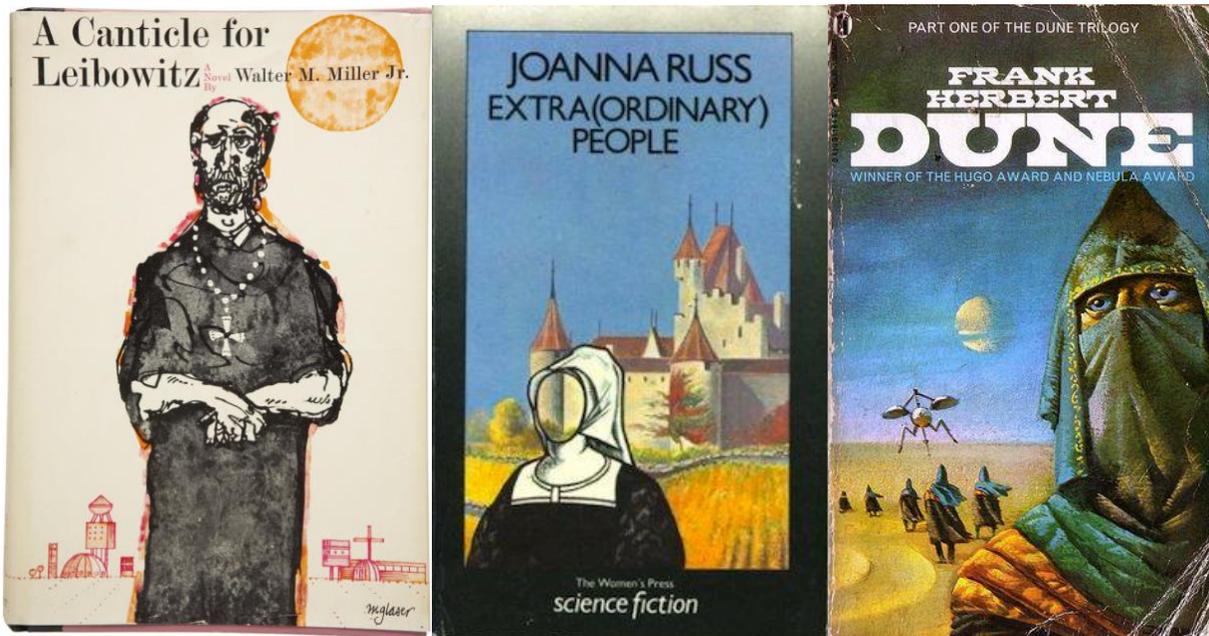


English 176: Medieval Futures

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Course Description

We usually think of speculative fiction as forward-looking. But it's no accident that the most popular modern sci-fi saga narrates the struggles of knights and monks "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away": even when our imagination projects forward, it looks backward, too.

This course traces the strangely central role of the Middle Ages in modern genre fiction and popular culture. We begin with the ways in which medieval writers themselves pioneered recurrent features of speculative fiction, from time travel to space exploration. From those early experiments in the fantastic and marvelous, we turn to modern novels and film that borrow form, content, and setting from the Middle Ages. To supplement our understanding of these works, we will read short excerpts from the medieval texts that inspired them.

Throughout the class, we will ask what role the past plays in fantasies about the future, and what that tells us about the attitudes of the present regarding religion, race, gender, politics, and the literary imagination. We'll think about form and literary history: how does the medieval past help modern sci-fi writers negotiate their relationship to their predecessors, the necessities of the market, and the competing demands of convention and innovation? And we'll try to figure out the role genre plays, too: specifically, is medieval sci-fi different from fantasy fiction, and does that difference really matter? In order to help develop your thinking, you will write two papers, as well as a number of short exercises and a creative assignment.

Course Format and Attendance

This class will meet synchronously via Zoom three times a week. We meet on “Berkeley time,” starting 10 minutes after the hour. Some weeks will involve a recorded lecture in lieu of a synchronous meeting; I will let you know about these substitutions well in advance. Check bCourses often: each week, I will update our course landing page with detailed directions on the week’s reading, assignments, and links to recordings and supplementary materials.

All class meetings will be recorded and posted on bCourses, but participation is part of your grade. If you are frequently unable to attend class because of work, family obligations, or time-zone issues, I understand—but let me know ASAP so we can arrange alternative opportunities to participate.

Required Texts

Please purchase or rent the following books:

- Delany, *Flight from Nevèrjon* (Wesleyan UP), ISBN: 9780819562777
- Willis, *Doomsday Book* (Spectra), ISBN: 9780553562736
- Herbert, *Dune* (Penguin/Random House), ISBN: 9780441172719
- Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (Bantam), ISBN: 9780553273816
- Strugatsky, *Hard to be a God* (Chicago Review), ISBN: 9781613748282

If you already own another edition of any of the above *other* than the last, feel free to use it (but you’ll need to adjust page numbers). You’re welcome to listen to audiobooks, too. The texts above will also be available via the course e-reserves. All other readings will be posted to bCourses.

Assignments for the Course

- **Short writing exercises – 10% each** Two short exercises in research and analysis.
- **Essay 1 – 20%** A short (4 pp.) critical essay.
- **Essay 2 – 35%** A longer (6-8 pp.) critical essay.
- **Curation project – 15%** Your own collection and explication of a gallery of pop-culture sci-fi medievalism, to be discussed in our final class meetings.
- **Reading log – 5%** *Very* short posts on our bCourses site, responding to the week’s reading, due by the end of the day Thursday on weeks without other writing due.
- **Participation and attendance – 5%**

Prompts and rubrics for written assignments will be posted well in advance. All work should be submitted via bCourses. Late work will lose a third of a letter grade each calendar day. I am profligate with extensions; email me *before the deadline* to ask for an extension if you need it.

Availability

- Don’t hesitate to email me. I will do my best to answer promptly: within 24 hours during the week, 48 during weekends and holidays. Please check your own email often.
- Office hours will be held via Zoom. Sign up on bCourses by following these directions:
 1. Navigate to the **Calendar** tab.
 2. Click **Find Appointment** on the righthand side of the page. You will be prompted to select a course. Choose this one; a list of available appointments should then appear. Feel free to email me to find another time if necessary. Don’t be shy! I want to talk to you!
- Finally: remote instruction is a trial-and-error process. Tell me if something isn’t working.

Academic Integrity

All papers, problem sets, quizzes and tests you submit in this class should be your own original work. All outside research should be properly attributed. **Academic dishonesty could result in a failing grade in the course.** If you *ever* have any questions about attribution, citation, or plagiarism, please don't hesitate to ask me! I am always happy to answer those questions.

Accessibility, Campus Resources, and Content

This class is intended to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible. If you have a disability or think you may have a disability, contact the Disabled Students' Program (dsp.berkeley.edu) to request an official accommodation if you have not already done so. If there are other concerns you need to share, please inform me as soon as they arise and I will do my best to accommodate them.

If you experience food or housing insecurity during the course of the semester, contact the Basic Needs Center (basicneeds.berkeley.edu). Other resources can be found on our bCourses site.

Finally, a content note: the Middle Ages and twentieth-century science fiction are both full of disturbing material. We have to talk about it. But if any issues arise or you feel uncomfortable about the content or tenor of a discussion in class, please let me know.

A Note about the Reading

On the following page, you'll find the schedule of readings for the course. The novels we'll read this semester are, in some cases, very long. We're going to cover a lot of pages each week. With a few notable exceptions, these pages will be fun, pulpy, plot-driven, and not particularly challenging. (The pages are smaller and the type is bigger than in academic books, too.)

Try to keep up, but don't fret if you can't cover it all: focus on the books you find most interesting and rewarding and dive deep on them; skim the others. I'll also try to provide weekly guidance for targeted reading.

Finally, however, some words of wisdom from Samuel Delany: "A lesson about reading...: do your share, and you can save yourself and others a lot of embarrassment."

Course Schedule

Please complete readings by the start of class on the day indicated.

Schedule and readings are subject to change: each week's schedule will be posted on bCourses.

- Jan. 20 Introduction to the course: medievalism, sci-fi, fantasy
Jan. 22 Before *Utopia 1: The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* and the [green children of Woolpit](#)

1. Monks and Messiahs

- Jan. 25 Before *Utopia 2: Guingamor*
Jan. 27 Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, 1-60; excerpts from *Rule of Saint Benedict*
Jan. 29 *Canticle*, 61-118; excerpt from Cassiodorus
- Feb. 1 *Canticle*, 121-83; short supplementary readings
Feb. 3 *Canticle*, 184-242; short supplementary readings
Feb. 5 *Canticle*, 244-338
Exercise 1 due
- Feb. 8 Herbert, *Dune*, 3-105; excerpts from Ibn Ishāq/Ibn Hisham, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*
Feb. 10 *Dune*, 106-204
Feb. 12 *Dune*, 205-324 (i.e., the end of Book One)
- Feb. 15 **No class – Presidents' Day (keep reading *Dune*)**
Feb. 17 *Dune*, 327-479
Feb. 19 *Dune*, 480-587 (i.e., end of Book Two); excerpt from Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*
- Feb. 22 *Dune*, 591-688
Feb. 24 *Dune*, 689-794
Feb. 26 *Star Wars*

2. Temporal Disturbances

- Mar. 1 *News from Nowhere*, excerpts; *Pavane*, excerpt
Mar. 3 Strugatskys, *Hard to be a God*, 1-42
Mar. 5 *Hard to be a God*, 43-88
Exercise 2 due
- Mar. 8 *Hard to be a God*, 89-151
Mar. 10 *Hard to be a God*, 153-231
Mar. 12 LeGuin, "Semley's Necklace"; *Star Trek TNG*, "Qpid"
- Mar. 15 Russ, "Souls," 1-38
Mar. 17 "Souls," 38-59
Mar. 19 Willis, *Doomsday Book*, 3-47
Essay 1 due
- Mar. 22-26 **Spring Break – get ahead on *Doomsday Book* and start thinking about your curation project**

3. Plagues

Mar. 29	<i>Doomsday Book</i> , 48-147
Mar. 31	<i>Doomsday Book</i> , 148-221
Apr. 2	<i>Doomsday Book</i> , 222-95
Apr. 5	<i>Doomsday Book</i> , 297-369
Apr. 7	<i>Doomsday Book</i> , 370-435
Apr. 9	<i>Doomsday Book</i> , 436-93
Apr. 12	Finish <i>Doomsday Book</i>
Apr. 14	Singh, "Delhi"
Apr. 16	Delany, <i>Tale of Plagues and Carnivals</i> (in <i>Flight from Neveryon</i>), 183-211
Apr. 19	<i>TPC</i> , 211-55
Apr. 21	<i>TPC</i> , 255-314
Apr. 23	<i>TPC</i> , 314-35
	Curation project due
Apr. 26	Finish <i>TPC</i> , 335-67; begin curation exercise presentation / discussion
Apr. 28	Curation exercise presentations / discussions
Apr. 30	Curation exercise presentations / end of class discussion
May 3-7	RRR Week
May 7	Final paper due