SCI-FI: EAST and WEST  
SLAVIC 0660

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Office hours: Tuesdays 11-11:50 AM, Thursdays 12-12:50PM, and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course compares Slavic and Anglophone science fiction on page and screen. We will examine how a given culture’s dominant concerns are articulated in a genre popular in the East (i.e., Eastern and Central Europe) and the West (i.e., America and Great Britain). These concerns emerge in works that imaginatively posit “fantastic” situations rooted in spatial, temporal, and biological explorations beyond those currently verified by science. Based on a wide range of novels, stories, essays, TV shows, and films, we will discuss such topics as progress, utopia/dystopia, human perfectibility, the limits of science, gender, the nature of knowledge, and human/other identity.

Although the reading load for this course may seem heavy at times, the texts are interesting and enjoyable. Additionally, the longer readings are scheduled after breaks or weekends, and many of the longer books are preceded by film viewings to make it easier to keep up with the readings.

Comprising three credits, this course meets twice weekly and satisfies the General Education requirement in Literature and Foreign Culture (E. Europe), Regional [non-Western], and Comparative.

COURSE FORMAT

This course will be conducted as a combination of lecture and discussion, with films viewed in class as well as outside. Preparation is vital for meaningful class discussion, so keeping up with the reading schedule is imperative.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Students are required to:

1. Complete the assignments scheduled for each class meeting, and be prepared to summarize and discuss the material in class on the appropriate day;
2. Participate actively and intelligently in class discussions;
3. Take the three scheduled exams, as well as the regular, unannounced quizzes administered throughout the semester;
4. Write two brief (2-3pp) directed response papers on the specific topics listed below for submission by the respective due dates.

Attendance. Since attendance is critical to course performance, more than 7 unexcused absences will result in an automatic "F" for the course. If serious illness prevents class attendance, documentation of that fact is required in the form of a letter from a doctor, stating that, on the day and time the class meets, you were too ill to attend. This letter must be submitted on the day you return to class. I mean it!

It is your responsibility to find out from classmates what information was discussed or materials were handed out during a missed session. If you are experiencing special problems, please make an appointment with the instructor.

Make ups. Make up exams will be administered only in cases of emergency, and then in the form of an essay test. Quizzes may not be made up.

Grades. The final grade will consist of the following:

1. Three exams—45%
2. Quizzes—25%
3. Class discussion—20%
4. Directed response papers—10%

Class discussion. In the past, some students have received low marks for class discussion. In order to avoid this, be prepared to comment at least once a session, even if you feel unsure of the material. In fact, if you are confused, you should absolutely speak up. Intelligent questions also count as participation. Remember, this is a large component of the grade.

Directed response papers. There will be two directed response papers due during the semester. Each should be about 2-3 pages in length, typed, and should examine one of the following topics as it relates to a film we have viewed or prose work we have read in class during the weeks
covered by the due date. Outside material may also be examined, although such a choice must be approved in advance by the instructor. The first of these papers should cover some film or prose work covered in class before 2 October, 2003, when the paper is due. The second paper should cover material from class from 2 October until 25 November, when the paper is due. You are expected to keep track of the due dates yourself; no late papers will be accepted. However, papers may be submitted as early as is convenient, so it may be in your best interests to turn in your papers before the due dates. Each paper should deal with one of the topics outlined below:

1. Write a brief analysis of a character in the work you have chosen. Discuss the character, his or her motivations, and how he or she is affected by the science-fiction nature of the work.
2. Analyze a visual or filmic aspect of one of the films we have viewed in class. How does this technical component affect the tale being told?
3. Analyze a narrative aspect of one of the prose works. How does the author use this technique, device, symbol, perspective, etc., to tell the story?

Extra Credit. If you wish to improve your grade you may choose to submit an optional extra credit paper. You must outline the proposed topic to the instructor in writing (a paragraph will do) by Thursday, 23 October, 2003. The paper itself is due by Tuesday, 2 December, 2003. Again, keep in mind that the end of your semester may bring many due dates—I strongly urge you to write and submit your paper as early as possible. Extra credit papers should be 7-10 pages, type-written, with a heading stating your name, SSN number, the paper’s title, and date. Papers must be your original work, and may consist of research, a comparison of two works, or even a creative-writing exercise. As many as 10 points may be awarded for an appropriate paper.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

By remaining enrolled in this course, you not only agree to abide by the above stipulations, but also understand that the instructor will rigorously follow the rules spelled out in the Handbook on Integrity regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc.
READING LIST
The following books, as well as the required coursepack (CP), are all available at Hillman Library on reserve.

- Evgeny Zamyatin, *We*
- Larry Niven, “The Theory and Practice of Time Travel” (CP)
- H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*
- Stanislaw Lem, *The Futurological Congress, Solaris*
- Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild” (CP)
- Orson Scott Card, *Ender’s Game*
- Karel Čapek, *War with the Newts*
- William Gibson, “Burning Chrome” and “Johnny Mnemonic” (CP)

VIEWING LIST

- Forbidden Planet
- *La Jetée*
- *Twelve Monkeys* (clips)
- “The Simpsons: Time Toaster”
- *The Time Machine* (clips)
- *Sexmission*
- *Barbarella* (clips)
- *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956-clips)
- *The Matrix* (clips)
- *Total Recall* (clips)
- *Terminator* (clips)
- *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (clips)
- *Species* (clips)
- *Star Wars* (clips)
- *Alien* (clips)
- *Aliens*
- *Blade Runner*
- “The X-Files: Kill Switch”
- *Solaris* (clips)
- “The Tick versus the Big Nothing”
- *Spaceballs* (clips—time permitting)
Generally, films will be viewed in class; on occasion, however, you may be asked to view or to finish viewing a film at home. All the books and films used in this course are on reserve at Hillman Library, and most of the films may be easily rented in local video stores. You will be expected to come to class ready to discuss each film.

**UNITS OF STUDY**

1. **Introduction.** Definitions of SF in literature and film.
2. **Utopias/Dystopias.** Study questions: Why is man obsessed with a "better" world? Why are so many seeming utopias actually dystopias?  
   Read: *We.*  
   View: *Forbidden Planet.*
3. **Temporal Experimentation.** Study questions: Why is the future world so often envisioned as a utopia? What are the inherent paradoxes of time travel? Why are so many writers enthralled with time travel?  
4. **SF and Feminism.** Study questions: How does SF portray women? How does SF test the boundaries of gender roles?  
   Read: “Bloodchild”  
   View: *Barbarella, Aliens,* assorted clips.
5. **Space and Biology.** Study questions: What happens when humans cross the "final frontier" of space and biology? What makes us "human," and what makes others "alien"? What differences may be seen between Eastern and Western depictions? How does the context of a given work (time period, geographical location, political/ideological agendas) determine its expression?  
   Read: *Ender’s Game, “Burning Chrome,” “Johnny Mnemonic,” War with the Newts.*  
   View: “The X-Files: Kill Switch,” *Blade Runner, Solaris* (clips)

**Daily Topics and Assignments.**

August
T 26. Introduction to the course. Definitions of SF as a genre. Watch *Forbidden Planet*. HW: Begin reading *We*.

H 28. Finish watching film and discuss. Introduction to utopian literature and film. HW: Read *We*.

September
T 2. Discuss utopias/dystopias. Begin discussion of *We*. HW: Finish *We*.

H 4. Finish discussion of *We*. HW: Read “All You Zombies” and “The Theory and Practice of Time Travel” (both in CP). If you have time, begin reading *The Time Machine*.


H 18. Finish any lingering questions on Wells, begin discussion of Lem. HW: Finish *Congress*.

T 23. Finish discussion of Lem. Review and questions for the test. HW: Study!

H 25. TEST ONE (covering all material to date). HW: Begin reading *Ender’s Game*, since it is rather long.

T 30. Watch *Sexmission*. HW: Keep reading *Ender’s Game*!

October
H 2. FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE! Finish watching *Sexmission*. Discuss. HW: Keep reading *Ender’s Game*!
T 7. Feminism and SF. Clips from various films. HW: Read "Bloodchild" (in CP) and keep reading Ender’s Game.


H 16. Finish discussion of Ender’s Game. HW: Begin reading War with the Newts.

T 21. View Aliens in class. Finish watching it at home! HW: Watch Aliens, and keep reading War with the Newts.

H 23. EXTRA CREDIT PAPER TOPICS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY TODAY! Discuss Aliens. Questions and review for Test 2. HW: Study!

T 28. TEST 2. HW: Finish reading War with the Newts.

H 30. Begin discussion of War with the Newts. HW: Finish Newts.

November.


T 11. Discuss Blade Runner. HW: Read "Burning Chrome" and "Johnny Mnemonic" (both in CP).

H 13. Introduction to Gibson. Watch "Kill Switch." HW: Keep reading Solaris. Maybe re-read the Gibson stories to be sure you've understood them.

T 18. Discuss "Kill Switch" and the Gibson stories. HW: Finish Solaris.

T 25. Finish discussion of Solaris. SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE TODAY! HW: If you have chosen to write an extra credit paper, finish it. Also, eat yourself into a food coma.


December.

H 4. TEST 3.

No final exam! Enjoy your winter break!