

COML/FREN 0090.401

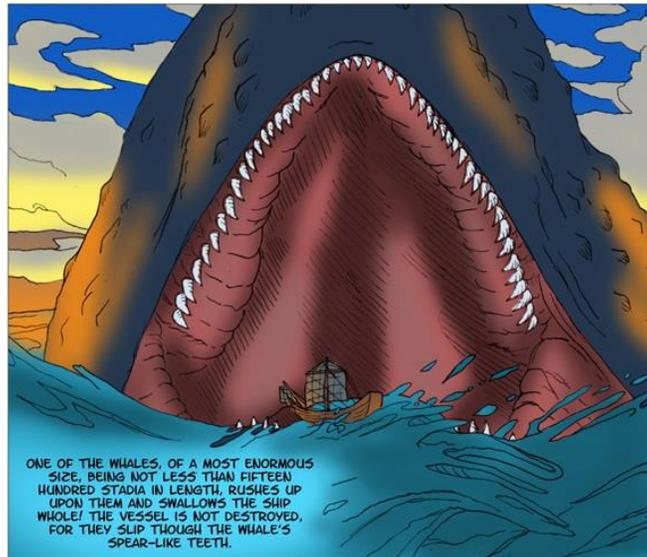
First-Year Seminar: The Fantastic Voyage from Homer to Science Fiction

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:45-3:15 PM
Fisher-Bennett Hall 222

Instructor

Scott Francis (he/him/his)
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Office: 546 Williams Hall
Hours: MW 11:00 AM-12:00 PM
or by appointment on Zoom



Lucian and his crew swallowed by a whale in the *True History*
(<http://truehistory.thecomicseries.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 Boule'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 Boule, *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).**
- Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (Norton, 2020, ISBN 9780393655063)

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”
- *George Méliès, A Trip to the Moon*
- *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

Canvas posts: 25%

Attendance and participation: 20%

Essay: 30%

Mark B. Adams Science Fiction Collection Presentation: 25%

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, which will take the discussion threads and students’ responses as a point of departure, will be recorded on a collaborative Google Doc that will be projected onscreen, and to which students can later refer for the essays.

To receive full credit for participation, you must make at least one relevant contribution to the verbal discussion and/or the Google Doc. 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 (ends Wednesday, Jan. 31) will not be penalized for classes they miss prior to joining.

The introduction to the Adams Science Fiction Collection will be interactive, but heavily curated by the instructor and by John Pollack, Curator of Research Services at the Kislak Center. Students are encouraged to participate and ask questions, but for this meeting, the grade will be based on attendance only.

Canvas posts

Starting in Week 2, topics for discussion posts on Canvas will be made available at the beginning of each week. Students must post a contribution (200-300 words in length) to a discussion thread on Canvas no later than 9:00 PM the day before each class meeting. Posts are graded on effort and completion: as long as your post is on time and on topic, you'll receive full credit.

Typically, you will be able to choose between multiple discussion threads, but you only need to post to one of the threads in order to receive credit. Over the course of the semester, there are 23 Canvas posts to complete for a total of 23 possible points:

- Post completed and turned in on time = 1 point.
- Failure to post = 0 points
- Late or incomplete post = ½ point

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.

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.

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>.

Schedule

Week 1

- January 22 Introduction: Science Fiction or Speculative Fiction?
 Reading: Darko Suvin, "Estrangement and Cognition"
- January 24 Session Zero: How to study and take notes

Week 2

- January 28 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- January 29 Reading: Homer, *The Odyssey*, Books 8–12
 Viewing: *Star Trek* TOS, "This Side of Paradise" (S1 E24, 1967)
- January 30 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- January 31 Reading: Homer, *The Odyssey*, Books 19–24

Week 3

- February 4 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- February 5 Readings: Lucian of Samosata, *The True History*
 Roy Arthur Swanson, "The True, the False, and the Truly False:
 Lucian's Philosophical Science Fiction"
- February 6 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- February 7 Viewings: *A Trip to the Moon* (1902)
 Futurama, "The Series Has Landed" (S1 E2, 1999)



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

Week 4

- February 11 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- February 12 Reading: Pierre Boule, *Planet of the Apes*, Part One (chapters 1–17)
- February 13 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- February 14 Reading: Pierre Boule, *Planet of the Apes*, Part Two (chapters 18–26)

Week 5

- February 18 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- February 19 Reading: Pierre Boule, *Planet of the Apes*, Part Three (chapters 27–38)
- February 20 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- February 21 Viewing: *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

Week 6

- February 26 **Introduction to Adams Science Fiction Collection**
Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts
- February 27 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- February 28 Reading: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part One: A Voyage to Lilliput

March 2-10: Spring Break

Week 7

March 10: Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM

March 11 Reading: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part Two: A Voyage to Brobdingnag

March 12 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM

March 13 Reading: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part Four: A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms

Week 8

March 17 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM

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

March 19 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM

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

March 22 **Presentation recordings due by 5:00 PM**



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

Week 9

- March 24 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- March 25 Reading: Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*
Part Two, Chapters 1–12
- March 26 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- March 27 Reading: Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*
Part Two, Chapters 13–23
- March 29 **Presentation responses due by 5:00 PM**

Week 10

- March 31 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- April 1 Viewing: *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Richard Fleischer, 1954)
- April 3 Essay workshop, part 1: Building an argument, finding sources,
constructing an outline

Week 11

- April 7 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- April 8 Reading: H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, Chapters 1–8
- April 9 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- April 10 Reading: H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, Chapters 9–16

Week 12

- April 14 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- April 15 Reading: Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris*
Chapters 1–7 (“The Arrival”–“The Conference”)
- April 16 Discussion posts due by 9:00 PM
- April 17 Reading: Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris*
Chapters 8–14 (“The Monsters”–“The Old Mimoid”)

