



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Science Fiction and (International) Politics - 58530

Last update 25-01-2024

HU Credits: 4

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: International Relations

Academic year: 0

Semester: Yearly

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Dr Oded Lowenheim

Coordinator Email: oded.lowenheim@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Zoom

Teaching Staff:

Prof Oded Lowenheim

Course/Module description:

The literary genre of science fiction (SF) can be used as a critical futuristic mirror. Since the 19th century, science fiction writers dealing with various aspects of social and political criticism are using fantasy literature, "speculative" and futuristic descriptions. This course introduces students to the field of science fiction by discussing several genres within it, such as utopia - dystopia, alternate history, encounters with alien civilizations, technology and politics, and more. We will explore the political aspects found in science fiction and ask how we can highlight and understand aspects and directions of contemporary "realistic" politics through these stories. To this end we will focus on several works of science fiction, both written and filmed. We'll ponder about the power and influence of social and political criticism like this, and see how we can learn about different historical periods from science fiction written during them. The purpose of the course is not necessarily to provide an answer to the big question of "life, the universe, and everything" (this answer, of course, has been given elsewhere...), but to raise more specific questions for discussion, and present different approaches discussed in the context of science fiction literature.

Course/Module aims:

Expansion of political thinking ability and familiarity with the science fiction genre introducing narrative tools. Similarly, thinking about fundamental political issues through allegorical and literary tools.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

Submit a seminar paper that will be an analytical article on an issue which illustrates a link between politics SCI-FI, or write a SCI-FI story / screenplay which will be informed by political thought and terms.

Attendance requirements(%):

80

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: discussions in class, watching parts of movies, reading SCI-FI novels.

Course/Module Content:

Week 1 +2 - Sci Fi and politics - What use for sci-fi in IR?
Weldes, Jutta. "Popular culture, science fiction, and world politics." To seek out new

worlds. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003. 1-27.

Carpenter, Charli. "Rethinking the political/-science-/fiction nexus: Global policy making and the campaign to stop killer robots." *Perspectives on Politics* 14.1 (2016): 53-69.

Boaz, Cynthia. "How Speculative Fiction Can Teach about Gender and Power in International Politics: A Pedagogical Overview." *International Studies Perspectives* 21.3 (2020): 240-257.

Neumann, Iver B. "Grab a Phaser, Ambassador': Diplomacy in Star Trek." *Millennium* 30.3 (2001): 603-624.

Week 3: Sovereignty and the UFO

Wendt, Alexander, and Raymond Duvall. "Sovereignty and the UFO." *Political Theory* 36.4 (2008): 607-633.

Week 4: SETI and IR

Galloway, Jonathan F. "An international relations perspective on the consequences of SETI." *Space Policy* 12.2 (1996): 135-137.

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Week 5: Encounters with aliens: benevolent aliens? Colonialism and conquest in Arthur C. Clarke *Childhood's End* and Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem*

Matthew Candelaria, "The Overlord's Burden: The Source of Sorrow in *Childhood's End*," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* Vol.33 No.1 (January 2002), 37-58.

Mengtian Sun, "Alien Encounters in Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Trilogy* and Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* Vol.12 No.4 (December 2018): 610-644.

Week 6: Encounters with aliens: refugee aliens in "District 9" (watching selected scenes from the film)

Bourke, Greg. "Bare Life's Bare Essentials: When All You've Got is Hope—The State of Exception in *The Road*, *District 9* and *Blindness*." *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 10.3 (2014): 440-463.

Week 7: How to write a research proposal for the seminar paper

Knopf, Jeffrey W. "Doing a literature review." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39.1 (2006): 127-132.

Gustafsson, Karl, and Linus Hagström. "What is the point? teaching graduate students how to construct political science research puzzles." *European Political Science* 17.4 (2018): 634-648.

Week 8: Encounters with aliens: "Stories of your life" - interspecies communication
Ted Chiang, "Stories of your Life" - short story, will be sent on email by the instructor.

Fleming, David H., and William Brown. "Through a (First) Contact Lens Darkly: Arrival, Unreal Time and Chthulucinema." *Film-Philosophy* 22.3 (2018): 340-363.

Week 9: Technology and the human condition - watching selected scenes from Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey"

Week 10: Discussion - "2001"

Gil Markovitz and Yohai Ataria. 2018. *2001: Space Odyssey - Papers to commemorate 50 years for the release of the movie and the moon landing*. Haifa: Pardess. (In Hebrew). Read the papers by Michael Keren on the "Apocalyptic dimensions in technological thought," and Moshe Zukerman, "From first man to the last man."

Week 11: Post-apocalyptic visions: *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and *Station 14*.

Week 12: *Dystopia: Fahrenheit 451* and the practice of book burning
Read: Ovenden, Richard. *Burning the books: A history of the deliberate destruction of knowledge*. Belknap Press, 2020, pp. 3-27.

Week 13+14: Alternate history - *Nazis in the U.S: The Plot Against America* and *The Man in the High Castle*

Rosenfeld, Gavriel. "Why do we ask "what if?" Reflections on the function of alternate history." *History and theory* 41.4 (2002): 90-103.

Nolan, Daniel. "Why historians (and everyone else) should care about counterfactuals." *Philosophical Studies* 163.2 (2013): 317-335.

Schneider-Mayerson, Matthew. "What almost was: The politics of the contemporary alternate history novel." *American Studies* 50.3/4 (2009): 63-83.

Week 15: alternate Israeli history

Rovner, Adam. "Alternate History: The Case of Nava Semel's *Israelsland* and Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 9.1 (2011): 131-152.

Smith, Philip. "Security and Identity in Jewish Utopias of the Late Twentieth and

Twenty-First Centuries." *Utopian Studies: The Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies* 30.3 (2019): 382-402.

Hesse, Isabelle. "Counterfactual Israels." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 41 (2021): 190-216.

Weeks 15-28: students' presentations

Required Reading:

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Additional Reading Material:

Grading Scheme:

Written / Oral / Practical Exam 30 %

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 70 %

Additional information: