

English 2113: Popular Fiction

Spring 2015
Section 002
Wednesday 5:30-8
Anderson 25

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Course Topic

Cli-fi: Science Fiction, Climate Change, & Apocalypse

Recent years have seen the emergence of a new genre of novel: climate fiction, or “cli-fi” for short. Its nickname reveals its connection to the larger genre of science fiction, which has for a century imagined alternative worlds and wondered what it would be like for humans to live during (and after) apocalyptic events. At the same time, contemporary science has begun to understand the irrevocable interconnection between humans and the earth’s climate—to wit, the frightening fact that human beings have altered the climate itself, for now and for long into the future. Taking up the intersection of science fiction and the climate, this course will explore contemporary fiction (and, to begin, some fiction from earlier in the twentieth-century) that depicts and/or imagines the impact of climate change. Our key questions will be these: how can something so gradual, so significant, and so mind-boggling as climate change be treated in literature? And can fiction help to alter our conceptions of the earth and our role in changing it?

Required texts (available online and in the University bookstore). It is *much, much easier* for everyone if you obtain the exact same version listed below, so I’ve included ISBN numbers. If you wish to read a different edition, or on a Kindle or other e-reader, I won’t object – but do know that you’ll be working with different page numbers, or without page numbers entirely, which will likely make it harder to follow along in class.

1. H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (978-0375761188)
2. Phillippe Squarzoni, *Climate Changed: A Personal Journey through the Science* (978-1419712555)
3. ¹ George R. Stewart, *Earth Abides* (978-0449213018)
4. Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (978-0231169547)
5. Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (978-0446675505)
6. Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* (978-0062124272)
7. Kim Stanley Robinson, *Forty Signs of Rain* (978-0553585803)
8. Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Wind-up Girl* (978-1597801584)
9. Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (978-0307455475)
10. ² Tobias Buckell, *Hurricane Fever* (978-0765319227)

¹ This is the mass-market paperback edition I own; used copies are widely and cheaply available. You may also find the reprint edition (978-0345487131). It’s available on Kindle, including KindleUnlimited. Feel free to read any edition you can find, but know that we’ll all likely be working with different page ranges.

² This is the hardback edition; there are cheap used copies available, so snag one of those early in the semester and you’ll be set. There’s also a paperback edition printed in the UK (978-0091953539). And there’s a good chance it will soon be released in paperback here in the US.

Course Requirements and Grading

In-class Participation: 10%

Online Participation: 10%

6 Short Reviews: 30% (5% each)

2 Expert Reviews: 30% (15% each)

1 Short Final Paper: 20%

In-Class Participation (10%)

This is a class full of people who love to read books and, presumably, talk about them with others. It is also, because we meet only once a week, a long class. So it will be very important that we all work to make class stimulating, rewarding, and thought-provoking. Further, because the material we will read together in this class is certain to provoke strong responses and opinions, it's essential that we strive to share our thoughts fervently, but with respect. To ensure that we make the most of our time together, come well-prepared for each class period, having **not only** read the day's assignment, but annotated it, thought about it, and anticipated what aspect(s) of the reading you wish to discuss in class that evening. I will carefully note your participation in class each week. It's not enough that you merely attend each class – you must also participate.

Don't even think about taking out your phone during class unless you have received special permission from me. We'll take a break midway through the class period – anything electronic can wait. Suffice to say that if you're looking at your phone, you're not participating.

A note about **attendance**: because this class will only meet 13 times after the first day, your attendance is required. **Any more than 2 absences will significantly affect your final grade.** I will take attendance each evening a few minutes after the start of class. If you are repeatedly late, this will make a significant dent in your class participation grade.

Course Blog

Because the topic of our class is so deeply concerned with public engagement and issues that are important to society at large, I have created a blog for our course. I will myself be actively posting on it and reading it throughout the semester. The url is sites.temple.edu/clifi. You will be added as an Author shortly after the first class. I'll discuss some good ways of keeping up with the blog; reading stuff on the internet is something I'm really good at...

The purpose of the course blog is two-fold: first, to provide a space for you to share your work with the rest of the class, not with me only, and to interact with one another beyond the bounds of the classroom. Second, it will remind us that the issues we are considering in this course are of great significance, and that it's our role as learners, thinkers, and writers, to *think in public* and share our expertise with others. In our age, thinking in public often means writing online—thus the blog.

I will also post links to course readings on the blog, on a separate page.

In terms of assignments related to the blog, there are three types:

1. **Online Participation (10%)**

Online participation includes commenting on posts made by myself or a classmate, or writing a post of your own separate from your weekly reviews. You are required to comment or post a **minimum of 8 times** during the semester—4 before spring break and 4 afterwards. Doing more than the bare minimum, in this case just as in life in general, is best. For comments, think about how you can either extend a classmate's points or make an additional (or counter) point of your own. Posting encouraging feedback is strongly encouraged, but it won't count towards your 8 posts. For posts, think about sharing an article, website, movie, book, or something else that you encountered outside of class (for example, if you read an article about climate change or come across a new book/movie that relates to the class, those would be great things to post about). In addition to regular participation, in Week 8 of the course you will write an "Audit" of your blogging that reflects upon the comments and reviews you've written to that point of the semester (this will count as one of your 8 posts). For this assignment, you'll be, in a sense, blogging about the blog. I'll provide complete instructions for this assignment before it's due.

2. **6 Short Reviews (30%)**

6 times this semester—3 times before Spring Break and 3 times afterwards—you will post a short review of the book assigned for that week. (Note: there are 10 books assigned, and you'll be writing an Expert Review for two of them, so you'll get to take a pass twice, once before and once after break). Think of these as being similar to reviews for books you read on Amazon: a 200-1000 word **critical evaluation** of the book. These reviews should be posted by **Tuesday at 8pm** so that your classmates and I will have a chance to look over them before class on Wednesday. Please create a new post on the blog for your Reviews; consider giving your Review a title too. (Note: I strongly suggest writing in another program and then pasting in the Wordpress site).

Extra credit: I think it would be great if in addition to posting on our own blog we also posted our reviews of the books on Amazon, where reviews are widely read and actually influence whether people buy books. Therefore, if you post all of your short reviews on Amazon in addition to posting them on the course blog, I will boost your final Short Reviews grade by one full notch (B- to A-, etc).³

3. **2 Expert Reviews (30%)**

Two times this semester you will be assigned to write an "Expert Review" on that week's reading, which will replace your Short Review and are also due at 8pm on Tuesday. Expert Reviews are different from Short Reviews in three ways: (1) they are longer (500-2000 words); (2) they must incorporate an outside source in addition to discussing the main reading for the day. You are encouraged to use the week's secondary reading as your second source or to choose one of your own; (3) they must take a stance on a larger issue related to the book, rather than just discuss the book on its own. Think of the Expert Review as a short paper—write more formally, like an expert, and spend more time crafting your post. I will give you an opportunity to volunteer to be an expert on a particular book. If you don't volunteer, I'll assign you to a certain week.

³ When you post a review on Amazon, you'll receive an email confirming that it now appears on the site; you can simply forward these emails to me so that I can look at the review.

Final Paper (20% of final grade)

A 3 page paper that sums up your knowledge of the course material and builds upon the Reviews you have been writing to that point. I will wait to provide a full version of the assignment later in the semester, so that I can shape the assignment to the interests of this particular group. That said, you can expect to be writing about one or two of the controlling ideas of the course and making a summary statement on the relationship between science fiction and climate change.

Email

I am happy to answer questions over email, and I will get back to you within 24 hours (except on the weekends, when I'll be less quick to respond, if I respond at all). However, **before** you write to ask a question, be sure that it is not a question that can be answered by looking at the syllabus *and* that it's a question that can't wait until the next class period. It's *much* better for everyone if you ask questions during class – that way everyone can benefit from the clarification.

Policies

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215- 204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has a policy on Student and Faculty and Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy #03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link:
[http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02.](http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02)

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism and Violating the Rules of an Assignment (Excerpted from the Temple University Statement on Academic Honesty for Students in Undergraduate Courses)

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's labor: another person's ideas, words, or assistance. In general, all sources must be identified as clearly, accurately, and thoroughly as possible. Academic cheating is, in general terms, the thwarting or breaking of the general rules of academic work and/or the specific rules of individual courses. It includes falsifying data; submitting, without the instructor's approval, work in one course that was done for another; helping others to plagiarize or cheat from one's own or someone else's work; or actually doing the work of another person.

Penalties for Academic Dishonesty

The penalty for dishonesty can vary from a reprimand and receiving a failing grade for a particular assignment, to failure for the course, to suspension or expulsion from the University. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, ask BEFORE you hand in the work. It will be too late afterwards.

Course Schedule

This schedule may be revised as necessary throughout the semester.
Changes to the schedule will be announced in class or via email.

Key

(ON) = Links on the blog's "Readings" page

Week 1

1/14 Welcome

Week 2

1/21 E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops" (ON)
 - Angela Evancie, "So Hot Right Now: Has Climate Change Created A New Literary Genre?" (ON)
 - Rodge Glass, "Global warning: the rise of 'cli-fi'" (ON)
 - Robert Macfarlane, "The burning question" (ON)
 - Ian Sample, "Anthropocene: is this the new epoch of humans?" (ON)

Week 3

1/28 H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*
 - H.G. Wells, from "The Extinction of Man: Some Speculative Suggestions" & "Popularizing Science" (ON)

Week 4

2/4 Phillippe Squarzoni, *Climate Changed: A Personal Journey through the Science*
 - Chris Hayes, "The New Abolitionism" (ON)

Week 5

2/11 George R. Stewart, *Earth Abides*
 - Rachel Carson, from *Silent Spring* (ON)

Week 6

2/18 Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future*
 - Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall, "An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security" (ON)

Week 7

2/25 Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*
 - Octavia Butler, "Devil Girl From Mars': Why I Write Science Fiction" (ON)

SPRING BREAK

(Start reading *Flight Behavior*)

Week 8

- 3/11 Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*
 - *The New York Times*, “The Power of Climate Change Fiction” (ON)

Week 9

- 3/18 Kim Stanley Robinson, *Forty Signs of Rain* (1-197)
 - PD Smith, “Before the Flood” (ON)

Week 10

- 3/25 Kim Stanley Robinson, *Forty Signs of Rain* (198-393)
 - Scott Beauchamp, “In 300 Years, Kim Stanley Robinson's Science Fiction May Not Be Fiction”

Week 11

- 4/1 Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Wind-up Girl*
 - Aarthi Vadde, “Megalopolis Now”

Week 12

- 4/8 In-class film to be determined⁴ (and start reading *The Year of the Flood*)
 - Michael Svoboda, “A Review of Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi) Cinema ... Past and Present” & “(What) Do We Learn from Cli-Fi Films? Hollywood Still Stuck in Holocene” (ON)

Week 13

- 4/15 Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*
 - Gerry Canavan, “Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*” (ON)

Week 14

- 4/23 Tobias Buckell, *Hurricane Fever*
 - Nisi Shawl, “The Shock of the New Normal” (ON)

⁴ A few candidates: *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Godzilla* (2014), *Interstellar*, *Noah*, *Snowpiercer*, *Into the Storm*.

Rubric for Reviews

Over half of your grade for this course is determined by the Reviews, whether the Short or Expert variety, that you post on the course blog. These Reviews will be graded on a 4.0 scale (C+, B, A- etc). The length for the Short Reviews is 200-1000 words; for the Expert Reviews it is 500-2000. For reference, one double spaced page in Times New Roman 12 font is typically around 250-300 words. More does not always equal better, but you do have to hit the minimum. There is a Word Count clearly displayed at the bottom the Wordpress composition field.

General Advice

What I am looking for in a Review is that you significantly engage the book by describing, analyzing, and grappling with the issues that it provokes. You do *not* need to worry about summarizing the plot: assume that your reader has already read the book, or that she is considering reading it because she is interested in the topic (and therefore doesn't want to read the whole plot before reading the book itself). Most importantly, your review needs to have a *point* – something that you want to say about the book and want to take the time to explain carefully. For an excellent general guide to writing Book Reviews, check out this website: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/book-reviews>.

Rubric

	Comprehension	Engagement	Originality	Connections
A (4.0)	Review demonstrates an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the book under review	Review engages with the book and its key issues in a rigorous, thought-provoking way.	Review offers a truly fresh take on the book, enabling readers to see it in a new and exciting way.	Review makes compelling connections to larger issues related to the course, its topics, and/or other readings.
B (3.0)	Review demonstrates an accurate knowledge of the book but lacks comprehensiveness.	Review engages the book's key issues, but on a more superficial level than an A review.	Review offers a unique perspective that is the author's own, but does not offer any unexpected insights.	Review makes connections to course topics and readings, but without synthesizing them to make a new point.
C (2.0)	Review shows a lack of accurate knowledge of the book (some errors of comprehension or reference).	Review makes some effort to engage with the book but neglects to do so on a more than superficial level.	Review echoes a common or basic reading of the book and does not offer any new insight.	Review gestures towards course topics or readings, but these connections are superficial.
D (1.0)	Review shows that the reviewer has not accurately comprehended the book, and may not have read it carefully or completely.	Review does not adequately deal with the book and its key issues.	Review does little more than recite common knowledge about the book.	Review barely engages with the course topics or with other readings.
F (0.0) - also the grade for missing reviews	Review is inadequate due to lack of engagement with text.	Review makes little to no effort to engage with the book and its key issues.	Review appears to be paraphrased from another source.	Review has little to no connection to the course as a whole.