HIS 185 A History of the Future: Millennial Visions in Film in Literature

MW, 9:00-10:15 a.m. Morey 501 Professor Laura A. Smoller office: Rush Rhees 457 office hours: M 1-3 and by appointment telephone: 275-7721 email: <u>laura.smoller@rochester.edu</u>

Through literature and film, this course examines how people at various points in the past have imagined our future--and the ways in which those "millennial visions" were conditioned by specific historical contexts. The course looks at both positive and negative views of the future, and at secular as well as religious predictions for humankind's fate, asking always how our visions of the future, like a fun-house mirror, reflect in sometimes monstrous or exaggerated terms the concerns of the present.

Part 1: Religious visions of the future

- Week 1. 1/14 Introduction
- Week 2. 1/19 NO CLASS (Martin Luther King holiday)
 - 1/21 Discussion: Apocalypse and millennium in the Christian tradition

Reading: Revelation; Joachim of Fiore, selections

Week 3. 1/26 Discussion: The Seventh Seal

Viewing: The Seventh Seal;

Reading: Michael Pressler, "The Idea Fused in the Fact: Bergman and *The Seventh Seal*," *Literature Film Quarterly* 13 (1985): 95-101.

Part 2: Technology and the future

1/28 Lecture: The Revolutions of the Modern Age

Reading: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein;* Deborah Blum, "Conceiving 'Frankenstein,'" *New York Times*, February 1, 2013.

2/4 Lecture: Space and artificial intelligence

Week 5. 2/9 Discussion: 2001: A Space Odyssey

Viewing: 2001: A Space Odyssey;

Reading: Jeffrey Geiger, "I'm Afraid I Can Feel It," in R. L. Rutsky, *Film Analysis: A Norton Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), online via FIAF International Index to Film Periodicals, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:fiaf&rft_dat=xri:fiaf:article:011/0000037.

Topics for final project due on 2/9.

2/11 Lecture: Jules Verne's world

Week 6. 2/16 Discussion: Jules Verne, Paris in the Twentieth Century

Reading: Jules Verne, Paris in the Twentieth Century; Brian Taves, "Jules Verne's Paris in the Twentieth Century," Science Fiction Studies 24 (1997): 133-38.

2/18 Discussion: *Blade Runner* (No response due; you will write an essay about Blade Runner on the midterm exam.)

Viewing: *Blade Runner* (director's cut); Reading: Mark Lussier and Kaitlin Gowan, "The Romantic Roots of 'Blade Runner,'" *Wordsworth Circle* 43 (2012): 165-72.

Week 7. 2/23 Midterm exam

Part 3: Cold-War visions of a nuclear holocaust

2/25 The Cold War and Nuclear Armageddon

Week 8. 3/2 Discussion: *On the Beach* (You may omit the response for either On the Beach or Dr. Strangelove)

Viewing: *On the Beach* Reading: Philip Beidler, "Remembering *On the Beach*," *War, Literature, and the*

- 4/6 Lecture: Seventies utopias and dystopias: Marge Piercy's world
- Week 13. No class 4/13 or 4/15. Work on final projects.
- Week 14. 4/20 Discussion: *Woman on the Edge of Time*

Reading: Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*; Marcia Bundy Seabury, "The Monsters We Create:

Books to purchase:

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition: 978-0143105039). Jules Verne, *Paris in the Twentieth Century* (Del Rey: 978-0345420398). Walter J. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (EOS: 978-0060892999). Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (Signet About the "ownership" of a film or reading: In a short, five minute presentation, you will orient the class about 1) the historical context in which the work was produced, specifically thinking about contemporary events to which the author or film-maker was responding (for example, for *Revelation*, to Roman persecutions of Christians in the late first century); and 2) the author or film-maker responsible for the work being discussed, situating the work within that person's life

grade for the course after a student's absence from four or more discussions. (For the sake of accounting, three tardies will constitute one absence.)

Learning objectives:

At the end of this course, students will be able to

- Read and understand primary sources as products of a specific historical context
- Describe both religious and secular views of the future, particularly as expressed in the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries
- Provide examples of the way in which projections of the future can convey anxieties or concerns about the present
- Effectively analyze, in writing and orally, works of literature and film as historical sources
- Identify and utilize appropriate sources to discover background material about the films, novels, and historical settings discussed in the course
- Correctly cite sources in footnotes/endnotes and bibliographies