

ENGL 90s.04: Space after Sputnik: Science Fiction in America in the Space Age

WF 8:30-9:45am
Allen 318

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Office hours: W 10-11:30pm (location TBD) and by
appt.

“You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the same state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it.

From out there on the moon, international politics looks so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter million miles out and say: look at that you son of a bitch.”

-Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut describing the effect of seeing the Earth from the Moon

“The immediate reaction, expressed on the spot of the moment, was relief about the first “step toward escape from men’s imprisonment to the earth.” And this strange statement, far from being the accidental slip of some American reporter, unwittingly echoed the extraordinary line which, more than twenty years ago, had been carved on the funeral obelisk for one of Russia’s great scientists: “Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever.”

-Hannah Arendt on the launch of Sputnik in *The Human Condition*

While *The Martian* was trapping Matt Damon in space (again), NASA was telling us that there was water on Mars. On the heels of *Interstellar* and *Gravity*, not to mention the auditions for the Mars One project and founding of Virgin Galactic in recent years, space has been having a bit of a moment in both fact and fiction.

Science fiction has a long history residing in the complicated space between fact and fiction in ways that may be unique. In the United States, the genre formed around layman scientists and tinkerers in the 20s as a way to promote scientific knowledge and thinking among the public. It emerged through pulps and



“The Blue Marble” taken by the crew of Apollo 17 December 7, 1972. One of the most reproduced images in human history

periodicals, more of them under the direction of Doctors of chemistry and physics than editors of more traditional backgrounds. Its perceived relationship to invention often grants SF (particularly hard SF) the ability to predict or invent the future of science by extrapolating from known facts to develop exciting possibilities which may then direct the imagination of new generations of inventors and researchers.

Given this history, it is my intention that this course look at a range of science fiction texts with an eye not only toward traditional literary analysis but also to this history of science fiction as a practical or scientific intervention rather than a solely aesthetic one. We be asking what the novels and film from this semester might say about space travel, terrestrial social and political issues, or questions raised about scientific ethics. In doing so, we will also have to question the history of what science fiction is believed to do in responding or influencing these issues.

This last question may very well be at the heart of the course. Unlike other cultural or technological developments that SF explores, space travel represents not simply a new technology but a new era culturally. Some scholars compare the decades of the Space Race to the influence of the Industrial Revolution and certainly the moon landing is considered one of the most remarkable moments in American, even world, history. The reality of having been in space provides a concrete marker through which to consider SF's role. Prior to Sputnik's launch in 1957, mankind in space was something only found in novels and films. After, it became seemingly inevitable. If science fiction prior to the reality of space travel was about prophesy and inspiration, how do we talk about science fiction about space travel after Sputnik? After Apollo 11?

Course Objectives

- Explore connections between portrayals of science in popular media, literature, and film and real-world public opinions, ethics, and policies.
- Develop interpretive skills to apply to literature directly and understand the social, political, and cultural implications that come from it indirectly.
- Improve critical writing abilities to gain a deeper understanding of a range of texts
- Utilize workshops as a productive insight into one's own writing practice
- Improve ability to engage in thoughtful discussion
- Improve public speaking and presentation skills

Course Texts:

2001: a Space Odyssey
Ender's Game
Dawn

On Hold at Lily Library

Star Wars IV
Interstellar
The Martian

***secondary course texts will be available in PDF format on Sakai

Policies

Attendance

Our class will rely heavily on group work and effective class discussions of course material. As such, your attendance and participation in class is important not only for your own performance but the success of the class as a whole.

You will be allowed *2 absences during the semester*. After you have missed two classes each additional unexcused absence will decrease your final grade in the class by half a letter grade. *If you miss more than 5 class meetings without prior arrangements you will fail the course.*

In the case of extended illnesses or other extenuating circumstances that require that you miss class for an extended period *please contact me at the earliest opportunity* so that we can work something out.

Please also see the Trinity College policies governing STINF forms and excused absences:

<https://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/illness>

- Religious Observation: According to the University, students absent from class due to observance of a religious holiday are expected to submit a Religious Observance Notification Form to me no later than one week prior to the date of the holiday. Because religious holidays are scheduled in advance, course work to be missed should be completed prior to an anticipated absence, but please see me in order to discuss it on a case-by-case basis.

- Athletes: According to the university, varsity athletes are recognized as officially representing the University when they participate in intercollegiate competitions away from campus. Varsity athletes, please notify me of your status at the beginning of the semester, along with your letter from the Dean of Academic Affairs and the Senior Associate Director of Athletics. You are expected to submit a Notification of Varsity Athletic Participation Form to me no later than one week prior to your participation in *each* varsity athletic competition out of town. Again, because out-of-town varsity athletic events are scheduled in advance, missed course work should be completed prior to an anticipated absence, but let's also discuss the matter in person.

Disabilities Statement: Starting this fall 2016 semester, the Student Disability Access Office (SDAO) notified us that they will provide students with a copy of the letter that lists the student's approved accommodations. In turn, the student will be responsible for providing this letter to me. Your success in this course is important to me, so please schedule an appointment to meet and discuss how the accommodations will be implemented in class. Please bring your letter from the SDAO to our meeting.

Participation

I know that for many of you sharing your thoughts and writing with others can be difficult and stressful (it is for me too!), however it is a necessary part of participating in a scholarly community. Participation is not limited to speaking in front of the entire class (though that is a good goal to work toward); participation is also demonstration active listening, bringing your writing to group workshops, providing constructive feedback to peers, and engaging with small group assignments.

Technology in the Classroom

I understand that many of you (myself included) prefer to take notes or carry your readings on a laptop or tablet. I trust that you will use these resources responsibly and your participation will be evaluated accordingly.

Keep your phones on silent and put away during class.

Office Hours

I will be holding office hours after class on Wednesdays until 11:30.

You can also schedule meetings by appointment via email. When you email please include 2-3 possible days/times to meet and attach any relevant drafts or other materials you may want me to look at.

Email

You may, of course, also communicate questions or concerns to me via email, although understand that the assistance I can provide through email alone can be limited and meeting in person may be preferable. This is particularly true of writing feedback.

Please also note that the immediate delivery of email does not mean an immediate response! Though I will attempt to answer emails as promptly as possible do not count on a response within 24 hours (potentially longer).

When writing emails to me (or other faculty and professionals) keep in mind that you are still communicating with your instructor and I expect an appropriate level of professionalism.

Writing Studio

You can take your writing to the Writing Studio at any stage in the process for assistance from a writing consultant. I highly encourage that you take advantage of the Studio as having an additional eyes on your work is always valuable, even when you are just brainstorming. *Note that if you go to the center you have the option of drafting a note to me with the consultant about your work there. Please do so.* This will alert me to your concerns with your writing and what you have been working on so I can provide more effective feedback on your work (knowing that you had outside help will not negatively impact your grade.) There are also many handouts on different aspects of writing and other information that may be of use to you.

Grading and Assignments

Class participation: 15%
Weekly Responses: 15%
Presentation: 10%
Paper 1: 15%
Paper 2: 20%
Final debate: 25%
 Debate and group work participation 10%
 Argument brief: 15%

Weekly Responses

You will post a short response to one of the week's texts to Sakai. This will allow you to engage with the text prior to our class meeting and get the ball rolling on what we will discuss throughout that week. It will also serve as a springboard for your papers throughout the term and help develop a regular writing practice. **Posts are due the MONDAY before class by midnight.**

Presentation

Once during the term you will be asked give a ten minute informal presentation on an issue that you think speaks to course texts or recent discussions. This can be derived from public debates, scientific policies, historical events etc. that you think provide interesting context for the discussing the text at hand. The presentation should serve as a springboard for discussion that day and you should come prepared with 2 discussion questions to pose to the class. If you are struggling to come up with topic ideas please see me! A sign up sheet will be circulated early in the term. **During the week of your presentation you are not required to post a weekly response.**

Papers

During the term you will produce two 5-8 page analytical papers that argue for an interpretation of one of our course texts. Both papers will be workshopped in class by your peers and you will be expected to make revisions in response. *Please keep a copy of your original (pre-workshop) draft so I can see both as well as any written comments you receive.*

Final Debate

In place of a final research paper, we will conclude our course with a debate on some issue that has arisen through the course and will be selected by the class before spring break. In preparation for the debate each team member will prepare a debate brief, or summary of their research and arguments, though the team overall should coordinate to make sure that the briefs cover the group's major points. Your debate brief will be turned in and will form the majority of your grade as will your overall participation during in-class group work and the debate itself.

-Assignments must be posted to Sakai before class on the day it is due (unless stated otherwise.) On workshop days you must also bring a printed copy of your work.

-All citations of outside material must be in MLA format. Guidelines available at: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/>

-Assignments should be in 12 point font, double spaced, and 1 inch margins. *Make sure your name is on it!*

Drafts and Grading:

Drafts are an important place to air your ideas and work on building new skills on the way to producing a polished final piece. As such, drafts will *not* be assigned a letter grade. You will, however, turn in copies of drafts with the final product and your work will be assessed, in part, by the changes you make. *Failure to complete and turn in drafts or participate in workshops will result in a reduction of your grade.* If you must miss a workshop please contact me at the earliest opportunity.

Late Assignments

Major assignments will decrease by half a letter grade for each day that your work is late (an A will become an A- and so forth).

Weekly informal assignments will not count for your grade if they are turned in late, as their purpose is to prepare you for that week's classes.

If there are extenuating circumstances that impact your ability to turn in assignments on time please contact me at the earliest opportunity. It is much easier for me to help you out if you communicate problems to me before they become major issues.

Plagiarism and the Duke Community Standard

I will hold you to the Duke Community Standard (<http://www.integrity.duke.edu/new.html>). This extends to plagiarizing the work of others. We will cover when and how to cite sources in class and techniques for keeping track of ideas and source material during the research process. If you have any questions please ask me or consult: <http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism>.

Know that as an instructor I am required to report suspicions of plagiarism to the Duke University Undergraduate Judicial Board. Being found guilty of plagiarism can result in failure of the assignment, this course, and/or suspension from the University.

	W	F
Week 1	NO CLASS	Jan 13: Introductions etc.
Week 2	Jan 18: Kennedy and Obama speeches on space exploration (on sakai)	NO CLASS
Week 3	Jan 25 <i>Seven Beauties of Science Fiction</i> (on sakai) ; <i>2001 A Space Odyssey</i>	Jan 27 <i>2001: a Space Odyssey</i>
Week 4	Feb 1 <i>2001: a Space Odyssey</i>	Feb 3 Paper 1 proposals due <i>2001: a Space Odyssey</i>
Week 5	Feb 8 <i>Hidden Figures</i> (awaiting confirmation)	Feb 10 Paper 1 draft due ; film discussion and workshop
Week 6	Feb 15 <i>Star Wars IV</i>	Feb 17 <i>Star Wars IV</i> ; Paper 1 due on Sunday
Week 7	Feb 22 <i>Ender's Game</i>	Feb 24 <i>Ender's Game</i>
Week 8	Mar 1 <i>Ender's Game</i>	Mar 3 <i>Ender's Game</i>
Week 9	Mar 8 select critical readings TBA	Mar 10; Paper 2 proposals due
Week 10	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
Week 11	Mar 22 <i>Dawn</i> Paper 2 draft workshop	Mar 24 <i>Dawn</i>
Week 12	Mar 29 <i>Interstellar</i>	Mar 31 <i>Interstellar</i> Final draft due
Week 13	April 5 <i>The Martian</i>	April 7 <i>The Martian</i>
Week 14	April 12 Debate set up	April 14 <i>Star Trek</i>
Week 15	April 19 Group Work Time	April 21 Briefs due ; debate in class
Week 16	April 26 Debates continued. Course evals; wrap up	