**Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies**

**EN 361 *Alternative Lifeworlds***

**Assessed Essay Topics**

**Term Two**

5000 words. DUE DATE: Week ONE, Term THREE: Tuesday 26th April, 2016

The following topics are suggestions. You may modify them, or devise one of your own, but should do so only in consultation with your seminar tutor.

While you may range as widely as you like in AL texts, not necessarily confining yourself to books studied on the module, you should make reference to at least two of the set texts studied in TERM TWO.\*

\* Unless you decide to do question 13.

1. “So much for the distinction between authentic living humans and humanoid constructs.” Deckard, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep.*

Write an essay on the terms and conditions of this distinction in AL texts.

2. The use and accessibility of superior technology is a significant feature in many AL narratives. Write an essay exploring ways in which this registers in at least two texts. (Try not to confine yourself solely to describing how that technology operates – extrapolate on what themes and issues it throws up, and/or how it registers on a formal level.)

3. “I don’t think genre is anything to be scared of. And I think it is a not unuseful way to think about books. It’s not the only way. It doesn’t complete the conversation.” China Miéville (“Interview” with David Naimon, *Missouri Review*)

AL texts have often been embroiled in debates about being a genre somehow “lower” down from “literary fiction”. Using at least two texts as your guide, write an essay responding to the (often disparaging) accusation that ALF is essentially “genre fiction”.

4. “Today, our monsters are robots, cyborgs, genetically altered creatures, and aliens who attempt to take up residence within a *necessarily altered* human domestic sphere, or within human sites of production, including human bodies. Instead of enforcing cultural and political norms, these constructed beings function as interpolators: their presence within causes breakdowns, interrupting, disrupting and redistributing power. Unlike the god-made monsters faced by Odysseus, contemporary monsters are products of human technology, or are alien constructs produced by their authors for the express purpose of creating opportunities to successfully confuse, destroy or recombine oppositional dualisms such as human/nonhuman.” (Anne Weinstone, “Resisting Monsters: Notes on *Solaris*”)

Taking this statement (or any particular part of it) as your cue, write an essay on “our monsters”, referring to at least two AL texts in your discussion.

5. Write an essay on the significance of the animal and /or nonhuman “organic” lifeform in AL texts.

6. “As I see it, the problem is basically very simple. Contact means the exchange of specific knowledge, ideas, or at least of findings, definite facts. But what if no exchange is possible?” (Kris, *Solaris*)

Write an essay on the “problem” (or, if you prefer, the possibilities - or both) of Contact or Communication in AL texts.

7. Why is travel and/or transport a significant feature of Alternative Lifeworld fiction? Answer with reference to at least two texts.

8. In what ways are material objects or artifacts critical things in AL texts?

9. AL texts help us to better realize the actually existing world system of capitalism, especially in what it renders invisible or ‘natural’ to our means of comprehension. Do you agree with this statement? Answer with reference to at least two AL texts.

10. Write an essay on the importance of one of the following in Term Two texts: War and/or weaponry; Imperialism; the Supernatural; geography; myth and/or legend; work and/or labour regimes; food; time; writing; energy and/or natural resources; memory; psychological disturbance; natural (or “unnatural”) habitats.

11. Write an essay on the significance of elements of fantasy and/or the fantastic in AL texts. You are free to interpret ‘fantasy’ as you wish.

12. ‘It’s not a matter of what I want. It’s a matter of what’s possible” (Snow, *Solaris*)

Is this an accurate assessment, in miniature, of some AL texts?

13. Make a case for the inclusion of a text you have read/seen/played that is not on the syllabus. Your essay must refer to **at least one** set text from Term Two by way of comparison.

14. Imaginary representations of apocalypse and catastrophe help us better prepare for the world to come. Do you agree? Write with reference to at least two texts.