HONR298G: Science, Gender, and Classic Science Fiction
Jane Donawerth, Professor and Distinguished Scholar-Teacher, Department of English

While science fiction has its roots in the scientific travel and adventure romances of the nineteenth century, its origin and flowering happened in short stories of the pulp and digest magazines from 1925 to 1950 and beyond. After a look at the roots, this course will explore the ways that men and women re-imagined science and gender in this "Golden Age" of science fiction. We will explore the conventions of SF in stories about cyborgs, rockets, aliens, epidemics, reproduction, and utopias and dystopia, in science fiction criticism and history of science, and in fandom and fanzines.

Science fiction used to be thought of as a genre for males, but almost half of current writers and readers are women, and women have always been part of the fan community. Questions to be discussed include whether men and women write different kinds of SF, what role science plays in the aesthetics of SF, whether authors truly imagine workable gender and sexual alternatives, whether the genre has a different relationship to its audience from that of mainstream fiction. Students will be asked to analyze and write about science fiction (enhancing their writing skills), to increase popular knowledge about SF by contributing to Wikipedia (practicing revising their writing for a different audience), and to create sf stories, art, or fan-style articles on the science of SF, so that the class may put together a fanzine (developing editing and visual design skills).

Tentative Assignments: 1. a journal on readings reviewed every 3 weeks but final grade assigned at end of course; 2. an oral report with email handout on the biography of one of the writers we read; 3. an edit or addition to a Wikipedia article on a writer we have read or a topic concerning science fiction we have studied; 4. a 5-page interpretative essay analyzing the re-imagination of gender roles and science as inter-related in one science fiction work we have read in class; a required revision of this essay; 5. an 8-10 pp. research paper on a science fiction work from the syllabus, linking the interpretation to science discoveries the decade before the story, or to changes in gender roles in the decade before the story; editing and design collaboration and a creative individual contribution to a class fanzine based on our readings in the course: a short article explaining the science in a story we have read; an illustration in the tradition of SF illustrations; a short story in the tradition of writings in the course.

Tentative Reading List: Required texts will be the J. Paul Hunter edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a Jules Verne novel (to be chosen), and *Sense of Wonder*, ed. Leigh Grossman, an anthology of SF stories and short encyclopedia-type entries on author and science fiction history and conventions, as well as advice on writing SF.

Course Enrichments: Class will visit perhaps the best East Coast USA SF Collection at UMBC Library, which houses pulp and digest magazines, sf art, fanzines, and other materials. Students will also be given information and encouraged to attend a day of Balticon, the largest area SF convention.