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LIT 370.01: Science Fiction - Philip K. Dick & Ursula K. Le Guin

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SF: Philip K. Dick & Ursula K. Le Guin (LIT 370)**Rob Browning****e-mail: rob.browning@mso.umt.edu****Office hours:** Tues/Thurs: 2:00-3:30 & before Noon by appointment (Eck 217); and Fridays by appointment on Zoom.**Spring 2022****T, R 12:30-1:50**

“...I will reveal a secret to you: I like to build universes that *do* fall apart. I like to see them come unglued, and I like to see how the characters in the novel cope with this problem. I have a secret love of chaos. There should be more of it. Do not believe—and I am dead serious when I say this—do not assume that order and stability are always good, in a society or in a universe. The old, the ossified, must always give way to new life and the birth of new things. Before the new things can be born the old must perish. This is a dangerous realization, because it tells us that we must eventually part with much of what is familiar to us. And that hurts. But that is part of the script of life.”

-- Philip K. Dick, “How to Build a Universe that Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later” (1978)

“Current-borne, wave-flung, tugged hugely by the whole might of ocean, the jellyfish drifts in the tidal abyss. The light shines through it, and the dark enters it. Borne, flung, tugged from anywhere to anywhere, for in the deep sea there is no compass but nearer and farther, higher and lower, the jellyfish hangs and sways; pulses move slight and quick within it, as the vast diurnal pulses beat in the moon-driven sea. Hanging, swaying, pulsing, the most vulnerable and insubstantial creature, it has for its defense the violence and power of the whole ocean, to which it has entrusted its being, its going, and its will.”

--Ursula K. Le Guin, opening of *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971)

This course focuses on two of the most influential science fiction writers of the second half of the 20th century. Graduates of the same high school class from Berkeley, California, Philip K. Dick and Ursula K. Le Guin took science fiction in radically different directions. Le Guin became a master builder of cultures and whole worlds, from the archipelago of Earthsea to the eighty-three planets of the Hainish novels. Where Le Guin’s stories typically follow a protagonist’s struggles on an alien world culminating in cultural breakthrough, the characteristic pattern in a PKD novel is for the created world (or universe) to become unglued, and we watch how the protagonist deals with this. Alternating between the two authors throughout the semester, we will study where these different plot movements take us and strive to understand the various underlying forces (beliefs, philosophies, commitments, obsessions...) that set them in motion.

Required Texts:

By PKD:

- *The Man in the High Castle* (Mariner, 2011), ISBN: 9780547572482
- *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (Mariner, 2011), ISBN: 9780547572550
- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Del Rey, 2017), ISBN: 9780345404473
- *Valis* (Mariner, 2011), ISBN: 9780547572413

By UKL:

- *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Penguin, 2010), ISBN: 9780441478125
- *The Lathe of Heaven* (Scribner, 2008), ISBN: 9781416556961
- *The Dispossessed* (Harper, 1994), ISBN: 9780060512750

Recommended (time permitting at the end of the semester, we’ll read a selection of stories from this collection): Le Guin, *Changing Planes* (Mariner, 2020), ISBN: 9780358380023

Graded Work:

Participation (in class discussions, group work) -----	10
Presentation -----	20
Midterm essay -----	30
Final project (analytical and/or creative) -----	40

Attendance. I become concerned if you miss more than three classes, and expect anyone in this position to talk with me. Communication makes all the difference. Missing more than four classes will result in a non-passing grade.

Participation: We are fortunate to have the opportunity this semester to explore a number of challenging, thought-provoking SF texts together. Studying literature in the company of other readers is a chance to learn about the texts in ways we couldn't as solitary individuals. Our classes will be successful to the extent that each of you keeps up with the readings and contributes to our discussions.

Essays: As you can see above, these account for 70% of the final grade, so they're quite important. I prefer to think of an essay in the spirit of Michel Montaigne—that is, as a “trying out” of ideas (from the French infinitive “essayer”). For another view, consider Sun Ra’s approach to jazz, which is at once *disciplined*—well-versed in the primary texts and histories—and *creative*, innovative, free. Or as Horace said of poetry in ancient Roman times, a writer’s goals should be both to instruct and to delight. Why shouldn’t writers of essays about literature, including those for college classes, aspire to any of these ideals? I appreciate essays that take chances, that pause to appreciate or to critique particular matters the writer finds to be significant or interesting, that show awareness of and sensitivity to the larger discussions going on, that point out connections between texts, and that do all (or any of) these things in clear prose.

Presentation: With the aid of one of your classmates, you will be called upon to give a short (10-15 minutes or so), engaging presentation on a topic relevant to our reading. You should create a document that records the essential content of your presentation, including documentation of the sources you consulted, and post this on Moodle.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is a violation of scholarly trust. According to the Provost, “Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321>.” Violators of the Student Conduct Code will receive an “F” for the offending paper.

Aims of this course:

1. To gain appreciation of the salient conceptual engagements and characteristic aesthetic qualities of major literary works by Philip K. Dick and Ursula K. Le Guin.
2. To study the respective contributions of these two authors to the development of “science fiction” and “speculative fiction.”
3. To reflect on the nature of the relationships between the biographies and the creative fiction of these two authors.
4. To develop your skills in performing meaningful, interesting close readings of literary texts, and to consider how the “protocols” for interpreting an SF text may differ somewhat from those we commonly employ in analyzing other kinds of literature.

According to the pace of our discussions, we may deviate from the following schedule. At the beginning or end of each class, I will confirm the assignment for the next class. I'll also communicate any adjustments to the schedule on our Moodle page.

Week one:

1/18 (T) PKD, "The Electric Ant" (1968); UKL "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973)
1/20 (R) PKD, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962)

Week two:

1/25 (T) *The Man in the High Castle*
1/27 (R) *The Man in the High Castle*

Week three:

2/1 (T) *The Man in the High Castle*
2/3 (R) PKD, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* (1963)

Week four:

2/8 (T) *The Three Stigmata*; "How to Build a Universe that Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later"
2/10 (R) *The Three Stigmata*

Week five:

2/15 (T) *The Three Stigmata*
2/17 (R) UKL, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969); "Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?"

Week six:

2/22 (T) *The Left Hand of Darkness*; "Is Gender Necessary?"
2/24 (R) *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Week seven:

3/1 (T) *The Left Hand of Darkness*
3/3 (R) PKD, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)
3/4 (F) **Essay one due**

Week eight:

3/8 (T) *Androids*
3/10 (R) *Androids*

Week nine:

3/15 (T) *Blade Runner* (1982), directed by Ridley Scott
3/17 (R) UKL, *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971)

Spring break: 3/21 - 3/25

Week ten:

3/29 (T) *The Lathe of Heaven*
3/31 (R) *The Lathe of Heaven*

Week eleven:

4/5 (T) UKL, *The Dispossessed* (1974); "Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown"
4/7 (R) *The Dispossessed*

Week twelve:

4/12 (T) *The Dispossessed*

4/14 (R) *The Dispossessed*

Week thirteen:

4/19 (T) PKD, *Valis* (1981); "Cosmogony and Cosmology"

4/21 (R) *Valis*

Week fourteen:

4/26 (T) *Valis*

4/28 (R) *Valis*

Week fifteen:

5/3 (T) UKL, from *Changing Planes* (2003): "Season of the Ansarac" and "Social Dreaming of the Frin"

5/5 (R) *Changing Planes*, "The Nna Mmoy Language"

Term paper due May 10 (Tuesday)

University guidelines regarding COVID-19:

- Mask use is required within the classroom or laboratory.
- If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please don't come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
- If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress.
- UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.
- Class attendance and seating will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts.
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.