creative imagination in new ways. Nineteenth-century writers used the page as a lab space in which to imagine what was possible, as well as a space to consider the ethical responsibilities that advancements in technology engender. What do we owe to the lives we alter through science? How do scientific advancements challenge our notions of beauty and self-worth? What might our future world look like? In reading works by Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells, among others, we will consider the outcomes of these literary thought experiments.

The technological advancements and social upheaval of the twenty-first century closely mirror those of the nineteenth; examining how writers wrestled with scientific and ethical conundrums in the long nineteenth century can help us better understand the challenges of today's world. In this class, we will map and research the parallels between these early examples of science fiction and modern scientific innovation, as well as consider the ethics of our advancements. This will culminate in a final project in which you will create a reverse genealogy based on a text from our reading.

Course Objectives

In this course you will:

- Learn to recognize major works of nineteenth-century science fiction
- Develop a basic knowledge of nineteenth-century historical contexts
- Evaluate authors' use fiction as a lab space for thought experiments
- Analyze ethical concerns in nineteenth-century science fiction and apply these to twenty-first century challenges
- Compose a multimodal project based on your research

Proposed Course Readings

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

Edgar Allen Poe, "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall" (1835)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birthmark" (1843) and "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844)

George Eliot, "The Lifted Veil" (1859)

Jules Verne, TBD

H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)

Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (1899)

Jack London, *The Scarlet Plague* (1912)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (1915)

Karel Čapek, *R.U.R.* (1920)

Supplementary readings will be assigned on our learning management platform.

Grading

We are using what's called a **Grading Contract/Letter Grading Schema**. Please see a detailed explanation of this at the end of this syllabus. Major assignments include: a close reading assignment, a precis of an academic article, an annotated bibliography and funding letter, and a multimodal research project. In addition, students will be asked to keep reading journals and participate in discussion board posts.

Major Assignments

1. Close Reading: A close reading of a passage from the text we are reading
2. Precis: A detailed summary and assessment of an academic article of your choosing
3. Annotated Bibliography and Funding Letter: An annotated bibliography of at least 8 pieces of research, along with a funding letter that explains the implications of your research
4. Reverse Genealogy: In our final project, you will create a reverse genealogy of a science fiction text of the long nineteenth century. Identifying a scientific inquiry in one of the texts we have read, you will analyze this as well as detail the ethical considerations it engenders. Then, you will map out the descendants of this inquiry to our present day. Essentially, you will be following these ideas through history and explaining how they've morphed over time. How has the science born out? Are the ethical problems in the ancestral work the same in the real world today? How have we addressed these? Using your research and subsequent analyses, you will create a website that will be added to a larger Reverse Genealogy Archive. For your final, you will have to present and defend your analysis to your peers.

Course Policies

Electronic Devices

Because I want to encourage class engagement as much as possible, I don't like to restrict the use of electronic devices. In fact, you will frequently need to use devices in this class. I expect you to be respectful of our class time, however, and refrain from texting, social media, watching videos, etc. If you need to take a call or have a texting conversation, you should leave the room quietly and return as soon as possible. Anyone who is found to be utilizing devices for reasons other than those directly related to what we're doing in class will not receive credit for the day's activities.

Email and Communications

Please be aware that I frequently use the announcement feature in our learning management platform. You are responsible, therefore, for regularly checking your university email. Note, too, that I can only respond to emails from your official university email address. Finally, replies from me will probably not be immediate, but I will get back to you within 48 hours.

Mutual Respect & Classroom Environment

Throughout the semester, we will read texts and engage with media that introduce complex, diverse, and even controversial subjects. I want this class to be a space in which we all feel safe and comfortable to share our thoughts, ideas, and opinions. I want each of you to remember at all times that your thoughts and ideas are important and valuable. We must all consider that each one of us comes into the classroom with our own histories, experiences, identities, values, etc. and each one of us deserves respect, care, and thoughtfulness in listening and communicating our ideas in a shared space. I will never ask you to change your mind, but I will expect it to remain open in this course. That being said, I will not tolerate disrespectful or inappropriate comments in this classroom, and

those students found to be making such remarks will be asked to leave immediately and will forego participation for that day. If you need to leave the room during an upsetting conversation, you may do so. Please let me know if you would like to be given trigger warnings.

Multilingual Scholarship

This classroom is a multilingual and translingual space, and we speak and write across languages. I encourage you to speak to me about any concerns you have with language use (reading, speaking, and/or writing) in this course, and I encourage you to be respectful of your colleagues and their ways of communicating in this multilingual space. We can learn much across and through languages.

Ethical Scholarship

While studying and making use of the ideas and texts of others is central to the work we will be doing in this course, this must be done in an ethical and appropriate way. Please review and abide by code on academic misconduct (plagiarism and misuse of sources); you will be held responsible for understanding these materials. Plagiarizing the work of others—passing off someone else’s work as your own—is a very serious offense, and anyone found plagiarizing will fail the assignment or the course. Please let me know if you have questions about what constitutes appropriate use and citation of other people’s work.

Accessibility and Equity for All

It is important to me that all students have the tools and resources necessary to be successful in this course. I have worked to ensure that this class is as accessible as possible for all students, incorporating Universal Design in Learning, multimodal texts, accessible content, and flexible deadlines and schedules. I am dedicated to meeting any accommodation requests, whether or not you are registered with the center for students with disabilities. I am also always learning, so I encourage you to approach me at any time with suggestions or requests for ways to make this class more accessible.

Course Concerns

If you have any questions about the course or your final course grade, please see me as soon as possible. If that conversation is not productive, please contact June Deery, the head of the Communications and Media Department.

Grading Contract

Why do a grading contract?

So, why are we doing a grading contract this semester? For students, grades tend to produce a sense of uncertainty and anxiety. With our grading contract, you -- the student -- have more control over how you are evaluated in this course, as you can set the terms of the contract alongside your peers and you can make informed decisions about completing and submitting work in this course. Studies have found that contract grading tends to produce more interesting work, as students feel more freedom to submit creative or unconventional projects. Grading contracts also minimize systemic or personal implicit biases (e.g. related to language use, identity, political beliefs). In short, the decision to make use of contract grading for our course this semester was done because I think it's best for learning and for creating an equitable and just classroom.

You will be evaluated according to 4 components of engagement: class activities (almost all of which will require your physical presence in class); reading journal entries; scaffolding assignments; major assignments.

Major assignments are: close reading of a passage from a text; precis of an academic article; annotated bibliography and funding letter; reverse genealogy final project.

Proposed Grading Contract:

Grade	# Missed Class Activities)	# Missed Journal Entries	# Late Journal Entries	# Missed Scaffolding Assignments	# Late Scaffolding Assignments	# Late Major Assignments (out of 4)
A* (see more below)	0-3	0-2	0-2	1	1	0
B	4-6	3	3	2	2	1
C	7-8	4	4	3	3	2
D	9-10	5-6	5	3+	3+	3
F	11+	7+	6+	4+	4+	4

I've proposed a grading contract based on my values as an instructor -- that is, engagement (completing assignments) and consideration (completing assignments on time, when possible). I've also attempted to prioritize flexibility by giving room for error, tardiness, incompleteness, etc. while still making commitments to high standards for our course.

How does this contract work?

Using this contract, your grade is determined by the *lowest listed score*. So, if you have 0 in all categories but miss 3 journal entries, your baseline grade would be a “B.”

Please Note:

- You cannot pass this class without completing all 4 major assignments
- All assignments must be completed in good faith. This means that submissions which do not meet the criteria of the assigned work will not be accepted.

Raising Grades and Earning an “A”:

In addition to meeting the criteria above, you must earn 4 engagement points through extra activities to earn an A. Please note, though, that this is NOT extra credit – you must meet the criteria for an “A” in the chart above for any of this to apply. Acceptable extra activities include:

- Coming to office hours to discuss a project (1 pt; can only do once)
- Leading a class discussion for the day (2 pts if done alone; 1 pt if done with a partner; must sign up in advance here)
- Taking notes for the class (1 pt; can only do twice; must sign up in advance here)
- Adding a text to the Living Document on the Google Drive (1 pt; can only do twice; must be accompanied by a short description)
- Proposing changes to the grading contract: Think you can improve the grading contract? Have ideas for how to incorporate pluses and minuses in an equitable way? Email me a copy of your changes (and your explanations for them) by _____. You will pitch your suggestions in class on ___ and we’ll decide together which changes to implement (2 pts; can only submit once).
- I am open to suggestions for more extra activities!

This contract is negotiable on a class-wide basis. I will check in mid semester to see how we feel about it. If you have concerns prior to or after that point, please let me know and we can see if the class would like to renegotiate.

Key to understanding your grades in our learning management system

- ☑ = Assignment is complete
- ⚠ = Assignment is missing criteria (you have 1 week to address this or you will not get credit)
- L = Assignment was submitted late
- ✗ = Assignment has not been done; assignment was missing criteria and it is too late to complete*

*I will try to give you as much time as possible to complete assignments. However, some assignments do have an eventual deadline. For instance, it doesn’t make sense for someone to go back and complete a scaffolding assignment after a final project has already been submitted.