

Science Fiction for the Moment

Pavla Veselá, PhD.

pavla.vesela@ff.cuni.cz

OBJECTIVES

Departing from Carl Freedman's argument concerning the conjunction of science fiction and critical theory, in this course we consider the present from the perspective of selected Anglophone science-fiction prose and poetry published in the past four decades. Novels under review include Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*, Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*. Poetry sessions focus on selected poems by Le Guin, Piercy, Ken MacLeod and Darko Suvin. Key cultural concepts important for the discussion of these artistic works are introduced in the course through a selection of theoretical texts by Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, bell hooks and Silvia Federici, among others.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MATERIAL (REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED)

Byrne, Deidre. "'What is Not Owned': Feminist Strategies in Ursula K. Le Guin's Poetry." *Foundation* 114 (Spring 2012/13).

Đergović-Joksimović, Zorica. "The Poetry of Estrangement or Utopia Suviniana." *Utopian Studies* 28.1 (2017).

Federici, Silvia. "The Body, Capitalism, and the Reproduction of Labor Power." *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. Oakland: PM Press, 2020.

Freedman, Carl. "Definitions." *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013.

Garforth, Lisa. "Green Utopias: Beyond Apocalypse, Progress, and Pastoral." *Utopian Studies* 16.3 (2005).

Haraway, Donna J. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Haraway, Donna and Sarah Franklin. "Staying with the Manifesto: An Interview with Donna Haraway." *Theory, Culture and Society* 34.4 (2017).

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, "Empire, Twenty Years On." *New Left Review* 120 (2019).

Harvey, David. "Marxism, Metaphors, and Ecological Politics." *Monthly Review*, Mar. 3 (1998).

hooks, bell. "The Politics of Greed." *Where We Stand: Class Matters*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Hopkinson, Nalo. *Brown Girl in the Ring*. New York: Warner Books, 1998.

Hopkinson, Nalo. "Report from Planet Midnight." *Report from Planet Midnight*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012.

Hopkinson, Nalo and Terry Bisson. "Correcting the Balance: Nalo Hopkinson Interviewed by Terry Bisson." *Report from Planet Midnight*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012.

Jameson, Fredric. *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. London: Verso, 2016 (Jameson's "An American Utopia" and "An American Utopia: Epilogue" along with essays by Jodi Dean, Kathi Weeks and Slavoj Žižek)

Kabo, Raphael. "'Life! Life!': The Precarious Utopianism of Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*." *Utopian Studies* 32.2 (2021).

Le Guin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home*. London: Gollancz, 2016.

Le Guin, Ursula K. and Stephanie Rogers. "Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin." *Femspec* 15.1/2 (2015).

MacLeod, Ken and Iain Banks. *Poems*. London: Little, Brown, 2015. (selected poems)

Miéville, China. "Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory." *Red Planets*, ed. Mark Bould and China Miéville. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2009.

Milner, Andrew and J. R. Burgmann. "A Short Pre-History of Climate Fiction." *Extrapolation* 59.1 (2018).

Moylan, Tom. "Marge Piercy's Tale of Hope." *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview, 2000.

Piercy, Marge. *He, She and It*. New York: Fawcett, 1991.

Piercy, Marge. "Why Speculate on the Future?" and "Port Huron Conference Statement." *My Life, My Body*. Oakland: PM Press, 2015.

Piercy, Marge and Terry Bisson. "Living off the Grid: Marge Piercy Interviewed by Terry Bisson." *My Life, My Body*. Oakland: PM Press, 2015.

Piercy, Marge. Selected poetry from *The Monthly Review*.

Robinson, Kim Stanley and Terry Bisson. "A Real Joy to Be Had: Kim Stanley Robinson Interviewed by Terry Bisson." *The Lucky Strike*. Oakland: PM Press, 2009.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. *New York 2140*. London: Orbit, 2017.

Suvin, Darko. "On Communism, Science Fiction, and Utopia: The Blagoevgrad Theses." *Mediations* 32.2 (2019) and selected poetry from <https://darkosuvin.com/>

Suvin, Darko. "Of Starship Troopers and Refuseniks: War and Militarism in U.S. Science Fiction, Part 2." *Extrapolation* 48.1 (2007).

Suvin, Darko. "What and How Are Poets for in Our Age of Want: Cognition, Emancipation, Communism." *Minnesota Review* 91 (2018).

Wood, Sarah. "'Serving the Spirits': Emergent Identities in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*." *Extrapolation* 46.3 (2005).

ASSESSMENT

To receive their credits, students must attend at least 70% of seminars, deliver an oral presentation and submit an essay of 3000-4000 words. Please consult "Essay Guidelines" at <http://uakl.ff.cuni.cz> for general writing guidelines and submit an approximately 100-word proposal in advance (a preliminary bibliography should be included as well). Essays must be submitted by June 15, 2026.

You can sign up for the graded paper addition AAALB038B (i.e. another essay of 3000-4000 words) only if you take the seminar. The deadline for the second essay is June 15, 2027.

Erasmus students: if you need a grade, please register with the "E-code."

SCHEDULE

February 17: Course Overview

February 24: Introduction

Required:

Carl Freedman, "Definitions"

China Miéville, "Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory"

Darko Suvin, "On Communism, Science Fiction, and Utopia: The Blagoevgrad Theses"

March 3 and 10: Ursula K. Le Guin, *Always Coming Home*

Required:

Darko Suvin, "Of Starship Troopers and Refuseniks: War and Militarism in U.S. Science Fiction, Part 2"

David Harvey, "Marxism, Metaphors and Ecological Politics"

Ursula K. Le Guin, *Always Coming Home* (selections)

Recommended:

Ursula K. Le Guin and Stephanie Rogers, "Interview with Ursula K. Le Guin"

Lisa Garforth, "Green Utopias: Beyond Apocalypse, Progress, and Pastoral"

March 17 and 24: Marge Piercy, *He, She and It*

Required:

Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs"

Marge Piercy, *He, She and It*

Recommended:

Donna Haraway and Sarah Franklin, "Staying with the Manifesto: An Interview with Donna Haraway"

Marge Piercy and Terry Bison, "Living off the Grid: Marge Piercy Interviewed by Terry Bisson"

Tom Moylan, "Marge Piercy's Tale of Hope"

March 31: No Class

April 7: Selected Poetry by Ursula K. Le Guin and Marge Piercy

Required:

Ursula K. Le Guin, selected poetry

Marge Piercy, selected poetry

Recommended:

Deidre Byrne, "'What is Not Owned': Feminist Strategies in Ursula K. Le Guin's Poetry"

Marge Piercy, "Why Speculate on the Future" and "Port Huron Conference Statement"

April 14: Selected Poetry by Darko Suvin and Ken MacLeod

Required:

Darko Suvin, selected poetry

Ken MacLeod, selected poetry

Recommended:

Darko Suvin, "What and How Are Poets for in Our Age of Want: Cognition, Emancipation, Communism"

Zorica Đergović-Joksimović, "The Poetry of Estrangement or Utopia Suviniana"

April 21 and 28: Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Required:

Silvia Federici, "The Body, Capitalism, and the Reproduction of Labor Power"

bell hooks, "The Politics of Greed"

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Recommended:

Nalo Hopkinson and Terry Bisson, "Correcting the Balance: Nalo Hopkinson Interviewed by Terry Bisson"

Nalo Hopkinson, "Report from Planet Midnight"

Sarah Wood, "'Serving the Spirits': Emergent Identities in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*"

May 5: Fredric Jameson, *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*

Required:

Fredric Jameson, "An American Utopia" and "An American Utopia: Epilogue"

Recommended:

Jodi Dean, "Dual Power Redux"

Kathi Weeks, "Utopian Therapy: Work, Nonwork, and the Political Imagination"

Slavoj Žižek, "The Seeds of Imagination"

May 12 and 19: Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140*

Required:

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Empire, Twenty Years On"

Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (selected chapters)

Recommended:

Andrew Milner and J.R. Burgmann, "A Short Pre-History of Climate Fiction"

Kim Stanley Robinson and Terry Bison, "A Real Joy to Be Had: Kim Stanley Robinson Interviewed by Terry Bison"

Raphael Kabo, "'Life! Life!': The Precarious Utopianism of Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*"