

Title: Five Great Works of Science Fiction

Credit / award	Non-accredited		
Start date	25 April 2019	End date	25 April 2019
Day and time	Thursdays, 19:00 – 21:00	No of meetings	5
Venue	TBC		
Tutor	Dr John Lennard	Course code	1819NWR002

Director of Academic Centres Sarah Ormrod

For further information on this course, please contact Head of Academic Centre Administration, Zara Kuckelhaus
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Tutor biography

John Lennard is an Associate Member and Director of Studies in English at Hughes Hall, Cambridge, and a Panel Tutor for ICE. He was formerly a Fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and Professor of British and American Literature at the University of the West Indies-Mona, in Jamaica. He has published two collections of essays on genre fiction as well as on practical criticism, Shakespeare, punctuation history, Faulkner, Paul Scott, and Nabokov.

Course syllabus

Isaac Asimov, *I, Robot* (1940–50; New York: Gnome Press, 1950)

Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Chilton Books, 1965)

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1969)

Octavia E. Butler, *Lilith's Brood* (1987–9; New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000)

Richard K. Morgan, *Altered Carbon* (London: Gollancz, 2002)

Aims:

To introduce students to five major works of science fiction, putting each in context; to explore the history of science fiction over the last half-century, including the emergence of female writers and writers of colour; and to deny the genre's supposed escapism, insisting on its engaged and engaging relevance.

Content:

Science fiction is often said to be escapist, or irrelevant, or written only for a narrow audience, but it is none of those things, and at its best is not only a major literary form but one that can do astonishing things. Looking at five great works written between 1940 and 2002, this course is both an introduction to the genre for those unfamiliar with it, and a survey of developments within the genre of interest to those who already are.

We begin with Isaac Asimov's seminal *I, Robot* (1950), a 'fix-up' of stories written from 1940–50 that establish his famous 'laws of robotics' and explore what Artificial Intelligence will mean ; technological development is sometimes wildly optimistic, but the dilemmas are acutely imagined. Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) brought a new level of literary complexity, and gave the 'planetary romance' a fierce ecological twist, while Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), still often cited as the 'best' SF novel, both announced an important female voice and put gender firmly on the agenda. Octavia E. Butler's trilogy *Lilith's Brood* (1987–9, formerly published as *Xenogenesis*) follows, as another female voice and as a writer of colour, aware of the constant resonance between the 'alien encounter' and race relations. Finally, Richard K. Morgan's *Altered Carbon* (2002), a crackling fusion of the hard-boiled crime novel and SF recently filmed by Netflix, is a howling and remorseless thought experiment about identity and guilt.

Each of these five works illuminates and is illuminated by its time, revealing the often fierce relevance of SF ; collectively, they insist on the genre's high talent, gripping excitement, and hard-eyed scrutiny of human behaviour.

Session 1: Un/Tamed Technology : Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* (1950)

Session 2: The Law of the Minimum : Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965)

Session 3: 'The King was pregnant' : Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)

Session 4: 'A talent for cancer' : Octavia E. Butler's *Lilith's Brood* (1987–9)

Session 5: Rights and Resleeving : Richard K. Morgan's *Altered Carbon* (2002)

Presentation of the course:

In each session there will be a short lecture, leading to open discussion.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

Consider more objectively claims about the nature and value of science fiction;
understand the importance of each of the set works to the evolving history of the genre; and
read any work of science fiction with a greater understanding of its possible methods and concerns.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

Author	Title	Publisher and date
*Isaac Asimov, <i>I Robot</i> (1940–50) in <i>The Complete Robot</i> (London: HarperVoyager, 1983). (Used copies of the individual volume are fine.)		
*Frank Herbert, <i>Dune</i> (1965; London: Hodder, 2015). (All other editions are fine.)		
*Ursula K. Le Guin, <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> (1969; London: Gollancz, 2017). (All other editions are fine.)		
*Octavia E. Butler, <i>Lilith's Brood</i> (1987–9; New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000). (The trilogy comprises <i>Dawn</i> , <i>Adulthood Rites</i> , and <i>Imago</i> , and was previously collected as <i>Xenogenesis</i> ; copies of individual books or the earlier collection are fine.)		
*Richard K. Morgan, <i>Altered Carbon</i> (2002; London: Gollancz, 2018). (All other editions are fine.)		

None of the following are essential, but all are interesting and helpful:

Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York & London: Methuen, 1984)

Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1979; rev. ed., New York: HarperPerennial, 1993)

Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Cambridge & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005)

Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (2/e, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2006 [New Critical Idiom])

Website addresses

<https://www.bbc.com/timelines/zp7dwmn> (A short timeline of SF)

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

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