

Introduction to Science Fiction

Prof. Andrew Goldstone

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

September 7, 2023. Introduction.

- ▶ Please fill out sign-in sheet

course goals

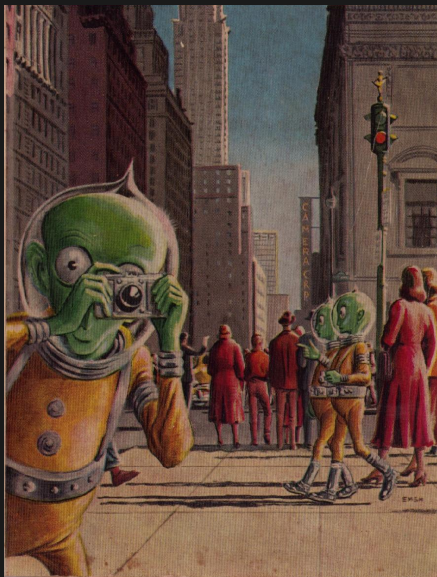
- ▶ read fun science fiction stories and novels
- ▶ learn to interpret texts in a scholarly way
- ▶ learn to think **historically** about culture
 - ▶ continuity and change
 - ▶ form, theme, context
- ▶ learn to think about **popular** culture

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“The only real horror in most of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art. Lovecraft was not a good writer.”

Edmund Wilson, “Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous” (1945), in *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (New York: FSG, 1950), 288.



beginnings (I)

Bisson, “They’re Made Out of Meat” (1991)

“Meat?” “Meat.”



Illustration from www.terrybisson.com/theyre-made-out-of-meat-2/, accessed September 6, 2023.

beginnings (2)

Octavia E. Butler, “Speech Sounds” (1983)

There was trouble aboard the Washington Boulevard bus. Rye had expected trouble sooner or later in her journey. She had put off going until loneliness and hopelessness drove her out. She believed she might have one group of relatives left alive—a brother and his two children twenty miles away in Pasadena. That was a day’s journey one-way, if she were lucky. The unexpected arrival of the bus as she left her Virginia Road home had seemed to be a piece of luck—until the trouble began.

Two young men were involved in a disagreement of some kind, or, more likely, a misunderstanding. They stood in the aisle, grunting and gesturing at each other, each in his own uncertain T stance as the bus lurched over the potholes.

WASF, 567.

back to meat

- ▶ Read the rest of Bisson's very short story.
- ▶ Consider: how does the story tell us who is talking?
- ▶ Why is the story told this way?

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-
- ▶ Do you believe in sentient meat?

definitions (rapid tour)

SF is, then[,] a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of **estrangement** and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework **alternative to the author's empirical environment**.

Darko Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," *College English* 34, no. 3 (December, 1972): 375.

There is the usual fiction magazine, the love story and the sex-appeal type of magazine, the adventure type, and so on, but a magazine of “Scientifiction” is a pioneer in its field in America.

By “scientifiction” I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision.

Hugo Gernsback, “A New Sort of Magazine,” *Amazing Stories* I, no. 1 (April 1926): 3.
[Pulp Magazines Project](#).

I am, by trade, a science-fiction writer. That is, the fiction I've written so far has arrived at the point of consumption via a marketing mechanism called "science fiction."

William Gibson, "Rocket Radio," *Rolling Stone*, June 15, 1989: 87. Rpt. at [Vice.com](#).

Note also that many Science Fiction fans dislike the term Sci-Fi: to them it suggests the flanderized conception of the genre in popular culture, with green-skinned aliens, giant space battles and hammy production values. Therefore, they will insist on calling it SF for short.

TV Tropes, s.v. "[Science Fiction](#)," accessed September 6, 2023.

course requirements

- ▶ paper 1 (25%)
- ▶ paper 2 (25%)
- ▶ final (25%)
- ▶ short writing exercises / quizzes (15%)
- ▶ participation (10%)

the books

- ▶ no screens in class
- ▶ buy or otherwise obtain the four required books
 - ▶ you need the *Wesleyan Anthology* for Monday
 - ▶ things on Canvas: I'll let you know when to print out

next

- ▶ Wells, “The Star” (*Wesleyan*)
- ▶ Rokeya, “Sultana’s Dream” (handout/Canvas printout)