

English 2329

Weird Tales of What If: Science Fiction and Utopian Fiction as Social Critique

Instructor: Bridgitte Barclay Arnold

Course Information: T/Th 11:00 a.m.-12:20 p.m.

Office: 614 Carlisle Hall

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 8:00 a.m.- 9:30 a.m.

Email: barclay@uta.edu

Phone (Messages Only): 817-272-2692

Course Description: This course will cover American science fiction, utopian, and dystopian literature and film, emphasizing themes dealing with the imagination of better worlds and worse worlds, including post-nuclear apocalyptic societies and the modern post-9/11 world. Because science fiction and utopian/dystopian literature expresses what an author sees as possible, hopes is possible, and fears is possible, it is inherently a political and social critique. We will discuss the causes and effects of these critiques. Texts will include various novels, short stories, and films.

Required Texts:

Mizora: A Prophecy by Mary E. Bradley Lane

Herland by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Anthem by Ayn Rand

Walden Two by B.F. Skinner

Woman on the Edge of Time by Marge Piercy

Pattern Recognition by William Gibson

E-Reserves Readings

Selection of movies

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to do the following:

- To engage the literature with current political and social issues and vice versa
- To write with clarity to communicate effectively within the academic community
- To respond critically to course material, using synthesis and analysis

- To explain or describe the meanings of literary texts
- To apply different and appropriate critical frameworks to the analysis of texts
- To adapt writing for different styles or forms, including informal reflections, analytical essays, research essays, etc.
- To evaluate and respond to the aesthetics and philosophies of a text
- To explain culture's influence on literature, as well as literature's impact on culture

Course Requirements:

- Response Essays and Quizzes (25%): At the conclusion of each major text, you will write an essay in response to a prompt. These **two-page** essays will require thinking critically about the text itself, the historical moment in which it is written, and/or the text's relationship to other texts in class. These are formal essays that will require substantial support from the reading, should be grammatically and structurally correct, and in MLA format. **I will not accept any essays in this class that are not MLA formatted.** While these essays are grounded academically, they should also push the limits. Summaries and sheer reiterations of class discussions will not earn passing grades. The purpose of these essays is not only to show familiarity with the reading, but also to begin exploring questions and ideas in a way that both initiates and is drawn from class discussion. This is the place to test out ideas and share them with the class. Writing these will be good preparation for the course exams. In addition, these essays are intended to demonstrate your engagement with the text. **Using an outside source on these is unacceptable and will result in a zero.**
- Group Film Presentation (25%): Early in the semester, you will be assigned a group and will sign up for 30-45-minute presentation based on a movie that you choose. I will assign a short list to each group, and the final choice from that list is up to the group. The group will lead the class on their assigned day at the end of the semester, analyzing the movie in the context of utopian literature and scholarship, as well as in the context of current political issues. **Everyone in class will have watched the films out of class by the first group's presentation date.** This is the final project, in place of a research paper, and should be approached with the time, research, preparation, and academic refinement you would give a research paper. **Each group should have the following requirements met: 1) each member should present in some way, the whole group working to relate the film to relevant utopian texts, utopian scholarship, and**

political issues; 2) the group should engage the rest of the class in some way. I know what I find interesting about these texts, but having you present and guide discussion about what you are interested in makes the class more dynamic and creates more avenues of thought. **Be creative. Use your talents and strengths as individuals and as a group.** The point is to share with the class a depth and complexity to the film by sharing what engages you, and then to elicit discussion with critical thinking questions.

- Individual Film Presentation Essay (10%): Each student will write a three-five-page essay explaining their groups presentation's relevance to the course, incorporating the scholarly approaches to the texts and relating the film to two or three of the course texts and/or themes. The essay should have a thesis, topic sentences, and be a well-organized, error-free academic essay.
- Exams (40%): You will have two in-class exams that will be in essay and/or short-answer form and based on the readings up to the exam date. We will spend part of a class day reviewing midterm material. **You should take detailed class notes and keep up with reaction papers in order to be prepared for this exam.** You will be required to utilize all that has been covered in class, in your readings, and in-group discussions in a deeper, more complex way. The second exam will be comprehensive.

Note: Please be advised that it is your responsibility to retain all of your assignments until after you have received your final grade. You cannot formally challenge a final grade if you do not have evidence of your work.

Late Work Policy: I do not accept late work. You are given the syllabus on the first day of class with ample time to complete all work. If you must miss class on a day something is due, you can email it to me as an attachment. With that said, if there is an emergency, then you may speak to me about the possibility of turning in an assignment one day late with a letter-grade deduction.

Attendance/Late Policy: This is an interactive class in which attendance is vital. While reading the texts on your own will provide insights, the real learning comes through class discussion and lecture. Please be in class on time, ready for active participation. You are allowed three absences. Each absence over three will result in a one-point deduction of your final course percentage. The reasons for the absences do not matter, and you will not be able to make up quizzes, etc. For

ANY absence, you (the student) are responsible for acquiring information about the notes and discussion you missed. If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, you will be counted absent. Manage your absences responsibly.

Formatting and Presentation: All assignments should be in MLA format. We will review this format in class, and you can also see a writing handbook for guidelines. In general, this means that assignments must be typed in 12-point font (Times New Roman for this class), double-spaced, with one inch margins all around. The first page should contain a heading and title. MLA parenthetical citations and works cited lists are also required when appropriate.

Dropping the Course: If, during the course of the semester, you choose to drop this class, it is your responsibility to fill out the appropriate documentation and pursue the procedure for dropping a course.

Classroom Etiquette: Students in this class are expected to show respect for their classmates, instructor, and guests. Disrespectful behavior is grounds for dismissal from class. This will mean an absence for the day and a required appointment with me before the next class meeting. Also, please remember to turn off cell phones during class.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism: Academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. "Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts" (Regents' Rules and Regulations, Part One, Chapter VI, Section 3, Subsection 3.2, Subdivision 3.22). You can get in trouble for plagiarism—even if you do not intend to cheat—by failing to correctly indicate places where you are making use of the work of another. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the conventions of citation by which you indicate which ideas are not your own and how your reader can find those sources. Because I value originality and honesty, I find plagiarism especially offensive. Do not do it.

Student Success Programs: UTA offers a variety of student programs to help you connect with the University and achieve academic success, including learning assistance, developmental education, advising and mentoring, admissions and transition, and federally funded programs. Students requiring assistance academically, personally, or socially should contact the Office of Student Success Programs at 817-272-6107 for more information and appropriate referrals.

Americans With Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 93112 -- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans With Disabilities Act - (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens. As a faculty member, I am required by law to provide "reasonable accommodation" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty at the beginning of the semester and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels.

E-Reserves: Several of the readings are online and are accessible to you with the course password. To find the readings, go to the library's catalog, then the "Course Reserves" tab at the top. Select the appropriate "Instructor," "Department," and "Course" pull downs (usually, just selecting "Arnold" under "Instructor" will work just fine). You will sign in with your NetID and password.

Tentative Course Schedule

- Jan. 20: Introduction to the class and syllabus
 Jan. 22: Read Sargent "Three Faces of Utopianism" (e-reserves) and *Mizora* (Ch. 1-11);
 Quiz

Reproduction and Society

- Jan. 27: Read *Mizora* (Ch. 12-end) and race; **Due: Reaction Paper (Prompt: Analyze Vera's reaction to Mizora. If she sees the benefits of the society, why does she desire more, want to leave? Look at the text's ending specifically.)**
 Jan. 29: No class; Watch *Children of Men*
 Feb. 3: Discussion of *Children of Men* and Movie Group Presentation Selection; Due: Reaction Paper **(Prompt: Relate Children of Men to Mizora in terms of how reproductive issues impact society, and explain how you would categorize**

Children of Men according to Sargent’s utopian definitions. Is it dystopian, ambiguous, utopian?)

- Feb. 5: Read *Herland* (Ch. 1-5) and exploration and science; Quiz
 Feb. 10: Read *Herland* (Ch. 6-end) race and gender; **Due: Reaction Paper (Prompt: Analyze “cognitive mapping” in the text.)**

Post-World War Utopian and SF critiques

- Feb. 12: Read *Walden Two* (Ch. 1-8); Quiz
 Feb. 17: Read *Walden Two* (Ch. 9-17) and Watch *The Village*
 Feb. 19: Read *Walden Two* (Ch. 18-27)
 Feb. 24: Read *Walden Two* (Ch. 28-end) and behaviorism; **Due: Reaction Paper (Prompt: What is Frazier’s view of individual freedom, and how does it relate to his notion of the social sciences – behaviorism, in particular – and to his notion of how society functions?)**
 Feb. 26: Read “No Woman Born” (e-reserves) and Watch *The Island*; Quiz
 Mar. 3: Read “Day at the Beach” and “Created He Them” (e-reserves); **Due: Reaction Paper (Prompt: What themes do these short stories share, and how does the genre (science fiction/dystopian) impact the theme?)**
 Mar. 5: **Exam 1**

Movement, Identity, and Ambiguity

- Mar. 10: Read *Anthem* (Ch. 1-5); Quiz
 Mar. 12: Read *Anthem* (Ch. 6-end); **Due: Reaction Paper (Prompt: How does this text differ from the texts in the first half of the semester (type of utopia, movement, etc?))**
 Mar. 17: Spring Break
 Mar. 19: Spring Break
 Mar. 24: Read “Age of Prophecy”; movie in class
 Mar. 26: Read *Woman on the Edge of Time* (Ch. 1-4) and experience; Quiz
 Mar. 31: Read *Woman on the Edge of Time* (Ch. 5-9) and environment; Quiz
 Apr. 2: Read *Woman on the Edge of Time* (Ch. 10-14)
 Apr. 7: Read *Woman on the Edge of Time* (Ch. 15-end) and war; **Due: Reaction Paper (Prompt: How does Connie as a character impact your reading of this utopian text?)**
 Apr. 9: Read *Pattern Recognition* (Ch. 1-8) and *The Matrix* in class; gender
 Apr. 14: Read *Pattern Recognition* (Ch. 9-17) and *The Matrix* in class; space

- Apr. 16: Read *Pattern Recognition* (Ch. 18-32); Quiz
- Apr. 21: Read *Pattern Recognition* (Ch. 33-end); **Due: Reaction Paper (Prompt: Relate *Pattern Recognition*'s themes to *The Matrix*.)**
- Apr. 23: Presentations
- Apr. 28: Presentations
- Apr. 30: Presentations
- May 5: Presentations
- May 7: Presentations