

Texts and Contexts: Speculative Fiction
English 202-007
Fall 2022

Instructor: Parker O'Connor

Office Location: Horizon Hall 4119

Office Hours: TR 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. or by appointment

Email Address: poconno@gmu.edu

Class Meeting Days & Times: TR 12:00 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.

Class Location: Blue Ridge Hall 129

Required Texts:

1. *A People's Future of the United States*, One World, ISBN-13: 978-0525508809
2. *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin, Ace Books, ISBN 9780441478125
3. *Sea of Tranquility*, Emily St. John Mandel, Knopf, ISBN 9780593321447

Course Description:

This section of Texts and Context seeks to examine contemporary texts through the lens of the speculative fiction genre. Each of the texts we read will consider the possible futures that await humanity. This course aims to help you improve your ability to read and process texts both in the classroom and elsewhere. The theme of this section, speculative fiction, will focus on stories whose authors ask *what if*. You will be asked to critically consider how this genre intersects with or is informed by race, class, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, gender, religion, and other identities.

Prerequisites:

Students must have completed or transferred in the equivalent of English 100/101.

Mason Core Statement:

This course is part of the Mason Core (General Education) Program, which is designed to help develop “a Mason Graduate [who is] an engaged citizen, a well-rounded scholar, and someone who is prepared to act for the world” (Mason Catalog). For more information on the mission of the Mason Core, visit the Provost’s Mason Core page.

Technology Requirements:

Activities and assignments in this course will use the Blackboard learning system, available at <https://mymason.gmu.edu>. Students are required to have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system (recommended: Windows 10 or Mac OSX 10.13 or higher) and a stable broadband Internet connection.

Textbooks:

You are welcome to obtain the required texts (listed above) in whatever format suits you best, though audiobooks may prove difficult for close reading and textual analysis. Many books can be found (for free) in the Mason Libraries or using a public library app (such as Hoopla or OverDrive).

Methods of Instruction:

This course will incorporate several methods of instruction, including lectures, class discussions, and individual writing. This course will require a significant amount of writing and reading. Students who attend and contribute to the weekly meetings, actively participate in the discussion boards, keep up with the assignments, and who block off time each week for thoughtful reading and writing usually succeed in this class.

Completion Policy:

Students must earn a C (73%) or higher to fulfill the ENGH 302 Mason Core requirement; students must complete all major projects to earn a C (or higher).

Grading Percentages:

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Textual Analysis Essay 1 | 20% |
| Textual Analysis Essay 2 | 20% |
| Textual Analysis Essay 3 | 20% |
| Class Participation | 15% |
| Discussion Board | 15% |
| Final Reflection | 10% |

Percentage Breakdown of Final Grades:

A+ 100-97.5% | A 97.4-93% | A- 92.9-90% | B+ 89.9-87.5% | B 87.4-83% | B- 82.9-80% | C+ 79.9-77.5% | C 77.4-73% | C- 72.9-70% | D 69.9-60% | F below 60%

Major Assignment Grading Standards:

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| An "A" level grade (90-100%) | marks an essay that engages the reader in a provocative conversation. Even more than in a "B" essay, the writer anticipates and responds to possible reader questions, uses a wide range of supporting evidence, structures arguments and analyses to create a fluid reading experience, provides unexpected insights, and/or uses language with care and facility. |
| A "B" level grade (80-89%) | highlights a strong example of college writing and thinking. In addition to meeting the "C" level requirements, the writer of such an essay goes further in some way(s): they demonstrate some insight into the "gray areas" of the topic, provide original or very thorough support that is tightly woven into the overall argument, and/or create prose that reads smoothly at both the sentence and paragraph levels. The essay has few sentence-level errors and/or may demonstrate a lively voice or style. |
| A "C" level grade (70-79%) | denotes competent college-level writing and achievement. The writer responds to the specified rhetorical situation: they meet, to some degree, all the assignment requirements, and employ some key strategies for communicating their ideas to their targeted audience. The essay has a central focus, presents some support, and moves from point to point in an orderly fashion; sentence-level errors do not significantly prevent comprehension. Essays that do not meet these criteria will not earn a "C." |

“D” & “F” level grades
(0-69%)

do not meet the basic expectations of the assignment.

Discussion Board:

Each week, you will be asked to post a discussion question related to the text and respond (in fifty words or more) to two or more of your classmates’ discussion board posts. Your discussion question should be in response to the chapters/pages assigned for the week, inspire critical thinking, and present a unique perspective on the text. Note: discussion questions will not receive full points if they are purely factual (“What is the protagonist’s name?”) or are unrelated to the text.

Textual Analysis Essays:

Throughout the semester, you will submit three essays in response to the texts we read. An individual assignment sheet will be provided for each of the major texts assigned, which will include guidelines, sample prompts, and a rubric. Essay due dates are listed on the syllabus schedule below.

Submitting Class Work:

All graded assignments are due on Blackboard by end of day on the due date. Unless otherwise noted, all essays should be typed and formatted in MLA. For an overview of the MLA formatting style and a sample MLA paper, go [here](#). I accept emailed assignment submissions only as placeholders to avoid a late penalty.

Late Work Policy:

Late assignments will lose 5% of their points for each calendar day they are late, including weekends and holidays. Late work penalties cannot be removed through revision. However, each student has three one-day late passes. Each late pass gives the student one extra day on any assignment without penalty or explanation. Late passes may be used individually or all at once; however, all late work is due by the last day of class.

Classroom Conduct:

To contribute to the discussion-oriented nature of the course, you are asked to communicate with your classmates in a respectful manner. In order to create a healthy learning environment, threatening or abusive speech and/or behavior will not be tolerated. Discussion and debate are enthusiastically encouraged, so long as the participants understand that different perspectives are not necessarily wrong perspectives. Students who violate this policy may be asked to leave the given conversation and/or lose points for that week’s Discussion Board.

Language Equity Policy:

Many of you speak multiples languages. I’m aware of the strengths of multilingual writers and the challenges faced by writers whose language is not always valued in academia or the workplace. I will not penalize students for grammar/word choice errors that don’t prevent the reader from understanding the writing. Because this class doesn’t include grammar instruction, I also won’t generally comment on grammar or word choice unless you explicitly ask me to.

Email:

Students are encouraged to reach out to me via email anytime they wish. I do my best to respond to all student emails within 24 hours unless I’ve notified the class otherwise. Please be sure to use your official GMU email address when contacting me.

Revision Policy:

All essays may be revised for a new grade. Revisions must demonstrate substantial change to the focus, support, approach, and/or organization of the essay in addition to comprehensive error correction, or they will be returned with no grade change.

Before beginning the revision process, you must email/meet with me to discuss your plan of action for the revision. You will have two weeks from the day you receive your original grade on the essay to submit a revision. Revisions must be submitted to Blackboard with all previous drafts. All revisions are due by the last day of class—revisions will not be accepted after this date.

Statement on Plagiarism:

Plagiarism means using words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient.

This class will include direct instruction in strategies for handling sources as part of our curriculum. However, students in composition classes must also take responsibility for understanding and practicing the basic principles listed below.

To avoid plagiarism, meet the expectations of a US Academic Audience, give their readers a chance to investigate the issue further, and make credible arguments, writers must

- put quotation marks around, and give an in-text citation for, any sentences or distinctive phrases (even very short, 2- or 3-word phrases) that writers copy directly from any outside source: a book, textbook, article, website, newspaper, song, baseball card, interview, encyclopedia, CD, YouTube video, movie, etc.
- completely rewrite—not just switch out a few words—any information they find in a separate source and wish to summarize or paraphrase for their readers, and also give an in-text citation for that paraphrased information
- give an in-text citation for any facts, statistics, or opinions which the writers learned from outside sources (or which they just happen to know) and which are not considered “common knowledge” in the target audience (this may require new research to locate a credible outside source to cite)
- give a new in-text citation for each element of information—that is, do not rely on a single citation at the end of a paragraph, because that is not usually sufficient to inform a reader clearly of how much of the paragraph comes from an outside source.

Writers must also include a Works Cited or References list at the end of their essay, providing full bibliographic information for every source cited in their essay.

While different disciplines may have slightly different citation styles, and different instructors may emphasize different levels of citation for different assignments, writers should always begin with these conservative practices unless they are expressly told otherwise. If student writers ever have questions about a citation practice, they should ask their instructor.

Instructors in the English Department support the Mason Honor Code, which requires them to report any suspected instances of plagiarism to the Mason Honor Committee. All judgments about plagiarism are made after careful review by the Honor Committee, which may issue penalties ranging from grade-deductions to course failure to expulsion from GMU.

The Mason Library:

Librarians are available to help with your research online and in-person. More information on library services is available [here](#). The [library's website](#) offers tutorials, research resources, and databases that we'll use throughout the semester.

The University Writing Center:

Take advantage of the [The Writing Center](#) resources as you work on written assignments in this course. You can book appointments to meet with a tutor or to submit a draft for written feedback. Tutors will work with you on any phase of a writing project. To schedule an appointment, go to writingcenter.gmu.edu, register, and use the online scheduler. Send any questions to wcenter@gmu.edu.

Disability Services:

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474.

CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services):

[CAPS](#) offers free counseling and academic workshops and a 24/7 student crisis line: (703) 993-2380. Services are provided by professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors. CAPS' individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs are designed to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance.

Notice of Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Assault, Interpersonal Violence and Stalking:

As a faculty member, the instructor for this course is designated as a "Responsible Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence and stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1412. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as the Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-3686) or Counseling and Psychological Services (703-993-2380). You may also seek assistance from Mason's Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730 or emailing cde@gmu.edu. View the Title IX Campus Resources [here](#).

Important Dates:

A full list of important dates can be found on the Office of the University Registrar's [page](#).

| Full Semester Schedule: | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|
| Date | Focus | Readings Due | Work Due |
| Week 1: 8/23 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syllabus overview Introductions and goals | | |
| 8/25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhetorical situations Literary devices | | |
| Week 2: 8/30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Emergency Skin," N.K. Jemisin (provided by instructor) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DB 1 |

| Date | Focus | Readings Due | Work Due |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|
| 9/1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Emergency Skin,” N.K. Jemisin (provided by instructor) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB Comments |
| Week 3: 9/6 (No class!) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A People’s Future of the United States</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Read After Burning,” Maria Dahvana Headley | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB 2 |
| 9/8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A People’s Future of the United States</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Read After Burning,” Maria Dahvana Headley | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB Comments |
| Week 4: 9/13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A People’s Future of the United States</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Bookstore at the End of America,” Charlie Jane Anders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB 3 |
| 9/15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A People’s Future of the United States</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Bookstore at the End of America,” Charlie Jane Anders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB Comments |
| Week 5: 9/20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A People’s Future of the United States</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Good News Bad News,” Charles Yu | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB 4 |
| 9/22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A People’s Future of the United States</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Good News Bad News,” Charles Yu | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB Comments |
| Week 6: 9/27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferences | | |
| 9/29 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferences | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textual Analysis Essay 1 |
| Week 7: 10/4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sea of Tranquility</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 1: Remittance / 1912 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB 5 |
| 10/6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sea of Tranquility</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 2: Mirella and Vincent / 2020 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB Comments |
| Week 8: 10/11 (No class) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sea of Tranquility</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 3: Last Book Tour on Earth / 2203 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB 6 |
| 10/13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sea of Tranquility</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 4: Bad Chickens / 2401 | |
| Week 9: 10/18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sea of Tranquility</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 5: Last Book Tour on Earth / 2203 • Part 6: Mirella and Vincent / file corruption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DB 7 |
| 10/20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sea of Tranquility</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 7: Remittance / 1918, 1990, 2008 • Part 8: Anomaly | |

| Date | Focus | Readings Due | Work Due |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|--|
| Week 10: 10/25 | • Conferences | | |
| 10/27 | • Conferences | | • Textual Analysis Essay 2 |
| Week 11: 11/1 | • <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> | • Chapters 1-3 | • DB 8 |
| 11/3 | • <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> | • Chapters 4-7 | |
| Week 12: 11/8 | • <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> | • Chapters 8-10 | • DB 9 |
| 11/10 | • <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> | • Chapters 11-14 | |
| Week 13: 11/15 | • <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> | • Chapters 15-17 | • DB 10 |
| 11/17 | • <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> | • Chapters 18-20 | |
| Week 14: 11/22 | • Peer review | | • Proposal Due |
| 11/24 (Thanksgiving Break—no class!) | | | |
| Week 15: 11/29 | • TBD | | |
| 12/1 | • Reflection • Course evaluations | | • Textual Analysis Essay 3 • Final Reflection Due |