

#### IV. Research Paper and/or Essay Exam Topics

1. It has been argued that science fiction's imaginary worlds can each be situated somewhere on the continuum between the opposing poles of utopia and dystopia. Consider how several of these stories suggest futures that will be better in some ways and/or worse in some ways, than the "real" world that produced them. What do the features of these various futures suggest about the historical contexts that produced them?
2. Write an essay about imaginative representations of the alien in several of these stories, including some consideration of the ways in which these representations function (for example, in terms of how they help to define "humanity" or how they act as metaphors of "otherness").
3. How has the portrayal of the alien in sf evolved since the early decades of the 20th century? Compare, for instance, "Shambleau" and "A Martian Odyssey" (as examples of "pulp" sf from the 1930s) with "Out of All Them Bright Stars" and "Think Like a Dinosaur" (as examples of modern sf).
4. Many readers agree that the fictional worlds of science fiction intersect with the "real" world in two quite different ways: through extrapolation and through metaphor (what Ursula K. Le Guin calls "thought experiment"). Using at least two stories as examples, write an essay in which you identify and discuss these two kinds of relationship between fictional worlds and real world. Which of these two tendencies seems most emphasized in the individual texts you are discussing? Keep in mind that some texts make fairly equal use of both tendencies.
5. Discuss the ways in which any three of the following titles contribute to the meaning of their stories: "A Martian Odyssey," "The Sentinel," "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side," "Aye, and Gomorrah...," "We See Things Differently," "Invaders," "Think Like a Dinosaur," and "Exhalation."
6. Discuss how several of these stories are "about" gender; that is, discuss how these texts construct/support/critique/question/subvert various ideas about "femininity" and/or "masculinity." Another way to consider this question is to consider the narrative worlds and structures of these texts and how they "estrangle" conventional ideas about gender and gendered behaviour. Remember that a text can be "about" gender in many ways.
7. Compare and contrast the literary and film versions of two of the following: "The Sentinel"/*2001: A Space Odyssey*; "Super-Toys Last All Summer Long"/*A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*; "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale"/*Total Recall*; and "Air Raid"/*Millennium*. Keep in mind that stories and films are different media; do not confine yourself only to content (plot and character) analysis; include some consideration of how each of these media work to create their particular effects.
8. Write an essay about the portrayal of artificially constructed life-forms (androids; cyborgs; clones; artificial intelligences; virtual intelligences, etc.), and the ways in which these representations function in several stories in the collection. For instance, they might raise questions about how to define "humanity" or they might function as considerations of the effects of technology on human life.
9. Write an essay examining the function of "estrangement" (also called "defamiliarization") as it is developed and used in two or more course readings. Your discussion should include an explanation of what you mean by this concept, and it should also include some conclusions about its *goal* in each text. Keep in mind that "estrangement" ultimately refers to an effect *on the reader*, although we often see fictional characters undergoing similar estranging experiences, often as stand-ins for the reader (e.g., the narrator in Russ's "When It Changed").
10. The way in which a story is told often helps to develop the meaning of the story. Consider the narrative points of view in several of these stories (examples might include "That Only a Mother," "The Sentinel," "Day

Million,” “When It Changed”). Discuss how the choice of point of view in these stories contributes to the reader’s experience and understanding of the narrative events.

11. Sf frequently highlights ecological concerns. Discuss several stories that do. Issues you might choose to focus on include: the implication of alien ecologies, the ways in which technological and other developments impact and transform the natural environments of future worlds, the evolution of a technological landscape (e.g., a “media ecology”) that has come to form a “second nature” to which humans must adapt.

12. American sf since the 1970s often displays a feminist consciousness or deals explicitly with feminist themes. Identify and discuss three sf stories of this type. Issues you might choose to focus on include: the politics of gender separatism, the critical interrogation of masculine behavior and values, the deployment of active female protagonists, the alleged “backlash” of cyberpunk against feminist concerns.

13. Much sf chooses to focus less on technological hardware and more on issues related to future lifestyles. Discuss this tendency in some of the stories you have read. Issues you might wish to focus on include: the exploration of alternative gender and sexual identities, the emotional and political complexity of interpersonal relationships, the fascination with future artforms and aesthetic practices, the embrace of drug-induced and other synthetic states of consciousness.

14. According to some commentators, American sf from the mid-1980s can be divided into two main camps: the humanists versus the cyberpunks. Discuss this polarization. Issues you might choose to focus on include: the relative importance of technology within both subgenres, their divergent stylistic norms and literary values, problems involved in the general division itself.

15. Discuss how cyberpunk sf portrays the cultural fallout of futuristic technologies. Issues you might choose to focus on include: the complex intersection between high-tech and street-level (sub)cultures, the flirtation with “posthumanist” or “transhumanist” possibilities and philosophies promoted by new technologies, the effect of these technologies on the social landscapes of cyberpunk's fictional worlds.

16. Contrast the role of the hero in early sf (pre-1960) versus contemporary sf. How has it changed? Why?

17. All literary texts are cultural artifacts. They are the products of their milieu and reflect their socio-historical origins. Choose three stories and explain how they express the period in which they were written.

18. Modern science fiction is sometimes described as more “inward looking” than “outward looking.” Explain, using examples from your readings.

19. Since the seventeenth century, the genre of sf has had a very long tradition of being used for purposes of social satire. Discuss at least three examples in your readings and explain how the satire works in each case. In terms of such social commentary, what advantages does this genre offer that others do not?

20. As explained in the Introduction to this anthology, reading sf involves certain “protocols” (with regard to plot, characterization, megatext, narrative structure, etc.) that are different from those used in reading realist mainstream fiction. Give at least three examples drawn from the sf stories you have read to illustrate these basic differences.