

**ENGLISH 2232**  
**Contemporary Science Fiction**  
**MWF 12:35-1:25**

**Dr. Jason Haslam**

**Fall 2013**

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**Office and Office Hours: McCain 1193; Fridays 1:35-3:35, or by appointment**

Focussing on literature in English, we will read (and watch) science fiction from the end of the so-called Golden Age in the 1950s through to its most recent incarnations. This period has seen not only the development of the personal computer and the massive changes it brought to daily life across the globe, but also the development and use of more sinister technologies, from the obvious dangers of nuclear weapons to the ethical dilemmas of cloning. Likewise, the effect on the global environment of human technologies are being more fully explored. SF has had a significant place not only in responding to these developments, but in framing the debates themselves.

We will see, generally, the ways in which SF not only comments on the developments and implications of new technologies, but also how it creates fictional worlds that, in part, work as detailed comparative structures to “actual” societies. More specifically, we will trace some of the particular functions of SF language, as opposed to the language of realism, and how those functions make SF especially well suited to an analysis of social issues; in order to further this discussion, several works have been chosen that focus explicitly on language itself. This focus will help us to further our discussions of such social and cultural issues as class, gender, race, religion, and sexuality, to mention a few topics. Such schools and areas as the New Wave, cyberpunk, and postcolonial SF are among the forms of SF that will be analyzed, as are developments in film, television, and new media.

**Required Texts:** All texts, except the course reading package, are available in the Dalhousie bookstore. The course reading package is available on the OWL/BbLearn page for the course.

Samuel R. Delany, *Babel-17*

Suzette Haden Elgin, *Native Tongue*

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

China Miéville, *Embassytown*

Walter Miller, *A Canticle for Liebowitz*

**Required Viewing**

Screenings for the material below will be arranged, either during or outside of class time. If you cannot attend an out-of-class screening, you are still required to view the work. Films can be rented at most video outlets, including Video Difference on Quinpool Road (at the student’s

expense).

*Star Trek: Deep Space 9*, “Far Beyond the Stars” (Season 6, Episode 13)  
*Doctor Who*, “The Shakespeare Code” (New Series, Season 3, Episode 2)  
*Pontypool*

## **Course Requirements**

### Assignments

Midterm: 25%; in class, October 11

Essay, 1500-1800 words (approx. 5-6 pages, double spaced): 35%; Due November 18

Final exam: 40% (during University exam period)

### Assignment Descriptions

**Midterm:** This in-class test will be based on the readings up to and including the class before the midterm. The test will consist of two sections: the first will be a quick test of your basic knowledge of the texts we have read; the second will consist of doing close readings and interpretations of several short passages chosen from the works studied. This latter section is designed to test both comprehension and interpretive skills.

**PLEASE NOTE:** travel plans will not be accepted as an excuse for missing the midterm, or as a reason for rescheduling the midterm.

**Essay:** This essay will be an in-depth analysis of one or two of the primary works read during the term. You will choose your topic from a list handed out by the instructor. While outside research is not required, you may use up to three (but no more) secondary sources. Proper research techniques and citation will be discussed in class. Proper MLA-style citation is required for the essay.

**PLEASE NOTE:** proper citation and acknowledgment of all sources is mandatory: see the statement on plagiarism, below, for possible penalties that will arise from a failure to properly acknowledge *all* sources.

**Final Exam:** The final exam will consist of three sections. The first two sections will follow the format of the midterms, and will only cover material from after the Winter midterm. The third section will consist of an essay examining a range of works in relation to a particular topic; essays will have to cover material from both terms.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The final exam will be held during the official university examination period. Students **must** keep their schedules clear during those dates. Travel plans will **not** be accepted as an excuse for missing the exam.

## **Other Course and University Policies**

### **Late Penalties and Missed Assignments**

Formal written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated, or at the time and date indicated. Late assignments will be docked 5% for each 24 hours that they are late. For example, a paper due at 12:00 pm on Day 1 will drop 5% starting at 12:01 pm on Day 1, another 5% starting at 12:01 pm on Day 2, etc. Assignments will not be accepted after the marked, on-time assignments are handed back; any assignment not handed in by that point will be given a grade of zero. Marking schedules will be made clear in class.

In-class assignments can only be written during the time and date listed on the syllabus. Missed assignments will be assigned a grade of zero.

Only properly documented medical problems or other documented severe circumstances which are out of your control will be accepted as excuses for late or missed assignments.

### **Plagiarism**

All students in this class are to read and understand the policies on academic integrity and plagiarism referenced in the Policies and Student Resources sections of the [academicintegrity.dal.ca](http://academicintegrity.dal.ca) website. Ignorance of such policies is no excuse for violations. Any paper submitted by a student at Dalhousie University may be checked for originality to confirm that the student has not plagiarized from other sources. Plagiarism is considered a serious academic offence which may lead to loss of credit, suspension or expulsion from the University, or even to the revocation of a degree. It is essential that there be correct attribution of authorities from which facts and opinions have been derived. At Dalhousie there are University Regulations which deal with plagiarism and, prior to submitting any paper in a course, students should read the Policy on Intellectual Honesty contained in the Calendar or on the Online Dalhousie website. The Senate has affirmed the right of any instructor to require that student papers be submitted in both written and computer-readable format, and to submit any paper to be checked electronically for originality. As a student in this class, you are to keep an electronic copy of any paper you submit, and the course instructor may require you to submit that electronic copy on demand.

### **AASC Statement on Accessibility**

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests and exams should make their request to the Advising and Access Services Center (AASC) prior to or at the outset of the regular academic year. Please visit [www.dal.ca/access](http://www.dal.ca/access) for more information and to obtain the Request for Accommodation – Form A.

A note taker may be required as part of a student's accommodation. There is an honorarium of \$75/course/term (with some exceptions). If you are interested, please contact AASC at 494-2836 for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

### Netiquette

Sometimes, students may want to continue a discussion from class outside of the classroom itself. Until recently, such discussions were limited to face-to-face interactions with other students, friends, and/or the professor during office hours. Now, however, we have the digital tools to continue that conversation with the whole class, and even people not enrolled in the course. In this course, we have available to us discussion boards on the BbLearn/OWL page, as well as Twitter (where we can use the #DalEnglSF hashtag to group our conversations). Posting to these forums is not required; they are merely one of several means of communication.

These technologies can offer an exciting way to engage in meaningful conversation outside of the class, but they do come with certain risks: the nature of online interaction can remove certain social cues many people rely on to judge how others are reacting to their comments, which can cause problems, and even shut down—rather than open up—dialogue. This problem is exacerbated on such platforms as Twitter, which by nature are open to the public, extending beyond the people directly involved in the class.

In order to avoid problems of this sort, students are asked to follow the guidelines below, as well as use their common sense, regarding what they post:

- *follow the guidelines of the Student Code of Conduct*
  - rude or abusive behaviour will result in an official complaint being filed, as per the Student Code of Conduct; see [http://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/student\\_services/student-rights-and-responsibilities/student-life-policies/code-of-student-conduct.html](http://www.dal.ca/campus_life/student_services/student-rights-and-responsibilities/student-life-policies/code-of-student-conduct.html);
- *don't be condescending*
  - even when you disagree with someone, if you strive to find common ground then you can make your case to them more strongly than if you act like a know-it-all;
- *don't be creepy*
  - don't make overly personal comments, or discuss things you wouldn't bring up in a general classroom setting; statements that come across as clearly sarcastic or as jokes in person—because of context, facial cues, etc.—can register much differently online;
- *don't use profanity*
  - “swears” can sound much harsher online than in person, especially if they seem directed at a person (this is one rule that your professor may himself on occasion break, but he's had many more decades of practice...);
- *disengage*
  - if a conversation takes an unpleasant turn, disengage, inform the professor, and remember that twitter has a block feature.
- *be helpful, be informative*
  - some good behaviour: stick to discussions that relate to class; provide informative, on-point links; ask questions! These are what such forums are for!

## Reading and Course Schedule

**NOTE:** Read early, reread often!

	<b>I. Introductions; Science Fiction Definitions</b>
September 6	Introduction: Sciences, Fictions, Fans, Critics
9	Farah Mendelsohn, “Introduction: Reading Science Fiction”; Lewis Padgett, “Mimsy Were the Borogroves”; Philip K. Dick, “The Eyes Have it”
	<b>II: The Atomic Age Meets the Golden Age, or, It’s the End of Utopia as We Know It</b>
11	Robert Heinlein, “The Roads Must Roll”
13	Walter Miller, <i>A Canticle for Liebowitz</i>
16	Miller, continued
18	Miller, continued
20	Miller, continued
	<b>III: The New Wave, or, From Outer Space to Inner Space</b>
23	William Gibson, “The Gernsback Continuum”
25	Samuel R. Delany, <i>Babel-17</i>
27	Delany, continued
30	Ursula K. LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas”
October 2	Suzette Haden Elgin, <i>Native Tongue</i>
4	Elgin, continued

7	Elgin, continued
9	Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds"
11	MIDTERM
	<b>IV: Building the Posthuman: Cyberpunk, the Digital Age, and the Posthuman</b>
14	Thanksgiving; NO CLASSES
16	Phillip K. Dick, "The Electric Ant"
18	William Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i>
21	Gibson, continued
23	Gibson, continued
25	Class Cancelled
28	Candace Jane Dorsey, "(Learning about) Machine Sex"
	<b>V. Race and Postcolonial SF</b>
30	Greg van Eekhout, "Native Aliens"
November 1	devorah major, "Trade Winds"
4	Nalo Hopkinson, "Something to Hitch Meat To"
6	Derrick Bell, "Space Traders"
8	Screening, <i>Star Trek: Deep Space 9</i> , "Far Beyond the Stars" in-class screening
11	Remembrance Day; NO CLASSES
13	Lecture, <i>Deep Space 9</i> , "Far Beyond the Stars"
	<b>VI. Imagining Realism, or "Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?"</b>

15	China Miéville, <i>Embassytown</i>
18	Miéville, continued; ESSAY DUE
20	Miéville, continued
22	Miéville, continued
25	<i>Doctor Who</i> , “The Shakespeare Code”: in-class screening
27	Lecture, <i>Doctor Who</i> , “The Shakespeare Code”
29	<i>Pontypool</i> discussion (Film Screening will be outside of class; date and time TBA)
December 2	China Miéville, “‘tis the Season”; Review

### **Grading Scale**

Mark Range (/100)	Grade	Range	Grade
90-100	A+	67-69	C+
85-89	A	63-66	C
80-84	A-	60-62	C-
77-79	B+	57-59	D+
73-76	B	53-56	D
70-72	B-	50-52	D-
		0-49	F

Note: A “slash mark” (e.g., A/A+, C+/B-) on an assignment is weighted as the highest mark in the lower grade category (e.g., a C+/B- is weighted as 69/100). Also, D- and D+ grades are used for information purposes only; the University transcript does not include D- or D+ grades, so a final grade in the D range will appear as a simple “D”.