Course Description

This course will survey the history of stories about the creation of artificial humans, while thinking about conventions of the genre, its particular uses and adaptations, and how it intersects with other genres. We’ll look at the desires expressed by this genre, most of all, the desire to perfect or eliminate what is most human. Familiar questions – can robots feel? can we tell who is a robot? – will be considered alongside the traditional use of robots to understand or emblematize justice, sin, labor, progress and modernity, self-awareness or simplicity, gender, emotion and indifference, skill, invention, art, and humanness itself. Examples will be drawn from both real and fictional robots in literature and in film.

ENG 205 is open to all students. This course (in any of its versions) is required for the English major. It is a pre- or corequisite of the Foundations of the English Major series (ENG 303-305).

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes of ENG 205 relate to building key skills and concepts in English as well as acquaintance with a wide range of issues related to robots. The core skills and concepts are valuable in many academic disciplines and build critical thinking and expressive skills that are highly sought after among college graduates and will be useful to you in a wide variety of careers and in civic, ethical, social, and many other contexts.

ENG 205 will familiarize you (1) with the length and breadth of the cultural history of the robot and (2) with the kinds of questions robots have been used to raise and answer. Meanwhile, the course will (3) teach you about how genres operate, especially how they accumulate, modify, and improvise on formal and thematic conventions – i.e. conventions relating to how a story is told (its form) and to the content of a story (its thematics). You will (4) practice analytic reading within and across genres and forms and (5) work on analytic writing, particularly close reading and argumentation. (4) and (5) are the skills that are most useful to you in a variety of extra-curricular, real-world contexts, including in a wide variety of jobs and professions.

The course meets in-person MWF from 10-10:50 in Condon 360. See expectations and accommodations related to attendance below.

Contact information for Prof. Bovilsky:
   Email: bovilsy@uoregon.edu  Email is the best way to reach me. I check it at least twice daily.
   Office: 246 PLC (next door to Condon)
   Office hours (i.e. time for us to meet via Zoom):
       Tuesdays, 3-4 pm; Wednesdays and Fridays, 1-2 and by appointment.
“By appointment” means that I can meet with students outside of the above hours. If you can’t meet at listed times, email me so that we can find a good time to meet. If you can meet during the weekly hours listed, it is helpful to do so, to ensure my other times are free for students who can’t.) Note: I will initially default to meeting on Zoom or possibly outside. I will always let you know which!

**Link to office hours signup sheet: sign up here.** Zoom link for office hours: [https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/99380867807](https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/99380867807)

**Why should we meet?**
I meet with students for many reasons. I’m here to talk about anything that is exciting or confusing in the course material, to clarify and help you plan your approach to assignments, and to explain how the skills and ideas we work on in class relate to real-world issues and translate to life after college. I also help when students are have interests or concerns that may not be directly related to our course. I can help find resources and suggest new ideas when things aren’t working as you’d like. In general, I recommend that all students meet with me at least once a term. I look forward to getting to know you better!

**Communication**
All course announcements and general emails will be made via Canvas. These will be automatically forwarded to your UO email. (Check and adjust your Canvas settings under Account > Notifications if you would also like to receive announcements via text.) Please check Canvas before class – if there are any Covid-related disruptions to our course, I’ll let you know there, as quickly as I can.

When I need to get in touch with you, I will email you – please note that I am only permitted to email you through your uoregon email address. You can set up another email account to get your uoregon email, but please check your UO account regularly.

**Required Texts**
Please use these editions, or you will struggle to find the text selections we discuss together in class.


Other readings will be made available in files on our course Canvas site. You will be expected to have access to course readings during class.

**Each week, you’ll have a guide to the week’s work in the “Modules” page on Canvas.**

**Films**
We will also watch and discuss 6 films in the class. All the films are streamable. Three are available for free; three require a rental fee ($4 or less). You are expected to arrange to see each film before we discuss it in class and to take some notes on it while watching, as with the texts we read. You must include films in your commonplace book (see below).
Course Schedule

September 27  Course introduction
September 29  Genre + robots, with early texts (Hesiod, Homer, Virgil)
October 1    *Metropolis* (1927, dir. Lang, 153 minutes, available free on Kanopy through the Knight Library website, uoregon.kanopy.com)
             *For Oct 1 discussion, watch at least first hour*
October 4    *Metropolis* (complete film); Read *R.U.R.*, Prologue
October 6    *R.U.R.*, Act 1
October 8    *R.U.R.*, Acts 2 and 3; Discussion: *R.U.R. + Metropolis*
October 11   Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, selections, first half (i.e. pp. 492-495, 620-627, 727-734)  [+ use Bovilsky, “Help reading Spenser”]
October 13   Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, selections, second half (i.e. pp. 735-755, [+ use Bovilsky, “Help reading Spenser”]
October 14   • Close reading 1 due
October 15   *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, dir. Wise, 92 minutes, streamable on Vudu/YouTube/Amazon etc., $4)  [do not watch the remake by mistake!]
             Discussion: Spenser, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*
October 18   Riskin, “Eighteenth-Century Wetware”
October 20   Robert-Houdin, *Memoirs*, chapters 9 and 10 (read 8 if you have time)
October 22   Discussion: mechanical robots and what they teach us
October 25   Read: Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”
October 27   Watch: *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* (dir. Scott, approx. 2 hours, free on Swank Digital Campus)
October 29   Discussion of Turing, *Blade Runner*, and the nature of mind
             • Submit Commonplace Book by email

November 1   Hoffmann, “The Sand-Man”
November 3   Watch: *The Stepford Wives* (1975; dir. Forbes, 116 minutes, streamable free on Tubi)
             Discussion of *The Stepford Wives*, robots and gender
November 5   Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*, excerpt; catch-up and intro: robot p.o.v.
November 6   • Close reading 2 due
November 8   Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Volume 1: pp. 5-61

November 15  Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Volume 3: pp. 137-190  • Final paper prospectus due
November 17  Watch: *Terminator 2* (1991, dir. Cameron, 156 minutes, Amazon $4)
             Discussion of *Terminator 2*
November 19  Discussion: robot p.o.v., learning, destruction (*Klara, Frankenstein*, *Terminator 2*)

November 22  *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, dir. Oshii, 85 minutes, streamable free on Tubi or YouTube) **please** screen in Japanese with subtitles, dubbed English version has different, inaccurate, and inferior dialogue**


November 26  Thanksgiving Break: no class

November 29  *Cyberiad*, pp. 131-39, 161-72, 200-203, 231-248, and 283-95. If you have bandwidth, add pp. 249-79.

  Discussion of cyborg life.

November 30  • Submit Commonplace Book by email

December 1  Writing work

December 3  Robots + Genre

December 6  • Final paper due (5-6 pp.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Participation**

Participation in class is required. You are expected to bring questions or comments about the reading/viewing to class and/or to respond to those of your classmates. You can speak in class, type in our Canvas chat (also during class!), or submit questions or thoughts to a weekly discussion thread in Canvas. Let me know if you’d prefer to contribute in another way.

**Students are expected to contribute to class discussion in one or more of the above formats at least once a week.** (Again, the formats = vocally in class, in-class Canvas chat, or weekly Canvas discussion threads.) During class, please pay attention to the class conversation and generally be present, focused, and respectful. Active participation can raise your final grade (see grade breakdown below).

I hope that active engagement can help everyone feel included in the community of our class. The issues we’ll discuss are often presented fancifully in our class texts, but they include important considerations of our own moment about treatment of the vulnerable, what is necessary to be fully human, how we think about the full range of variable human traits and abilities, and whether we take others seriously. Thinking about these issues together can help us flourish as much as possible in an intellectual, ethical, and friendly learning community.

Meanwhile, in order that we can use the class to maximum advantage, we will need to let each other think in real time – which will of course include all of us sometimes saying things we later decide we don’t agree with or think were wrong. Such exploration is a great way to arrive at new ideas we do agree with and feel excited about. For this reason, supporting your own and everyone else’s endeavors to develop new ideas and take risks, and to be open to error and setback without condemnation or recrimination of self or others, is also required in this class.
Attendance

Attendance is mandatory; more than four unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered as follows. Five unexcused absences will lower your grade two-thirds of a full letter grade (A- becomes B); six will lower your grade one full letter grade (A- becomes B-). Seven or more unexcused absences will mean a failing grade. (If you have to miss significant class for excused reasons, please try not to use as many of the unexcused absences, so that you won’t fall too far behind.)

NOTE: Missing class for Covid-related reasons is an excused absence. Remember that you help yourself and everyone around you when you stay home if you have symptoms of contagious illness or when someone you live with must quarantine. Thank you for taking care of others in and beyond our community.

If you need to stay home (e.g. you have symptoms of contagious illness, you are waiting for a test result per the Covid policies below, etc.), email me. These are excused absences and we will work out accommodations to make sure you don’t fall behind. If you are able to, you can attend class via Hy-flex through Zoom. I will also make class recordings available as needed (i.e. if you cannot attend synchronously).

In general, illness and personal emergencies are excused absences: you will not be penalized for an excused absence. If you are ill or need to offer care or help to others, contact me in advance of any missed class to touch base and find out what you will need to make up before next class. (Many more details about Covid policies are below.)

Reading/Screening/Writing

Students taking the class should expect to spend roughly 8 hours/week on class work outside of class meetings (reading, watching films, taking notes, and writing/revising papers – time will be more in some weeks, less in others). This number is the number UO policy requires me to program (2 hours/week of work per credit hour of the course).

Assignments

This course includes several assignments: production of a commonplace book to help develop your sense of your interests in the course areas and to synthesize readings; 2 close readings (2-3 pp. each); and a final essay (5-6 pp.), preceded by a prospectus.

Assignments must be typed in 12-point font, be double spaced, and have reasonable margins (1 inch is generally standard; greater than 1.25 inch will not be accepted). You may work from MLA or Chicago format: just be consistent. All work will be submitted to Canvas.

Please proofread and revise your written work. Extensive sloppiness and mechanical errors will result in a lower grade.
All students have two opportunities to turn in an assignment up to two days late for any reason, no questions asked, and additional accommodations are available for students who have been instructed to quarantine. Let me know if you are using one of these, so I know you remember the assignment. After these two, late papers will be penalized one third of a letter grade per day.

However, you may ask for an extension if the due date is more than 72 hours (3 days) later, and the earlier the better. In case of a looming or unexpected disaster, consideration will be given if you keep me in the loop and communicate in advance. Stay in touch.

Note: it will always help if you hand in assigned work, even if it is quite late. I can give significant credit for almost any late paper, but I can’t give credit for no paper. Handing something in, even long after it is due, can keep students from failing.

**No incompletes will be granted except in case of documented emergency.**

**GRADES**

See above under “Assignments” for deadlines and grades.

A final grade of **C or better** in the course is required for English major credit.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close reading 1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>due October 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close reading 2</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>due November 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commonplace book</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>due October 29 and November 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper prospectus</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>due November 13</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
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<td>due December 6</td>
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**PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING**

In accord with English Department policy, academic dishonesty (plagiarism or cheating) will minimally result in an automatic failing grade for this course. In addition, all incidents of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, as required by the University.

Plagiarism is the use of another person’s words or ideas without due acknowledgment. It may be intentional or unintentional. To make sure you have avoided plagiarism in your work, you should:

- Accurately quote the original author's words if you are quoting.
- Enclose the quotation within quotation marks.
- Follow the quotation with an in-text citation. => (Shelley, p. 15)
- Introduce quotations with a phrase that includes the author's name (Turing argues that...)
• If you are paraphrasing someone else’s ideas or words rather than quoting, you must still cite the source with in-text citation, footnote, or a phrase that includes the author’s name.
• Provide a list of references with full citation information at the end of the paper.

The bottom line is that all work submitted in this course must be your own, and written exclusively for this course. The use of all external sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented, and you are not allowed to cut and paste from Internet sites into your paper. (Note: Most internet essays aimed at students are not written at the college level. Stealing from this work, even in the case that you are not caught, often results in a lower grade.)

For further guidance, see the UO library website (under “How-To Guides” on the library homepage) for more on citation practices. If you remain uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism, definitions are available in the “Student Conduct Code” section of the Student Life website (http://studentlife.uoregon.edu). Additional information is available at https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism. You are welcome to contact me if you have any questions about these definitions.

Finally, if you are having trouble writing a paper or understanding what we are looking for, please let me know. I do not expect that you already know how to do what I am teaching you. Extra help is always available. There’s nothing wrong with getting something wrong; often it takes mistakes to learn, and this is not something to panic about. However, if you take ideas from elsewhere and pass them off as your own, you learn nothing—so the next paper will therefore be no easier—and risk incurring significant academic penalties.

COURSE CONTENT ADVISORY

The texts we will read and watch this term deal with adult themes and subject matter and will often contain beliefs and opinions that are very different from our own and sometimes include upsetting or offensive depictions. The ability to encounter unfamiliar and even disturbing ideas with an attitude of critical distance is fundamental to academic work and to forming arguments supporting your own beliefs. Not everything we read or watch will be likable. Indeed, many of these texts contain disturbing representations with the goal that their reader or viewer will think hard about them and their meanings and impacts; others are not as self-aware but offer important depictions for us to consider as we think about the full history of robot stories. Cultivating such hard thinking is good practice not merely for us as students of literature and media; it can also help prepare us to have empathy, to build resilience, to think about the consequences of beliefs, and to live as ethical members of a diverse and inclusive society. We will be talking about these representations and the larger questions and challenges they pose in class.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu or visit https://aec.uoregon.edu/.
WRITING ASSOCIATES

The Writing Associates Program offers free, one-on-one peer tutoring for students in 100- and 200-level English and Composition classes. Writing Associate tutors are advanced English majors who have been trained to tutor writing. They are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course, from learning how to write about literature and media to crafting clearer and more effective arguments. To make an appointment with a Writing Associate, go to https://writingassociates.uoregon.edu.

COVID

The UO’s means of keeping us together in person and as safe as possible is following three strategies: **Prevention, Containment, and Support**. We will follow all these strategies in our class.

**Prevention**
- Get fully vaccinated or test weekly if unvaccinated/exempted from vaccination
- Wear masks indoors always on campus
- Stay distanced whenever possible; wear masks if you can’t, including off campus
- Do not come to class or to campus if you have any symptoms of contagious illness
- Fill out this Covid case/contact report if you test positive or have had contact with someone who tests positive or who is deemed presumptively positive: https://oregon.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6lfKVJkE0jAGPvn

**Containment**
- If one of us tests positive, the UO’s Corona Corps Contact Team will let us know. Requirements depend on our status and symptoms, if any:
  - If you’re vaccinated and asymptomatic, you need not quarantine. Pay attention to how you are feeling daily. Sign up for a MAP test 3-5 days after notification. MAP info/signup here.
  - If you are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated, you must quarantine for two weeks. Do not come to class in person (you can attend with Hy-flex/Zoom). **If you have no symptoms**, sign up for a MAP test 3-5 days after notification. **If you develop symptoms**, get a better test through University Health Services (541-346-2770) or your primary care provider.
  - If you have symptoms (regardless of your vaccination status), immediately get a reliable test through University Health Services (541-346-2770) or your primary care provider.

**Support**
- I am here for you and happy to answer your questions about the above and its details and implications for our class. I can and will make many accommodations related to Covid events and I will help you navigate the term. But you have many additional resources…
  - University Health Services or call (541) 346-2770
  - University Counseling Center or call (541) 346-3277 or (541) 346-3227 (after hrs.)
  - MAP Covid-19 Testing
  - Corona Corps or call (541) 346-2292
OUR COMMUNITY AND VALUES

Wow, this is the most stress-inducing (not to mention longest) syllabus I’ve ever written! Let’s be kind to ourselves and each other as we weather this latest stage of the pandemic.

I will repeat: I am here for you. What’s most important to me as an educator is to help my students holistically. I want to teach you things – mainly to help you learn to learn, to express yourself, and to analyze texts, ideas, and arguments with logical rigor and creativity. However, this class and our relationships do not begin and end with academics. I also want us to keep our values front and center, particularly at such a crazy time (again). Here are some of my values:

Learning skills and ideas is more important than grades (and your employers and future friends/family will agree).
Keeping each other safe and supported, while (and by) taking care of ourselves, is central to learning and living well.
Respecting each other’s opinions, differences, and needs supports our learning – both academically and more broadly, our learning to be citizens, community members, grown-ups, ethical agents, and many other roles.

At stressful times, we are not always able to be our best selves at every moment. I recommend that, all term, we take care of ourselves and each other, showing each other kindness and grace. We will take time in class to remember to be grounded, to think a bit about stress reduction in relation to Covid, academics, and other stressors that affect us.

ADDITIONAL LEGAL POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Reporting Obligations

I am a student-directed employee. This means that I am not a “mandatory reporter” – not obligated to report instances of illegal discrimination or harassment, including sex- or gender-based violence, except that like all UO employees, I must report any cases of child abuse or neglect (legally, a child is anyone under 18).

This means that I can guarantee forms of confidential support to you, except in cases of child abuse or neglect. I can also help you report discrimination or harassment, should you wish to, or find resources including counseling and legal support. For information about my reporting obligations as an employee, please see Employee Reporting Obligations on the Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance (OICRC) website and here: Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect.

If you or another student you know is experiencing any form of prohibited discrimination or harassment, including sex- or gender-based violence, you/they may seek information and
Accommodation for Religious Observances

The university makes reasonable accommodations, upon request, for students who are unable to attend a class for religious obligations or observance, in accordance with the university discrimination policy which says “Any student who, because of religious beliefs, is unable to attend classes on a particular day shall be excused from attendance requirements and from any examination or other assignment on that day. The student shall make up the examination or other assignment missed because of the absence.” To request accommodations for this course for religious observance, visit the Office of the Registrar’s website (https://registrar.uoregon.edu/calendars/religious-observances) and complete and submit to the instructor the “Student Religious Accommodation Request” form prior to the end of the second week of the term.

Basic Needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office (346-3216, 164 Oregon Hall) for support.

This UO webpage includes resources for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, technology, finances, and legal support: https://blogs.uoregon.edu/basicneeds/food/