

ENGLISH 2232
Contemporary Science Fiction

Dr. Jason Haslam

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E-Mail: Jason.Haslam@dal.ca

Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. We are all Treaty people. The Elders in Residence program provides students with access to First Nations elders for guidance, counsel and support. Contact the program at elders@dal.ca.

Focussing on literature in English, we will read 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 even more sinister technologies, from the obvious dangers of nuclear weapons to the ethical dilemmas of cloning and genetic alteration. Likewise, the effects 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. Science Fiction also plays with language and literary form in ways that can challenge readers of more traditional realist literature, or what science fiction author and critic Samuel R. Delany calls “mundane fiction.” These linguistic and formal experiments can add to the social and political dimensions of science fiction.

A note on the online structure of the course: This course is taught asynchronously within the regular term. In other words, we won't be meeting at specific days and times in the term, and for the most part you can view the material and work on your assignments as best fits your own schedule. But, assignments are still be due on certain days, and our discussions will take place on specific (but still flexible) days, both of which mean that as a class, we will move through the course at the same rate. This is why dates are given in the reading and class schedule, below. **Modules will be locked until you complete certain assignments in the previous module, and/or according to date.** This is to ensure that students build a foundation of knowledge before moving on to later material.

However, I recognize we are in an unprecedented situation, so **as long as you tell me in advance and we agree to a new timeline, I will not deduct late penalties from any assignments this term.** However, if I notice that you are falling more than a week behind the schedule, we will chat about it and about how better to support your educational goals. If we can't agree to a new timeline, or if you don't let me know you need one, then I will have to assign a grade of zero to missed assignments. Let's work together to ensure that doesn't happen.

Modules

To explore these issues, this course will be divided into 6 modules:

1. Introductions and Science Fiction History, Definitions, and Discontents
2. The Golden Age and the End of Utopia as We Knew It
3. New Waves: From Outer Space to Inner Space
4. The Digital Age
5. Expanding Universes: Afrofuturism and African Futurisms
6. Conclusions

Each module will consist of the following activities and resources

- **Lecture PowerPoints and Videos:** these will include module introductions, text and context introductions, and textual analysis, with most videos running approximately 20-30 minutes long, though some may be longer; you can pause them, remember!
- **Graded Activities/Discussion:** each module will include student activities and conversations on the Brightspace Discussion Board. The activities are designed to further both skills and knowledge building, and could include close readings of passages; finding material related to the module to bring to discussion; and so on.
- **Formal writing assessment:** each module will have some formal assessment, in the form of formal “journal entries” on particular topics and reading quizzes. There will also be a longer take-home (... stay home?) writing assignment at the end of the course.

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*

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

Walter Miller, *A Canticle for Liebowitz*

Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*

Course Requirements

Assignments

Journal Entries: 300 words (approx. 1 page, double spaced) each; 5% each; total: 25%; submitted before you begin each module

Reading Quizzes: 15% each; total 30%; to be completed at the end of module 3 and module 5.

Discussion Board Activities: each module includes a specific discussion board activity, to be completed during the module. 5% each; total 20%.

Final Take-home essay/story: 25% due after you complete the final module, no later than Dec. 15 by 4:00 p.m.

Assignment Descriptions

Journal Entries: These will be due before you can begin most modules (excepting module 4). You'll be asked to submit a brief journal entry (approximately 300 words) on a specific topic. Each journal assignment (except the first, which will be an introductory assignment) will ask you a specific question that you should answer, or provide a specific task that you will complete,

using evidence from material we have covered. This assignment will be graded on, and is designed to help with, three specific skills:

- 1) your academic writing
- 2) your analytical reading skills
- 3) the level of your engagement the material.

Reading Quizzes: These short, timed tests will be based on the readings up to and including the last lecture scheduled before the test (the second will only include material after the first test). They will consist of two sections: the first will test of your basic knowledge of the texts; the second will consist of doing close readings and interpretations of short passages chosen from the works studied. This latter section is designed to test both comprehension and interpretive skills.

Note: These quizzes are timed generously, but if you have a specific accommodation from the accommodations office that allows you more time, that can be included in the system. Also, if you have trouble accessing the internet for the duration of the test, let me know and we will arrange another method.

Discussion Board Activities: One of the primary forms of learning in a face-to-face classroom is the dynamic discussions that can occur between the instructor and the students, and among the students. We'll be moving these onto the Brightspace discussion board. There will be formal, graded discussions (these take the place of my usual "participation" grade), where I will generally provide a specific prompt and/or discussion structure. The goal is not just to respond to *me*, though, but to discuss the material with *each other*. To facilitate that, assignments will include both "post" and "respond" components.

(I will also include a "general discussion" board where people can chat about the material, or related things they have read or seen, to try to mimic the conversations people have amongst themselves in and around the classroom. These will not be graded.)

Note: please see the "netiquette" statement below. Unlike face-to-face conversations, tone can be *very* difficult to present and read accurately, and so we need to develop or enhance our online communications in order to be both engaged and collegial. Emojis help! The discussion board will also be moderated in order to avoid any accidental posts (it happens...).

Final Take-home Essay/story: You can choose one of two options for this assignment:

1) You can write a formal essay of 1500-1800 words (approx. 5-6 pages, double spaced). 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.

2) **With the prior permission of the instructor, based on a proposal and outline**, you can write a science fiction story of **no more than** 1500 words (approx. 5 pages, double spaced), which **must** be accompanied by a formal essay of 1200-1500 words (approx. 4-5 pages, double spaced) which explains, in specific detail, how at least three elements of your story derive from or connect to material you studied in the course. While outside research is not required for the essay, you may use up to three (but no more) secondary

sources. **Outside research may be required for the story depending on the topic.**

Proper research techniques and citation will be discussed in class. Proper MLA-style citation is required for the essay.

An assignment sheet detailing requirements and grading rubrics for these two assignments will be available in advance of the due date. **PLEASE NOTE:** proper citation and acknowledgment of all sources is mandatory for both options: see the statement on academic integrity, below.

Netiquette

The technology at our disposal is extremely useful during this pandemic. Had this pandemic struck a decade or more ago, we'd be unlikely to be able to continue with our courses. Social technologies, like social media or the Brightspace discussion board, can offer an exciting way to engage in meaningful conversation even when we're not face-to-face, 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. (We've all seen Twitter, I assume...).

In order to avoid problems of this sort, students are asked to follow the guidelines below 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](#);
- *watch your links*
 - providing external links to sources can be a great way to further discussion, but *verify that it's a useful and appropriate source*: does it directly address the topic? Is it using evidence well? If so, great! Conversely, does it engage in ad hominem arguments or is it violating any of those codes of conduct above? If so, don't use it. Ask your instructor if you have any doubts;
- *don't be condescending*
 - even when you disagree with someone, if you strive to find common ground then you can make your case more effectively 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 and inform the professor;
- *be helpful, be informative*
 - some good behaviour: stick to discussions that relate to class; provide informative academic links; ask questions! These are what such forums are for!

Reading and Course Schedule

(Note: some lecture titles, or the number of lectures in a given unit, may change)

Sept. 8-14	Module 1. Introductions and Science Fiction History, Definitions and Discontents
	Readings for Module 1: Farah Mendelsohn, "Introduction: Reading Science Fiction"; Lewis Padgett, "Mimsy Were the Borogroves"
Sept. 8	<p>Introduction <u>Welcome Video (in Announcements)</u> Welcome and Navigating this BS... by which I mean this Brightspace Site</p> <p><u>Video Lecture 1.1: Introduction to the Course</u> The syllabus and course policies Assignments in Detail</p>
Sept 9	Assignment Due: Journal Entry #1 (see lecture 1.1). Don't worry--this one's super easy. Submit it before 4:00 p.m. on Sept. 9 and you get 5/5
Sept 9 - 14	<p><u>Video Lecture 1.2</u> Defining Science Fiction I: SF and Literature</p> <p><u>Video Lecture 1.3</u> Defining Science Fiction II: The Novum, Cognitive Estrangement, Semiotics, and the History of "Scientific Fiction"</p> <p><u>Video Lecture 1.4</u> Application: Lewis Padgett, "Mimsy Were the Borogroves"</p>
Sept 14	Assignment Due: Journal Entry #2 (see lecture 1.4; due no later than Sept. 14 at 9:00 a.m.)
Sept. 14 - 25	Module 2: The Golden Age and the End of Utopia as We Knew It
	Readings for Module II: Walter Miller, <i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i>
	<p><u>Video Lecture 2.1: Defining Utopia</u> <u>Video Lecture 2.2: <i>Canticle for Leibowitz</i>: Context and Themes</u> <u>Video Lecture 2.3: <i>Canticle for Leibowitz</i>: (Mis-)Interpreting the Past</u></p>
Sept 23	Assignment Due: Discussion Board assignment (see lecture 2.3; post no later than Sept. 23 at 9:00 a.m.)
	<p><u>Video Lecture 2.4: <i>Canticle for Leibowitz</i>: Knowledge Discovered, Received, and Ignored</u> <u>Video Lecture 2.5: <i>Canticle for Leibowitz</i>: Plato's Cave and Hope?</u></p>

Sept. 28	Assignment Due: Journal Entry #3 (see lecture 2.5; due no later than Sept. 28 at 9:00 a.m.)
Sept 28-Oct 16	Module 3: New Waves, From Outer Space to Inner Space
	Readings for Module III: William Gibson, “The Gernsback Continuum”; P. A. Zoline, “The Heat Death of the Universe”; Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”; Samuel R. Delany, <i>Babel-17</i>
	<u>Video Lecture 3.1</u> Introducing the New Wave: Gibson, Gernsback and (Dis)continuities <u>Video Lecture 3.2</u> Experimental (Science) Fiction: Zoline’s “The Heat Death of the Universe”
Oct. 5	Assignment Due: Discussion Board assignment on “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (see lecture 3.2; due no later than Oct 5 at 9:00 a.m.)
	<u>Video Lecture 3.3</u> Introducing Samuel R. Delany and <i>Babel-17</i> <u>Video Lecture 3.4</u> <i>Babel-17</i> Context: Language, Linguistics, Semiotics <u>Video Lecture 3.5</u> <i>Babel-17</i> : On Close Reading
Oct. 14 - 16	Assignment Due: Reading Quiz (pick a time between Oct. 14 at 8:00 a.m. and Oct. 16, no later than 4:00 pm when you have at least 60 uninterrupted minutes to write the quiz; once you start you need to finish it in one sitting).
October 19-30	Module 4: The Digital Age
	Readings for Module 4: Phillip K. Dick, “The Electric Ant”; William Gibson, <i>Neuromancer</i> ; Candace Jane Dorsey, “(Learning about) Machine Sex”
	<u>Video Lecture 4.1</u> Pre-digital Influences: Phillip K. Dick and “The Electric Ant.” <u>Video Lecture 4.2</u> Introducing Cyberpunk: <i>Neuromancer</i> , Setting and Digital Noir
Oct. 26	Assignment Due: Discussion Board assignment on <i>Neuromancer</i> (see lecture 4.2; due no later than Oct 26 at 9:00 a.m.)

	<u>Video Lecture 4.3</u> Post-Discussion Lecture <u>Video Lecture 4.4</u> <i>Neuromancer</i> , New Romantics, and Identity <u>Video Lecture 4.5</u> Candace Jane Dorsey and Digital Resistance
Nov. 2	Assignment Due: Journal Entry #4 (see lecture 4.5; due no later than Nov. 2 at 9:00 a.m.)
Nov 2-6; 16-27	Module 5: Expanding Universes: Afro- and African Futurism
	Readings for Module 5: Nalo Hopkinson, “Something to Hitch Meat To”; Octavia Butler, “Speech Sounds”; N.K. Jemisin, “Too Many Yesterdays, Not Enough Tomorrows”; Nnedi Okorafor, <i>Binti</i>
	Video Lecture 5.1: Retracing Beginnings: Intro to Afro- and African Futurism Video Lecture 5.2: Octavia Butler and How to Kill Zombie Ideas Video Lecture 5.3: Agency, Community and Changing the Futures: N. K. Jemisin and Nalo Hopkinson
Nov. 16	Assignment Due: Discussion Board assignment on Jemisin’s “Too Many Yesterdays...”(see lecture 5.3; due no later than Nov 16 at 9:00 a.m.)
	Video Lecture 5.4: Nnedi Okorafor and African Futurism Video Lecture 5.5: <i>Binti</i> and otherness Video Lecture 5.6: Diversity and the Future(s) of the University
Nov. 27	Assignment Due: Journal Entry #5: (see lecture 5.6; due no later than 4:00 p.m. on Nov. 27)
Nov 30-Dec 4	Module 6: Conclusions and Final Assignment
	Lecture 6.1: Take Home Essay and Research Lecture Lecture 6.2: This is the End (?)
Dec. 4-8	Assignment Due: Reading Quiz (pick a time between Dec. 4 at 8:00 a.m. and Dec. 8, no later than 4:00 pm when you have at least 60 uninterrupted minutes to write the quiz; once you start you need to finish it in one sitting).

University Policies

Grading Scale

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/grades-and-student-records/grade-scale-and-definitions.html

Note: In this course, 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).

Academic Integrity

At Dalhousie University, we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect. As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity. (read more:

https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity.html

Accessibility

The Student Accessibility Centre is Dalhousie's centre of expertise for student accessibility and accommodation. The advising team works with students on the Halifax campus who request accommodation as a result of: a disability, religious obligation, or any barrier related to any other characteristic protected under Human Rights legislation (NS, NB, PEI, NFLD).

Student Code of Conduct

Everyone at Dalhousie is expected to treat others with dignity and respect. The Code of Student Conduct allows Dalhousie to take disciplinary action if students don't follow this community expectation. When appropriate, violations of the code can be resolved in a reasonable and informal manner—perhaps through a restorative justice process. If an informal resolution can't be reached, or would be inappropriate, procedures exist for formal dispute resolution. (read more:

https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/student-life/code-of-student-conduct.html)

Diversity and Inclusion – Culture of Respect

Every person at Dalhousie has a right to be respected and safe. We believe inclusiveness is fundamental to education. We stand for equality. Dalhousie is strengthened in our diversity. We are a respectful and inclusive community. We are committed to being a place where everyone feels welcome and supported, which is why our Strategic Direction prioritizes fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness (Strategic Priority 5.2). (read more:

<http://www.dal.ca/cultureofrespect.html>)

Other University Policies and Programs

- Important Dates in the Academic Year (including add/drop dates) http://www.dal.ca/academics/important_dates.html
- University Grading Practices: Statement of Principles and Procedures https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/academic/grading-practices-policy.html
- Scent-Free Program <http://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/occupational-safety/scent-free.html>

Learning and Support Resources

- General Academic Support – Advising https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/advising.html
- Fair Dealing Guidelines <https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office/guidelines/fair-dealing-guidelines.html>
- Dalhousie University Library <http://libraries.dal.ca>
- Indigenous Students https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/indigenous.html
- Black Students https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/black-student-advising.html
- International Students https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/international-centre.html
- Student Health Services https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness.html
- Counselling https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness/frequently-asked-questions-august-2017.html
- Copyright Office <https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office.html>
- E-Learning website <http://www.dal.ca/dept/elearning.html>
- Dalhousie Student Advocacy Services <http://dsu.ca/dsas>
- Dalhousie Ombudsperson https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/where-to-get-help/ombudsperson.html
- Writing Centre https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html
- Faculty or Departmental Advising Support: Studying for Success Program: http://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/study-skills-and-tutoring.html