

Final Paper

Topic description due December 11 by 5 p.m. in e-mail

Paper (8–10 pp.) due Monday, December 23 at 11 a.m. on Sakai

Write a paper of eight to ten pages making an interpretive argument about one to three science-fictional texts. Your argument should be motivated by a significant question about the genre of science fiction: its historical development, its political or social stances, its philosophical content, or its internal contradictions. But your argument itself must concern a specific problem, device, or pattern in the texts you discuss. The particular theme is up to you. A good topic is specific, specific, specific. I will circulate a list of sample topics in the week of December 2.

Choice of texts. You must discuss at least one of Delany, Gibson, Butler, and Ghosh. You may not discuss a text you have already discussed in your earlier papers. You may not write about a single short story; if you write about only one text, that text must be *The Calcutta Chromosome*. This paper will be evaluated on the sophistication and interest of the chosen topic; if your paper addresses two short stories in terms close to those already raised in class discussion, it cannot earn an A-range grade. I will also consider proposals to address *one or two* texts we have not read together in conjunction with one text that we have read. I particularly encourage you to think about reading more by a writer who interested you. I can give hints about where to find more short texts by the writers we've read.

Secondary sources. You must engage with at least two secondary sources in your argument. At least one of these sources must be from a legitimate, scholarly, peer-reviewed source: that is, an academic journal or an academic book. You are encouraged to make use of the assigned secondary readings from the class, but you must locate at least one outside scholarly source on your own. Engagement does not mean simply summarizing someone else's argument or quoting it in order to agree. Engagement means building on, complicating, or disputing the other scholar's salient claims. This can be done with something as small as a single footnote or as large as a several-paragraph section of your paper. The heart of your paper and the main criteria of evaluation are, as in your earlier work in this course, your careful analyses of primary texts.

The topic description

By December 11 at 5 p.m., write me an e-mail with a paragraph describing your topic, your choice of texts, and a preliminary sense of your motivating questions. This preliminary work is ungraded but required.

Aspects of a successful paper

The motive. Your paper must address a significant, interesting, non-obvious question. Your choice of primary and secondary sources is part of your work on motive; your reflections on your sources should help you develop a sense of what is at stake in your paper. What is surprising about it? Why

would a reader want to follow you through your analysis of the texts? How are you adding to a scholarly conversation about science fiction, about a particular author, or about another broad literary or cultural problem? Motive is normally established at the start of an essay in a strong introductory paragraph. A strong introductory paragraph avoids broad generalizations, defines its terms clearly, and uses specifics right away to establish the topic and the motive.

The argument. A good paper has a claim to make; it is not merely descriptive or observational. Think of the argument as an answer to the motivating question. A strong argument must be surprising rather than obvious, complex rather than straightforward. Its logic must be carefully thought out; often this logic comes clearest in engaging with counterarguments and alternative viewpoints. If no reasonable alternative viewpoint is conceivable, your argument needs revision.

The evidence. Your work on the paper should focus on discovering specific evidence relevant to your argument. The principal evidence in your paper will be in the form of quotations from primary sources. Those quotations never stand on their own but are always analyzed and explained, often at length. A quotation does not work to support an argument until you explain your interpretation and the reasons for it. Use both in-text and block citation; err on the side of copiousness in your analysis. Cite sources carefully.

The line of thinking. A strong paper is organized around a developing sequence of argument. The evidence is organized to introduce your claims, then substantiate them, then complicate or deepen them. Try to resist the idea of a series of independent subtopics, or of a compare-and-contrast model, in favor of a clear logical progression for your argument. At the level of writing, ask yourself how you get from one paragraph to the next convincingly rather than arbitrarily.

Clarity. Your argument convinces most when it is made in prose that places no unnecessary obstacles in the way of understanding: your writing should be efficient and carefully edited for style.

Finding sources

The standard starting point for searching for secondary sources in literary studies is the [MLA International Bibliography](#). This is far superior to the multi-database “article finder” offered on the library homepage. For more localized browsing, the full run of *Science Fiction Studies* is available on [JSTOR](#). *SFS* articles range from the outstanding to the disheartening. The *Wesleyan Anthology* has a good short bibliography of secondary works about science fiction in general.

You will not always be able to access articles you find citations for instantly online, and sometimes what you can immediately access is not the best source. It is often possible to request scans of articles held in print or microfilm through [Article Delivery](#). The reference desk at the library is devoted to helping you get to sources you need, so avail yourself of their help.

The peer-reviewed source requirement. This requirement is meant to steer you away from fan and course websites, Wikipedia, newspaper and magazine articles, and other non-academic sources: these are all interesting kinds of material, but they do not carry the same guarantees of scholarly

validity as peer-reviewed sources do.

Dr. Kevin Mulcahy, the Humanities Specialist Librarian at Alexander, happens to be a science-fiction scholar himself. He works with students on finding good sources all the time and can be reached by e-mail at mulcahy@rci.rutgers.edu. He has recommended three general references that might be good leads for finding citations of good articles: *Anatomy of Wonder: A Critical Guide to Science Fiction*, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, and *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. All three are held in Alex (the first two in Reference).

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 be in Portable Document Format (PDF) if at all possible. 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. See also <http://andrewgoldstone.com/pdf>.

Style guidelines

You must proofread carefully.

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, *and attributed*. 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. If you use someone else’s work, whether peer-reviewed scholarship or 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; if you use Zotero, edit what it gives you. Your citation should distinguish carefully between authors and editors. Honest attribution and proofreading 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*.

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 three days before the deadline. I will answer questions, time permitting, up through the day before the deadline.

No late papers

I have put the paper deadline as late as possible, on the date on which this class would have an exam if we had an exam. That also means, however, that I will have only a short time in which to grade the papers and submit my final grades. Barring exceptional circumstances, I will not be able to grade a paper turned in after December 23. If you miss the deadline, you are likely to fail the course. Don't fail the course after the hard work you have put in all semester.

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

If you fall ill near the end of term or encounter other difficulties, *please contact me as soon as possible*.

Grading standard

3.5 to 4.0 (A range): Insightful, original argument; strong, well-defined motive; a single, connected line of thinking; systematic, copious, and convincing use of evidence; effective choice and analysis of sources, bearing witness to thoughtful though not necessarily comprehensive research; clear writing at the sentence level.

2.5 to 3.5 (B range): Clear but less interesting argument; substantial evidence, but in need of further analysis; good individual paragraphs not necessarily linked in a single line of thinking; genuine effort at researching sources which did not necessarily yield the best materials; some problems at the level of style.

1.5 to 2.5 (C range): Unfocused or over-general argument; inadequate or incorrect use of evidence; limited research; significant problems of writing mechanics or citation.

0.5 to 1.5 (D range): Work completed but unsatisfactory in several major areas.