

ENGL 4396 Selected Topic: Speculative Science Fiction

What defines us as human beings? What would constitute an ideal society? What pleasures and perils does technology offer? What role does language play in shaping our understanding of reality? How might our world be different if we had different bodies or different ways of communicating?

This course examines speculative science fiction as a literary genre that takes up philosophical questions about personal and national identity; gender, race and sexuality; political morality; and the nature of technology. Although allegory has traditionally been identified as a dominant technique in speculative fiction, we will also be drawing on structuralist theories of myth in society; deconstruction's destabilization of truth; and postmodern theories of fluid identity in analyzing the ways that science fiction represents and symbolically resolves cultural issues and philosophical concerns.

Primary texts will include:

H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932)
Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (1951)
Samuel Delany, *Babel-17* (1966)
Philip K Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)
Ursula K LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)
William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984)
Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)
Nicola Griffiths, *Slow River* (1994)
Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2* (1995)
Peter Watts, *Blindsight* (2006)

Theoretical readings will be drawn from Frye, Levi-Strauss, Peirce, Derrida, Haraway, and Hayles, among others.