

Sci-Fi Literature: Dystopian and Cyperpunk Fiction
Intro to Fiction — ENGL 2370-27727
MWF 11:00-11:50 in Irby 313
Dr. Katherine E.C. Willis

Three Ways to Contact Me:

Email: kwillis@uca.edu

- I only reply if you use basic etiquette (salutation, legible grammar, signature)
- Allow 12 hours for a response

Meet with me in Irby 317D:

- Stop by my office hours on **MWF 10-11, 12-1** or **T/Th 10:00-10:45**
- Schedule an appointment through the Calendly app: <https://calendly.com/katherinewillis>

Phone: 501-450-5100

Course Description & Objectives:

We will focus this semester on the genre of science fiction literature. In particular, we'll read works from two of its subgenres: **dystopian fiction** and **cyberpunk fiction**. Dystopian fiction often presents a world that is dark, broken, and dysfunctional, and the characters must struggle against it to make good choices and reshape their part of the world. Cyberpunk literature often presents a world that is technologically and scientifically advanced, but socially fractured and stratified. It often involves a contrast between the "underworld" or "reject" elements of society with the elite and wealthy. We'll be reading a selection of major works from 20th and 21st century writers who helped define and develop these genres.

Since its earliest days, science fiction has always been interested in asking some of the biggest and most difficult questions. These are a few of the ones we'll encounter together this semester: What is included or excluded in how we define what it means to be fully and acceptably human? How should we balance individual freedom with the needs of a society/community/nation? What does a fair and just society look like? When (if ever) does the end justify the means? Are there unethical ways to pursue scientific and technological advances, and if so, who decides what they are?

The main goal of the course is to explore how science fiction works and how to interpret it. Regardless of what type of career(s) you plan to pursue, reading literature of all kinds is an excellent way to enrich yourself as a human being and live a better life. In other words, this class should be fun, but it will also

have practical benefits for you. Interpreting literature is an enjoyable way to gain empathy and learn about other perspectives, to strengthen your critical reading and writing skills, and to practice creative and imaginative thinking.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ to gain an appreciation for foundational works of sci-fi literature written from diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds
- ✓ to learn about the personal, social, cultural, and historical contexts for the works
- ✓ to learn about the major themes and concerns addressed in sci-fi literature
- ✓ to strengthen your critical reading and writing skills
- ✓ to strengthen your ability to make a claim about a text and support it with detailed analysis
- ✓ to practice creative and empathetic thinking about a diverse array of social issues

UCA CORE: This course satisfies the **Diversity** component of the Lower-Division Core (Diversity in Creative Works). Diversity courses promote the ability to analyze familiar cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems as well as to analyze the major ideas, techniques and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts. For more info, go to <http://uca.edu/core>.

Required Materials:

The following books should be purchased in **hard copy or in ebook format**. Other materials will be distributed on the class website or via email throughout the semester:

- *Children of Men* by PD James
- *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood
- *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* by Haruki Murakami
- *Neuromancer* by William Gibson
- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick

Assignments and Grading:

10% Participation: Come to class each day prepared to write and to discuss. Because this is a heavily discussion-based course, our success as individuals and as a group depends upon your consistent, active, and vocal participation. Good participation means being regularly present and active in class, engaging with me and your classmates in generative, constructive discussion, and being prepared for each day. See the rubric online.

10% Reading Journal: For every class meeting that has an assigned reading, you must submit a journal entry online before the start of class time (through Google Classroom). Your journal

entry should be 150-300 words in length and focus on a specific passage of your choice from the reading. Here are a few examples of questions you can consider to write your journal entry:

- What is the significance of the passage in the context of the whole work so far?
- What kinds of literary techniques does the writer use?
- What major developments in character, theme, or style are taking place?

Each journal entry is worth a maximum of 3 points:

- 3 points = solid and satisfactory
- 2 points = functional but weak or incomplete
- 1 point = unsatisfactory (but you made an attempt)
- 0 points = nothing submitted

I will drop your lowest three journal scores at the end of the semester.

- 10% Leading discussion:** You will be responsible for starting class discussion for the day at least once this semester. Think of this assignment as a brief presentation of the passage and ideas you addressed in your reading journal. It should be a minimum of 4 minutes and no longer than 10 minutes (strictly timed). You are not allowed to read off your journal entry. Point us to the passage you chose, make an interpretive claim about its significance, and then explain and back up your claim with close analysis of the details. You will be graded on how focused your response is, the depth of analytical thinking you demonstrate, the relevancy and quality of the connections you make to the text, and your level of engagement with your peers. See the rubric for more details.
- 30% Essays:** You will write a total of four essays throughout the course (strictly 1.5-2 pages in MLA formatting). The due dates are staggered through the semester (see the course schedule). Each essay will be a close reading of a passage of your choice. Use your close reading skills to analyze the passage, connect its significance to the meaning of the work as a whole, and relate it to the broad patterns of sci-fi literature. Everyone will write an essay on the first work. After that, you will choose which three other works to write on. See the assignment sheet and rubric online for more details.
- 5% Consultation:** One time this semester, you are required to make an appointment with me (use the Calendly app: <https://calendly.com/katherinewillis>) to discuss your plans for one of your essays. I recommend you do this earlier in the semester rather than later, but that is not required. You should arrive with 2-3 specific questions/concerns that we can discuss. You will be graded on your level of preparation and on the professional nature of your engagement in our conversation. See the rubric online for more info.
- 15% Midterm exam:** Expect a combination of multiple choice, matching, and passage analysis.
- 20% Final exam:** Same as the midterm exam, but this will be cumulative and include an essay component.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Readings and assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day on which they are listed. Some days may specify other materials you are required to bring. Note: I reserve the right to change the schedule below if it will help the class. I will announce any changes in class and via email.

Introduction to the course: Defining features of sci-fi and its subgenres
Jan. 11 - 14

***Children of Men* by PD James:** Jan. 16 - 25
Workshop for the first essay on Jan. 28
Essay due on Feb. 1 (required of everyone)

***Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood:** Jan. 30 - Feb. 11
Essay due on Feb. 15 (if this is one of your other three essays)

***Neuromancer* by William Gibson:** Feb. 13 - March 1
Essay due on March 8 (if this is one of your other three essays)

Midterm exam: March 4

***Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* by Haruki Murakami:** March 6 - April 1
Essay due on April 5 (if this is one of your other three essays)

***Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick:** April 3-12
Essay due on April 17 (if this is one of your other three essays)

***Bladerunner*, directed by Ridley Scott:** April 15-24

Study day: April 26

Final exam: Mon. April 29, 2:00-4:00 pm

MY POLICIES FOR THIS COURSE:

STUDENT CONDUCT:

You are responsible for your conduct. I expect you to conduct yourself professionally and courteously in the classroom, in my office, and in your work. If your behavior seriously disrupts the learning experience of other students or my ability to teach, I will ask you to leave the classroom and/or the course.

ATTENDANCE AND DROP POLICY:

Your attendance and active participation in each class meeting throughout the semester is the foundation of your whole grade in this course. I reserve the right to drop students who have an excessive amount of unexcused absences. For a MWF course, that begins at 3 unexcused absences. For a T/Th course, that begins at 2 unexcused absences.

As the Attendance section of the Student Handbook explains, "A student's official program is regarded as his or her obligation to the institution, full performance of which requires regular and punctual class attendance and active participation. A student is responsible for coming to class prepared, completing any missed work, and knowing the dates and places of required course examinations."

GRADING POLICIES:

If you are unable to submit work on time due to an excused reason, it is your responsibility to contact me as soon as possible to document your reason and to make timely alternative arrangements. As the Student Handbook specifies in the section on Attendance, "Make-up examinations and assignments are required only for valid absences as determined by the faculty member. Students who miss an examination or assignment without a valid excuse may receive a failing grade for that exam or assignment."

Excused reasons include (but are not limited to): official university-sanctioned athletic or organizational events (requires appropriate documentation), severe illness, death of a family member, court appearances, jury duty. For such excused reasons, late work will be accepted for full credit. However, be aware that some in-class activities may not be possible to make up.

Unexcused reasons include (but are not limited to): computer/printer malfunctions, traffic problems, family vacations/travel, or forgetfulness. For such unexcused reasons, I may be able to accept late work for partial credit, but you must discuss it with me first. The standard deduction for late work is one letter grade off per day.

EMAIL ETIQUETTE:

I will respond to your email within 12 hours. If you do not hear from me in that time window, contact me again. This means you should not, if at all possible, email last minute concerns. In addition, I only respond to emails that follow basic etiquette. That includes the following: a salutation line, readable grammar, and a signature line.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

As a general rule, you should know the policies described in the Student Handbook. The Sexual Harassment Policy and Academic Policies are especially important. You can find the current edition of the Student Handbook online here.

Academic Integrity: The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university's Academic Integrity Policy, approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the Student Handbook. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student's acceptance of this university policy.

Title IX Disclosure: If a student discloses an act of sexual harassment, discrimination, assault, or other sexual misconduct to a faculty member (as it relates to "student-on-student" or "employee-on-student"), the faculty member cannot maintain complete confidentiality and is required to report the act and may be required to reveal the names of the parties involved. Any allegations made by a student may or may not trigger an investigation. Each situation differs, and the obligation to conduct an investigation will depend on the specific set of circumstances. The determination to conduct an investigation will be made by the Title IX Coordinator. For further information, please visit: <https://uca.edu/titleix>. Disclosure of sexual misconduct by a third party who is not a student and/or employee is also required if the misconduct occurs when the third party is a participant in a university-sponsored program, event, or activity.

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this Act due to a disability, please contact the UCA Disability Resource Center, 450-3613.

Building Emergency Plan: An Emergency Procedures Summary (EPS) for the building in which this class is held will be discussed during the first week of this course. EPS documents for most buildings on campus are available at <http://uca.edu/mysafety/bep/>. Every student should be familiar with emergency procedures for any campus building in which they spend time for classes or other purposes.

Course Evaluations: Student evaluations of a course and its professor are a crucial element in helping faculty achieve excellence in the classroom and the institution in demonstrating that students are gaining knowledge. Students may evaluate courses they are taking starting on the Monday of the thirteenth week of instruction through the end of finals week by logging in to myUCA and clicking on the Course Evaluations task. This semester, course evaluations open on Monday April 8.