

Fiction, Fantasy and Politics

Thursday 4 June 2026 10:45 (1h 30m)

The role of fiction and fantasy in IR scholarship –both as a pedagogical tool and as data for analysis –is garnering well-deserved attention. There is a growing recognition amongst critical scholars that the world building and fantasizing inherent in fiction shapes the way that individuals and societies experience and understand politics in the present. Indeed, individuals always engage in politics as a fantasy: it is an unknown and unknowable domain for many and so understanding of what happens behind closed doors will always be constructed through the consumption of political materials. Understood this way, fiction is just as important as formal education, social media, or news, in shaping fantasies of political life.

This panel will analyze political fantasizing in three distinct ways. First, panelists engage with previously overlooked cultural artefacts which construct alternate political systems. These include genres of literature, film, or video games which are dismissed as apolitical or appealing only to specific populations, which often includes pop culture that is specifically catering towards women. Consider, for example, the myriad articles written about Game of Thrones and the comparative dismissal of the so-called “Romantasy” genre, or the interest in House of Cards, but blind spot for Scandal. Second, scholars engage with cultural artefacts which fantasize about existing political systems, such as books or movies which take place in political settings. Here again, the focus is not on “political” pop culture, but instead on materials which fantasize about politics as part of storytelling. Third, scholars examine how these fantasies are brought into the “real” world, through the reimagining of pop culture as central political artefacts.

Track Classification: Critical Alternatives for World Politics