



## CUST-4529H-A: Advanced Studies in Science Fiction: Catastrophe Ecology 2019WI - Peterborough Campus

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### Instructor:

Instructor: Brent Ryan Bellamy

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Office: WH 107

Office Hours: Tues 10:00AM-12:00PM or by appointment

### Meeting Times:

Seminar Mon 06:00PM-08:50PM, BG, Room 101

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### Department:

Academic Administrative Assistant: Rosemary Devlin

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### Description:

This seminar focuses on reading science fiction insofar as it pertains to ecology and environment. Beginning with the science-fictional process of world building, the course will investigate the contested narratives that surround human use and abuse of technology. It will look to marginalized voices in science-fiction writing and subgenres of science fiction itself. Our exploration of the Anthropocene, ecology, and energy will take up science fiction's capacity to imagine massive interrelated systems, to depict incredible timescales, and to comment on the politics of the human impacts on such systems and across such durations. This course will feature

classic science-fiction texts and emergent works. It will feature one major assignments, one major research paper (developed in stages), and a participation grade.

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## Learning Outcomes:

To complete this course students will demonstrate their ability to:

1. Interpret science fiction writing with a high level of clarity and originality;
  2. Demonstrate a critical understanding of assigned critical readings;
  3. Present compelling, elegantly constructed arguments (both oral and written); and,
  4. Write at a level befitting a fourth-year undergraduate seminar (all writing proofread to be error-free with proper grammar and syntax and in MLA style).
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## Texts:

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)

M. John Harrison, *Light* (2002)

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* (2017)

Waubgeshig Rice, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018)

Ernst Callenbach, *Ecotopia* (1975)

N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (2015)

\*All other texts provided on Blackboard

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## Assessments, Assignments and Tests:

Science Fictional Object Assignment 15%

Annotated Bibliography 15%

Paper Proposal 15%

Research Paper 30%

Seminar Participation 25%

Science Fictional Object Assignment | 500-750 words

Students select either one actual object from real life or one realist object from a fictional world in our required readings. They will use scientific/technological as well as sociological research to tell a story of the object's past and its future. For example, one could choose driverless cars from the real world and discuss how they are made and distributed today and then speculate on how these may be produced and used in the future and by whom. This assignment involves an oral component and a written component. The oral component will be a five-minute presentation to the class. Students are welcome to bring an actual object to class as a science-fictionalized show and tell. The written component will be a 500- to 750-word presentation of the assignment, to be submitted at the time of the oral presentation. Students will be required to sign up for an assignment presentation date in the first two weeks of classes, from a schedule of options throughout the term.

Annotated Bibliography | 500-750 words

Students are to locate 3-5 suitable, critical sources (journal articles, book reviews, scholarly

books, and so on) that engage with the primary text, the concepts that will be taken up, or the generic fundamentals of science fiction and the critical approach of environmental humanities, ecocriticism, or related fields. They may include critical works from the syllabus and from our shared research folder. They must locate at least one critical source on their own. For each source they will be required to paraphrase the central argument and explain how they find that source useful in their work.

#### Research Paper Proposal | 500-750 words

To devise an essay topic, students will be required to write a 500-750-word essay proposal. This proposal will not be a binding document; instead, it will offer the chance to put their ideas in writing. These essay proposals will be reviewed by students' peers before they are submitted and graded.

#### Research Paper | 2500-3000 words

Students will develop what they have learned in their research and close reading of one of the course texts into a polished, original interpretation, touching in some way on ideas of ecology, environment, or genre in science fiction. Students will be required to create their own topic for the essay. They will be encouraged to meet with me to discuss the possibilities for this paper before submitting a research paper plan. The research paper should present an argument supported by evidence from both the primary text and secondary sources and make every effort to engage with established and current scholarship on the text and the topic. The essay must be presented using MLA parenthetical citation and documentation style, including a works cited page. The essay should be 2500 to 3000 words in length.

#### Seminar Participation

Seminars will focus on group discussion of science fiction, genre, and ecology. Students are encouraged to come to class not only having read the material but also having prepared questions and observations. Students are expected to engage one another in conversation. To facilitate seminar participation, each student will be responsible for submitting a question about the assigned readings once during the term. The onus will be on the students to engage with the readings. In order to track attendance in a fair and equitable way, a sign-in sheet will be presented in class.

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## Grading:

To earn a C, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of the text in your own terms. A C paper may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or analysis of its sources. C papers are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.

To earn a B, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A B paper typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B papers are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.

To earn an A, you must construct a paper that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A paper advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A papers are clearly written, and often eloquent.

A D means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An F means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.

Papers that fall between these categories will be given a '+' or '-' depending on which grade they seem closest to.

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## Grade Total by Withdrawal Date:

25%-35% of grade by 08 March 2019

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## Schedule:

Jan. 7<sup>th</sup> - Science Fiction and Ecology

Kim Stanley Robinson, "Think of Yourself as a Planet," El Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gUgVz1MYn8>

Jan. 14<sup>th</sup> - The Planet Called Winter

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* 1969

Jan. 21<sup>st</sup> – Ecological World Building

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* 1969

Fredric Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin," *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, 2005, pp. 267-280.

Ursula K. Heise, "Reduced Ecologies: Science Fiction and the Meanings of Biological Scarcity" *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, August 2012, pp. 99-112.

Jan. 28<sup>th</sup> – Ecocidal World Destroying

Paolo Bacigalupi, "The People of Sand and Slag"

*Pumzi* (Dir., Wanuri Kahiu 2009)

***Annotated Bibliography or Research Essay Proposal Due***

Feb. 04<sup>th</sup> – Energy Futures I

M. John Harrison, *Light* (2002)

Feb. 11<sup>th</sup> – Energy Futures II

Italo Calvino, "The Petrol Pump"

China Méville, "Covehithe"

Graeme Macdonald, "Improbability Drives: The Energy of Science Fiction," *Paradoxa*, 26, Fall 2014, pp. 111-144.

***Research Essay Proposal Peer Review Workshop***

Feb. 18<sup>th</sup>      **READING WEEK**

***Research Essay Proposal or Annotated Bibliography Due***

Feb. 25<sup>th</sup> – Unsettling the Post-Apocalypse

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*, 2017

Waubgeshig Rice, *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, 2018

Mar. 4<sup>th</sup> – Unsettling the Post-Apocalypse

Rice and Dimaline (continued)

Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene," *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, 2017.

Mar. 11<sup>th</sup> – Ecotopian Imaginings  
Ernst Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, 1975

Mar. 18<sup>th</sup> – Science-Fantasy Defamiliarization  
N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, 2015

Mar. 25<sup>th</sup> – Science-Fantasy Defamiliarization II  
N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, 2015

Apr. 1<sup>st</sup> – Spectacular Ecologies  
FILM TBD (*Fury Road*, *Wall-E*, *Dune*, *Stalker*, etc).  
Weekly Reading TBA

**Research Essay Due**

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## Course Guidelines:

Email: Students in this class are required to check their official university email account at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

Laptop Policy: In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts, for notetaking, and for in-class research. However, students must refrain from non-class related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like.

Academic Skills Centre: Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Academic Skills Centre at any stage of the course or writing process. Please visit their website:  
<http://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/>.

Flexibility: If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above after an in-class discussion.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who believe they will require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met. If you are unsure of what you need to do to qualify for services, you can begin by visiting the Student Accessibility Services in Suite 132, Blackburn Hall, or by visiting their website at <https://www.trentu.ca/wellness/sas>

Academic Integrity: The university expects that all students will be held to the highest level of academic integrity. The university's standards for academic integrity are outlined in the [Undergraduate Academic Integrity Policy](#). For questions, please consult the Academic Integrity [FAQ](#).

Academic Freedom: We all enter this classroom with pre-existing political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely not required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss in whole or in part.

Respect: This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here. Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will severely negatively impact your class participation grade.

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## University Policies:

### Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism and cheating, is an extremely serious academic offence and carries penalties varying from failure on an assignment to expulsion from the University. Definitions, penalties, and procedures for dealing with plagiarism and cheating are set out in Trent University's *Academic Integrity Policy*. You have a responsibility to educate yourself – unfamiliarity with the policy is not an excuse. You are strongly encouraged to visit Trent's Academic Integrity website to learn more: [www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity).

### Access to Instruction

It is Trent University's intent to create an inclusive learning environment. If a student has a disability and documentation from a regulated health care practitioner and feels that they may need accommodations to succeed in a course, the student should contact the Student Accessibility Services Office (SAS) at the respective campus as soon as possible.

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