

COML/FREN 0090.401

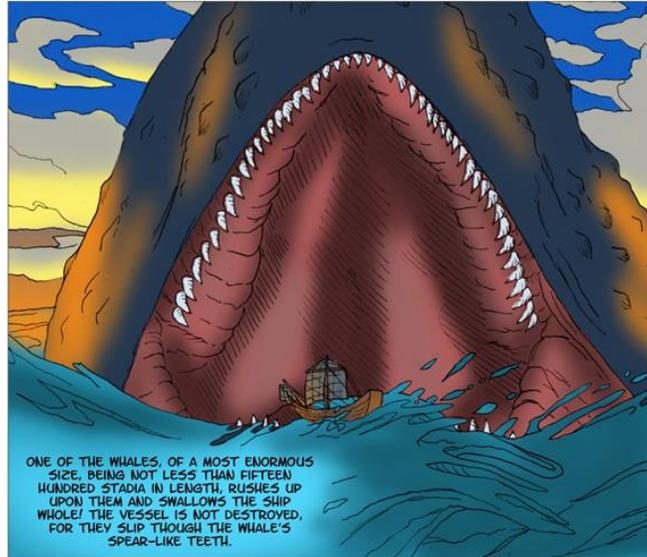
First-Year Seminar: The Fantastic Voyage from Homer to Science Fiction

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:45-3:15 PM

Instructor

Scott Francis (he/him/his)
franciss@sas.upenn.edu

Office: 546 Williams Hall
Hours: TR 12:30-1:30 PM



Lucian and his crew swallowed by a whale in the *True History*
(<http://truehistory.thecomicsseries.com/comics/15>)

Tales of voyages to strange lands with strange inhabitants and even stranger customs have been a part of the Western literary tradition from its inception. What connects these tales is that their voyages are not only voyages of discovery, but voyages of self-discovery. By describing the effects these voyages have on the characters who undertake them, and by hinting at comparisons between the lands described in the story and their own society, authors use fantastic voyages as vehicles for incisive commentary on literary, social, political, and scientific issues.

In this course, we will see how voyage narratives as seemingly distant as Homer's *Odyssey* and Pierre Boullé's *Planet of the Apes* fit into a bigger tradition of speculative fiction. We will determine what the common stylistic elements of speculative fiction are, such as the frame narrative, or story-within-a-story, and what purpose they serve in conveying the tale's messages. We will see how voyagers attempt to understand and interact with the lands and peoples they encounter, and what these attempts tell us about both the voyagers and their newly discovered counterparts. Finally, we will ask ourselves what real-world issues are commented upon by these narratives, what lessons the narratives can teach about them, and how they impart these lessons to the reader.

Readings for this course, all of which are in English or English translation, range from classics like the *Odyssey* and *Gulliver's Travels* to predecessors of modern science fiction like Jules Verne and H. G. Wells to seminal works of modern science fiction like Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes*, Karel Čapek's *War with the Newts*, and Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*. We will also look at how films like *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954) or television shows like *Star Trek* and *Futurama* draw upon literary or cinematic models for their own purposes. Students will also have the opportunity to examine and present on pieces from the Mark B. Adams Science Fiction Collection at Penn's Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts, which comprises over 2,000 volumes of science fiction, speculative fiction, and fantasy.

This course is meant not only for SF fans who would like to become better acquainted with the precursors and classics of the genre, but for all those who wish to learn how great works of fiction, far from being intended solely for entertainment and escapism, attempt to improve upon the real world through the effect they have on the reader.

Requirements fulfilled by school

SAS: Cross-Cultural Analysis foundational approach, Sector III (Arts and Letters)

SEAS: Humanities breadth requirement

Wharton: General Education Distribution (Humanities), Cross-Cultural Perspectives (non-U.S.)

Nursing: Arts and Letters

Course Materials

Available at Penn Bookstore

- Pierre Boulle, *Planet of the Apes*, trans. Xan Fielding (Del Rey, 2001, ISBN 9780345447982)
- Karel Čapek, *War with the Newts*, trans. G. and R. Weatherall (Northwestern University Press, 1996, ISBN 9780810114685)
- Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris*, trans. Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox (Houghton Mifflin, 2002, ISBN 9780156027601)
- Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Broadview, 2012, ISBN 9781551119793). **Different digital edition available through Penn Libraries (link on Canvas).**
- Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*, trans. William Butcher (Oxford UP, 2009, ISBN 9780198818649). **Digital edition available through Penn Libraries (link on Canvas).**
- H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (Broadview, 2001, ISBN 9781551113050). **Different digital edition available through Penn Libraries (link on Canvas).**

All other readings are available on Canvas.

Films and TV episodes

- *Planet of the Apes*, dir. Franklin J. Schaffner
- *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, dir. Richard Fleischer
- *Star Trek*, “This Side of Paradise”
- *A Trip to the Moon*, dir. Georges Méliès
- *Futurama*, “The Series Has Landed”

Films and TV episodes will be available for free streaming via Penn Libraries if possible (“Course Materials @ Penn Libraries” tab in Canvas). If not, links will be provided to other online streaming services, some of which require either a subscription or a one-time rental or purchase.

Grading

Perusall and discussion posts: 25%

Attendance and participation: 20%

Mark B. Adams Science Fiction Collection Presentation: 25%

Essay: 30%

Perusall and Canvas discussion posts

Starting in Week 2, students will be asked to annotate passages from each day’s reading on Perusall. On days devoted to films or television episodes, the conversation will take place through Canvas discussion posts.

To get full credit for this assignment, you must choose one of two options for each class session:

- 1) You can generate your own comment, question, clarification, or appraisal with a thoughtful explanation for your reaction and react to a peer’s comment (agree, disagree, expand, support, etc.).
- 2) Alternatively, you can react to two of your peers’ comments.

Your two contributions should contain a total of 200-300 words, about the equivalent of one or two substantial paragraphs.

Annotations or discussion posts must be submitted no later than 10:00 AM on the day the source is scheduled to be discussed.

For each class session, points will be awarded as follows:

- Annotations or discussion posts meet the above guidelines and are submitted on time: 5
- Annotations or discussion posts are submitted late or do not meet the guidelines: 3
- No annotations submitted: 0 points

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend and participate in all class meetings, which will be devoted to discussion of the assigned reading for that day. These discussions will take the discussion threads and students' responses as a point of departure.

To receive full credit for participation, you must make at least one relevant contribution to the discussion. If you are unable to attend a meeting for any reason, please contact the instructor ASAP so that the absence can be excused.

There are 28 class meetings for a total of 28 possible points:

- Participation = 1 point
- Unexcused absence = 0 points
- In attendance, but no contribution to the discussion or Google Doc = ½ point

Students who join the class late during Course Selection Period will not be penalized for classes they miss prior to joining.

Mark B. Adams Science Fiction Collection Presentations

One of the many unique resources available at Penn's Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts is the Mark B. Adams Science Fiction Collection, which comprises over 2,000 volumes of science fiction, speculative fiction, and fantasy. Students will be introduced to the collection and a sample of its holdings, and each student will select an item on which to give a presentation.

The presentation will focus less on the text (the written story that is usually studied in literature classes) than on the paratext, the aspects that make a text into a material book and a commercial object (cover art, blurbs, advertisements, author bios, etc.). In this way, students will gain an appreciation for how the study of literature involves understanding how texts are packaged, disseminated, sold, and received, sometimes in ways that are radically different from what authors might envision for their own writing.

The presentations will be done asynchronously: students will record themselves and post the recordings to Canvas. Students will also be divided into groups, and the members of each group will respond to questions about each presentation in a different group. These responses will factor into the final grade for the presentation.

Essay

Students will write an essay, the final version of which will be due no later than the end of exam period. Students will be provided with a list of potential topics, but they will be free to devise their own if they prefer. Two class sessions will be devoted to workshops on how to build an argument, how to locate and use secondary sources, how to construct an outline, and how to construct the first draft of an essay.

Final versions of essays must be 5–6 pages in length, double-spaced, and written in Times New Roman size 12 font, with 1-inch page margins — no exceptions.

Plagiarism and academic integrity

Students are expected to be familiar with the University of Pennsylvania’s Code of Academic Integrity, a clearly defined set of rules governing student conduct in terms of crediting the work of others, collaborating with others on coursework, and completing assignments in a proper fashion. The instructor will hold students to the Code, and any and all violations of it will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

Online version: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>.

General set of guidelines on how to cite sources properly and avoid plagiarism: <https://guides.library.upenn.edu/copyright/citation>.

A note on responsible use of AI

A note on the responsible use of AI

As far as this instructor is concerned, speed is generative AI’s only attractive quality when it comes to the study of language and culture. In terms of the skills this course is meant to cultivate, including independent thought, deep and accurate knowledge, and the ability to express oneself elegantly and precisely, AI is more a hindrance than a help.

At most, you may use AI for brainstorming and proofreading, but even then, you should do so with caution. It will often provide misleading or even outright false information, and fabrication of information or sources is considered a clear violation of the Code of Academic Integrity and will be treated as such. You will be much better off relying on direct engagement with the works we study, on class discussions and materials, and on other reliable sources such as peer-reviewed publications. When in doubt as to whether a source is reliable or as to where to find reliable sources, ask the instructor.

Similarly, all assignments must be written in your own words. Submitting work that contains AI-generated content will be considered a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity and treated accordingly.

Weingarten Center

<https://weingartencenter.universitylife.upenn.edu/>

The Weingarten Center offers a variety of resources to support all Penn students in reaching their academic goals. All services are free and confidential. To contact the Weingarten Center, call

215-573-9235. The office is located in Stouffer Commons, 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300.

Academic Support

Learning consultations and learning strategies workshops support students in developing more efficient and effective study skills and learning strategies. Learning specialists work with undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to address time and project management, academic reading and writing, note-taking, problem-solving, exam preparation, test-taking, self-regulation, and flexibility.

Undergraduates can also take advantage of free on-campus tutoring for many Penn courses in both drop-in and weekly contract formats. Tutoring may be individual or in small groups. Tutors will assist with applying course information, understanding key concepts, and developing course-specific strategies. Tutoring support is available throughout the term but is best accessed early in the semester.

Disability Services

The University of Pennsylvania is committed to the accessibility of its programs and services. Students with a disability or medical condition can request reasonable accommodations through the Weingarten Center website. Disability Services determines accommodations on an individualized basis through an interactive process, including a meeting with the student and a review of their disability documentation. Students who have approved accommodations are encouraged to notify their faculty members and share their accommodation letters at the start of each semester. Students can contact Disability Services by calling 215-573-9235.

Schedule

Week 1

January 16 Introduction: Science Fiction or Speculative Fiction?
How to study and take notes

Week 2

January 21 Reading: Darko Suvin, “Estrangement and Cognition”

January 23 Reading: Homer, *The Odyssey*, Books 8–12
Viewing: *Star Trek TOS*, “This Side of Paradise” (S1 E24, 1967)

Week 3

January 28 Reading: Lucian of Samosata, *The True History*, Part 1
Roy Arthur Swanson, “The True, the False, and the Truly False:
Lucian’s Philosophical Science Fiction”

January 30 Readings: Lucian of Samosata, *The True History*, Part 2

Week 4

February 4 Viewing: Georges Méliès, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902)

February 6 Viewing: *Futurama*, “The Series Has Landed” (S1 E2, 1999)



Scene from Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902)

Week 5

February 11 Reading: Pierre Boule, *Planet of the Apes*, Part One (chapters 1–17)

February 13 Reading: Pierre Boule, *Planet of the Apes*, Part Two (chapters 18–26)

Week 6

February 18 Reading: Pierre Boule, *Planet of the Apes*, Part Three (chapters 27–38)

February 20 Viewing: *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

Week 7

February 25 Introduction to Adams Science Fiction Collection

February 27 Reading: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part One: A Voyage to Lilliput

Week 8

March 4 Reading: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part Two: A Voyage to Brobdingnag

March 6 Reading: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part Four: A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms

March 8-16: Spring Break

Week 9

March 18 Reading: Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*
Part One, Chapters 1–12

March 20 Reading: Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*
Part One, Chapters 13–24



Shipwrecked, Aronnax, Conseil, and Ned Land
find themselves atop the *Nautilus*
(ill. Edouard Riou)

Week 10

March 25 Reading: Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*
Part Two, Chapters 1–12

March 27 Reading: Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*
Part Two, Chapters 13–23

Week 11

April 1 Viewing: *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Richard Fleischer, 1954)

