

### Paper 2 Assignment

6–7 pp. Due Wednesday, November 20, at 5 p.m.

Write a focused, analytic paper making an argument in which one science-fictional text offers a lens on another. Use one text to bring out a problem, then show how another writer handles it differently; discuss a device in one story and its implicit critique in another; suggest a historical contrast between an earlier and a later text; reveal an unexpected affinity between two texts that seem radically unlike. You may write about any of the readings assigned since September 30. You may not write about both *The Space Merchants* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*. If you wish to make *Star Trek* one of your “texts,” I must approve your paper topic by November 14.

The balance of the two texts in your paper need not be even: I have used the metaphor of the *lens* instead of the formula *compare and contrast* to encourage you to think about the kinds of arguments that can succeed in a small space. In general, such arguments avoid broad generalizations and instead use one text to set up a strong argument about another. If you choose to write about Le Guin or Pohl and Kornbluth, it is particularly important to think about how your argument can *convincingly* draw a select body of evidence from these longer texts.

For this paper, you need not refer to secondary sources, and you are not expected to do outside research. However, one of the assigned secondary readings might be of use. If you wish to quote a source (any source), you must, naturally, cite it appropriately.

### Topics

The choice of topic is your own. A good topic leads you from a specific analytic focus to a significant, non-obvious interpretive conclusion about the texts you choose. Here are some examples, which you may use if you wish:

1. *Automata*. Take two robots (not Asimov’s). What are the differing roles mechanical beings can play within their respective texts? What does the robot suggest about human consciousness, autonomy, or labor?
2. *Out to get you*. Consider images of oppressive, all-encompassing System in two texts. How do different critiques of the System expose some things and forget others? This is not a topic about any old critique: this is about paranoid affects, total surveillance, unbreakable control.
3. *De te fabula narratur* [the story’s about you]. Compare one of Le Guin’s Gethenian myths with Lem’s *Cyberiad* tale. How does one writer’s handling of the tropes of myth illuminate the other’s? Or: how does the expansive novelistic context of *Left Hand* refract an inset story differently from Lem’s freestanding tale?
4. *Home planet*. The manned spaceflight era (1962–) opens up new ways of conceptualizing the earth, exemplified by the famous “Blue Marble” photograph of the earth seen from space. Choose two stories that think about our own globe *as* planet (for example, “The

Cage of Sand,” *The Space Merchants*, or “Aye, and Gomorrah...”); or choose one story that has a planetary imaginary and one story that, you believe, lacks it. How does the Earth, as a whole, get refracted through particular tropes, images, affects? How do such stories invite us to think of humanity in planetary terms? Do not neglect possibilities of conflict, division, localism, parochialism as well as universality, humility, togetherness.

5. *Experimental*. It is a truism that though science fiction narrates imagined other worlds, it normally uses the conventions of realistic narrative, more or less straightforwardly conveying a sequence of events that happen to a recognizably human-like set of agents according to an intelligible causal logic. Choose one story that does this (examples: the excerpt from *The Star Diaries*; “We Can Remember It For You Wholesale”) and one story that does not (examples: “The Heat Death of the Universe,” “Repent, Harlequin!”) and argue for the specific significance of *formal* choices. Alternatively: compare two experimental forms.
6. *Bodies that matter*. Choose two stories that you think defy the stereotype of science fiction as cerebral, technological—or juvenile—when it comes to the body. Develop an argument about a *particular aspect* of bodily life or a *particular way* of representing embodied beings that holds surprising significance. Use one story to set another off by contrast. Possibilities: raced and sexed bodies; machine-human hybrids; novel pleasures; challenges to the mind-body distinction.
7. *Reflexivity*. Genre fiction in general tends to be highly self-reflexive about its fictiveness (“it’s only a story”). Choose two stories, describe their modes of self-reflection, and develop an argument about the effects these dimensions of reflexivity have. Consider: frames, allegories of writing and reading, representations of disbelief, representations of the medium itself.

## Writing guidelines

The central requirement of this paper is careful analysis of the materials of science-fiction writing using the evidence of the language of your chosen texts. Your claims should be supported by extensive *quotation*. To support a claim, it is not enough simply to quote; once you quote, you must *analyze* what you have quoted, paying close attention to the significance of individual words, of syntactical and rhetorical patterns, of nuances and implications. Attend to narrative and linguistic form, to structure and style. Do not take for granted that your reader will see the evidence the way you do: point out the details that can *convince* the reader of what you say.

Think carefully about the *line of thought* of your writing, the way one claim leads to the next. “Transition sentences” are less important than your sense of the overall *logic* of your argument: it may help to think of the essay as a story you have to tell about the texts you are analyzing, one with an arc from beginning to end. One of the most compelling ways to tell such a story is by thinking carefully about the *order of presentation of evidence*: indeed, you can “outline” a paper by first choosing the passages that are most essential to your thinking and then deciding what sequence they should be presented in.

Your interpretation must be organized into an *argument* with a meaningful *motive*. In other words, your paper must address a significant, interesting, non-obvious question that arises when you put two texts together, and it must propose a clearly articulated, non-simplistic answer to that question. Comparison between texts is often a productive source of motives, but not if you limit yourself to a formulaic “compare and contrast” exercise. Instead, think about the *justification* for your comparison: what emerges unexpectedly when you use one text as a lens through which you see another? What hidden affinity do you discover, or what obvious parallel do you overturn? Relate your focused claims to broader questions (about themes, about the science-fiction genre), and show how paying attention to the particular, *highly specific* argument you are making changes how readers should think about the broader questions. It will also help to ask yourself what alternative arguments someone might raise about your topic and to anticipate objections to your claims. If there are no alternative arguments or no possible surprises, you haven’t found a motive, and you will have to revise your argument.

Motive is often established at the start of an essay. *Avoid writing a generalizing introduction. Waste no time on summary.* Begin your essay with a surprising piece of evidence or observation of your own that immediately frames the topic you are going to address and establishes its interest. Expanding on that piece of evidence, forecast the terms of your argument, then state the central, argumentative claim of the essay.

## Drafts

Plan to draft and revise. You may submit partial or full drafts to me for brief comments, as long as you do so at least two days before the deadline. I will answer questions, time permitting, up

through the day before the deadline.

### Format

The page format: between 1.0 and 1.25-inch margins on all sides, twelve-point serif font suitable for body text (e.g.: Garamond, Hoefler Text, Palatino, Baskerville, or, less appealingly, Cambria, Times), between one-and-a-half and double spacing. *Number all pages.* The paper should have your name and the date on the first page. Title your paper.

Submit your paper electronically via your Sakai Drop Box. E-mail submissions are not acceptable.

Digital submissions should, if possible, be in Portable Document Format (PDF). Native word-processor formats (.doc, .docx, .pages, .odt) are a second-best alternative. All word processors are capable of producing PDF files, through either a “Save As...” option, an “Export” command, or a “Print to PDF” option in the print dialog. For more on producing PDF files, see [andrewgoldstone.com/pdf](http://andrewgoldstone.com/pdf).

If you prefer to turn in hard copy, leave your paper in my mailbox in Murray Hall and *send me an e-mail before the deadline* saying you are doing this.

### Style

*You must proofread carefully.*

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, *and attributed*. In a paper on two texts, you may give a full citation for each text only once, either in an MLA-style “Works Cited” bibliography or in a Chicago-style footnote to the first quotation of each source. After that, page numbers may be given in parentheses, using author’s names only where the source is ambiguous. Secondary sources are not required in this paper; but if you use someone else’s work, including someone’s informal comments inside class, on the blog, or elsewhere, *you must cite that work*. Using someone else’s work without specific citation is plagiarism.

For bibliographic conventions, you may use either Chicago or MLA style. Automatically generated citations are always immediately obvious as such; edit what you get from Zotero. Your citation should distinguish carefully between authors and editors. Honest attribution and proof-reading are more important than following formatting rules.

Please follow the conventions of standard written American English. I am non-prescriptive about things like the split infinitive, the sentence-final preposition, and “they” used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun. The passive voice is an excellent grammatical resource and can be used freely, provided it is used wisely.

The best resource on matters of usage is the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary of English Usage*, also available in a wonderful paperback Concise Edition. For detailed information about current and past word uses, the fundamental source is the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

For grammar, I consider *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* by Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum to be the reference standard; it is condensed in their slightly less daunting *Student's Introduction to English Grammar*.

### **Late Policy**

Per the syllabus, one of the two papers in this course may be turned in up to three days late without penalty. The other paper must then be on time. Past these deadlines, the rate of penalty is 0.4 points per day, with no fractional penalties. It is always better to turn in your best attempt on time than to take a late penalty in an effort to improve what you have.

Computer problems are not a valid excuse for lateness. Plan ahead. Back up frequently.

### **Grading**

The syllabus explains the general meaning of marks on the four-point scale. Note that there are no “minus” grades. The chief criteria of assessment are:

1. Evidence: has textual evidence been used extensively and chosen well?
2. Analysis: is the evidence convincingly analyzed and interpreted, with careful attention to detail, making use of concepts introduced in class?
3. Motive: does the paper make its central problem interesting?
4. Argument: is the argument focused, logical, convincing, surprising?
5. Line of thought: does the paper develop its ideas in connected, orderly fashion? Does the conclusion follow from (and differ from) the opening?
6. Style: is the paper clearly written? Is it free from typographical, grammatical, and other errors?

In general, an A-range paper is strong by all these criteria; a B-range paper has well-chosen, well-analyzed evidence but does not fully develop its argument or its motive; a C-range paper lacks evidence or uses evidence only to summarize plot; and a D-range paper is too short or ignores the assignment.

If you submit work that is not your own, you will not receive credit for the assignment, and you will face disciplinary consequences. See the Rutgers academic integrity policy on the website <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.