**Essay topics**

**Please respond to ONE of the following topics in an essay of somewhere between 1200 and 1500 words. Provide a clear discussion of your chosen topic, with supporting examples (cited correctly using MLA format!) wherever possible. I’m looking for your analytical, critical thinking, and writing skills rather than for any “right” or “wrong” responses. Got an idea that’s not on this list? Run it by me. I am always up for some individual analyses! Due: Sunday, Nov. 4, by 11:59pm.**

1. Both *Blade Runner* and *Snowpiercer* take place in dystopian societies: the former exists in a wide-open landscape of darkness, rain, porous spaces (locations where interior and exterior spaces overlap), and street-level chaos, while the latter is set in a completely enclosed and deeply claustrophobic world. Compare/contrast the way the actual environment of each story—the physical places in which the characters act and interact—shapes the dystopian narrative of each work. Use examples from both films, and be as specific as possible!
2. Feminism is generally defined as: “The doctrine advocating social, political, and all other rights of women equal to those of men” (Dictionary.com), or “The theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes (Merriam Webster). If we accept that (for our purposes, at least) these definitions are essentially accurate, can either or both of the two stories “The Conquest of Gola” (1931) or “When it Changed” (1972) truly be defined as “feminist” in content and execution? Why or why not? Is the time period in which each story was written relevant to our understanding of how “feminist” the stories are… or aren’t? Discuss, using specific examples from both stories to support whatever point you decide to make. (You can also write a slightly different take on this by substituting any pair of stories dealing with gender stereotypes/expectations!)
3. In his introduction to the book *Shine: An Anthology of Optimistic Science Fiction*, editor Jetse de Vries writes “There’s a thing like weed: it grows everywhere, despite the common wisdom that it *can’t* grow there. In the most barren, destitute and desperate places, it springs up. It flowers, against the grain. It raises its head at the most unexpected times, even when – often *especially* when – most people think it’s dead and gone. It’s hope. Hope fed by optimism.”  
     
   In similar fashion, author David Brin finds optimism even in some deeply tragic SF: “After all, the core postulate of true SF is that children *can* sometimes learn from their parents’ mistakes… not that they will always do so!  This is why genuine sci fi tragedies like *On The Beach* and *Soylent Green* are so powerful. ‘This does not have to happen,’ say Huxley and Orwell and Slonczewski and Tiptree, in their masterful *self-preventing prophecies*.  Be smarter, better people.  Be *a* better people.”  
     
   Do you agree or disagree with de Vries and Brin that Science Fiction, even at its most tragic, is essentially a deeply optimistic genre with the power to encourage and inspire hope and change? Discuss, using specific examples from some of the short stories and films we have read or watched this semester to support your discussion.
4. “Slipstreaming,” a term coined by Bruce Sterling (author of “We See Things Differently”), refers to the “borrowing” of SF themes and conventions by mainstream “literary fiction” writers, who—in spite of their choice of material—are usually quite vocal in their insistence that they are *not* in fact science fiction writers—they’re just “slumming,” and would never allow their work to be shelved in the SF section of the local bookstore.   
     
   Please read the short piece by (well-known literary writer) Margaret Atwood here: <http://io9.com/5847421/if-it-is-realistic-or-plausible-then-it-is-not-science-fiction>   
   and Tom Shippey’s review of Atwood's book here: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203476804576612891771273656.html>   
     
   Having considered both Atwood’s and Shippey’s perspectives, do you think that “slipstreaming” will ultimately become a positive force in support of science fiction, helping the genre to earn respect among a more mainstream literary readership and acting as a sort of “gateway drug” to SF for new readers? Or, will “slipstreaming” (and the justifications presented by writers like Atwood) simply ensure that science fiction remains marginalized and dismissed by the mainstream literary community and readership? Take a clear position and discuss, using examples from the articles linked above, supplemented with examples from your own reading, if you wish.