



An Inhabitant of the Moon

## ENGL 123 LITERATURE AND GENRE: FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Professor Russell A. Potter

The genre we'll be tackling this fall goes by many names -- 'Fantasy and Science Fiction' is one; 'Speculative Fiction' another. It's an old genre, stretching back to the earliest literary texts, and yet still, for some reason, one that's frowned upon by 'serious' literary thinkers and creative writing professors. One of the latter, an old friend of mine, always liked to begin her CW course with a simple admonition: "No Hobbits!" Which may seem odd, since she was and is a huge fan of Tolkien; her aversion likely had more to do with not wanting to read a stack of creative pieces which, in addition to their other issues, were set on strange new worlds.

But the larger bias -- the feeling that Fantasy and Sci-Fi (and here we could include comics, graphic novels, and much of the rest of the geekazoid literary universe) are somehow juvenile, somehow not quite suited for grown-up readers, somehow lesser than 'literary' fiction -- is still out there. Sci-Fi has its own awards (the Hugo and Nebula), but Sci-Fi and fantasy writers rarely show up on the list for any major literary awards, unless they're for children's literature. Some noted writers have dabbled in it -- Doris Lessing with her *Shikasta* series, or Margaret Atwood with *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* -- but they were both established writers before they did so. Atwood, pointedly, does not like the phrase "science" fiction -- she prefers "speculative" -- because, as she puts it, her novels don't have "things in them that haven't been invented yet."

But just because the setting, the characters, the geology, climate, and perhaps even the physics and the power of a world and its inhabitants are different from our everyday reality doesn't make them unrealistic -- indeed, it adds all kinds of other possible dimensions. Ursula K. Le Guin, who's spent a lifetime writing in, and defending, the Sci-Fi/Fantasy genre, referred to its authors as "realists of the greater real" in a widely-reported speech she gave last year at the National Book Awards. And let's bear in mind that the standard literary "novel" -- a term meaning "new" -- was new precisely because it wasn't like the fantastical fictional tales that had come before -- *realism*, it turns out, had to be invented.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

Week I (Sept. 1, 4): Tuesday: Introduction to Class. Friday: Lucian of Samosata, *The True History*, Book I.

Week II (Sept. 8): *The True History*, Book II. NO CLASS FRIDAY

Week III (Sept. 15, 18): Tuesday: In-class film, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*. HG Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*, chapters 1- 13.

Week IV (Sept. 22, 25): Wells, *First Men in the Moon*, chapters 14-26 (end). Friday: In-class film, *The First Men in the Moon*.

Week V (Sept. 29, Oct. 2): Miller, *A Canticle for Liebowitz*

Week VI (Oct. 6, 9): Tuesday: In-class film, *Things to Come* (1936). Friday: Start Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Week VII (Oct. 16): NO CLASS TUESDAY. Friday: finish *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Week VIII (Oct. 20, 23): Bradbury, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*

Week IX (Oct. 27, 30): Tuesday: finish *Something Wicked*. Friday: Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives*.

Week X (Nov. 3, 6): Tuesday: In-class film, *The Stepford Wives* (1975). Friday: Start Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Week XI (Nov. 10, 13): Tuesday: Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*. Friday : In-class film, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990).

Week XII (Nov. 20): NO CLASS TUESDAY. Friday: Finish *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Week XIII (Nov. 24): In-class film: *Soylent Green* (1973).

### THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week XIV (Dec. 1, 4) Tuesday: Hans Christian Andersen, "The Shadow," "The Red Shoes."  
Thursday: Andersen, "The Little Mermaid," with excerpts from the Disney version.

Week XV (Dec. 8, 11) Film: *Pan's Labyrinth*.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

- *Attendance: In accordance with Departmental policy, students may have no more than two (2) absences. Barring exceptional circumstances, there is no such thing as an excused absence; please schedule any college or personal appointments (doctor's visits, etc.) outside of class hours.*
- *Electronic devices. All cell phones, laptops, etc. should remain closed and off during class. The only exception is for Kindles or other e-readers used for course texts.*
- *Plagiarism: Please acquaint yourself, if you have not already, with the statement in the College Handbook on this subject. Clear instances of plagiarism will result in an automatic grade of "F," and all such instances are reported to the Chair of the Department.*