

LIT 3313: Modern Science Fiction “American Space Opera: The Roots and Political Blowbacks”

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Office Hours: TBA / By appt.
MWF / Period 7 (1:55-2:45)

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Course Description

Coined by Wilson Tucker in 1941 as a pejorative, the science fiction subgenre of “space opera” has become a staple of science fiction narrative, most popularly envisioned in film by the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* franchises. But far from mere visual spectacle or adventure, space opera’s history suggests a complicated relationship between the subgenre and the contemporary culture in which it is written. From its roots in the often paranoid and sometimes blatantly racist narratives (e.g., “Yellow Peril” stories) of what I.F. Clarke calls “future war fiction,” to its development as a legitimate subgenre in the pulps and the Golden Age via writers such as E.E. “Doc” Smith and Alfred Bester, space opera has always been in conversation with its time. It reinforces contemporary values or, as science fiction is apt to do, it critiques or deconstructs those values.

This course will explore the development of American space opera from its literary origins in late 19th-century “future war fiction” and the “Edisonades” to its codification as a subgenre in the pulps via writers such as Edmond Hamilton and E.E. “Doc” Smith. From there, the course will trace the legitimization of space opera as a subgenre in the Golden Age and the political and literary blowbacks to its imperialistic and/or “conservative” themes or narrative tropes in the New Wave (Samuel R. Delany, et al.) and New Space Opera periods (Tobias Buckell, C.J. Cherryh, et al.).

Readings will consist of serialized fiction, novels, and critical readings on science fiction. Students will be expected to keep up with the readings and to regularly participate in class discussion. Written course requirements will include two short essays, a group discussion panel, weekly discussion questions, and one final essay.

Required Texts

Some books may not be available at the UF Bookstore; you will need to find them via an online venue. Additional texts will be marked on the schedule and made available online by direct link or on Canvas. All assigned texts are required reading for this course. You must have them with you during class.

Buckell, Tobias S. *Ragamuffin*. 2nd ed. New York: Tor, 2015. Print. ISBN: 0765338416
Cherryh, C. J. *The Chanur Saga*. New York: DAW, 2000. Print. ISBN: 0886779308
Hartwell, David G., and Kathryn Cramer, eds. *The Space Opera Renaissance*. New York: Orb, 2007. Print. ISBN: 0765306174
Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. New York: Ace, 1990. Print. ISBN: 0441172717

Le Guin, Ursula K. *Worlds of Exile and Illusion*. New York: Orb, 1996. Print.
ISBN: 0312862113
Leckie, Ann. *Ancillary Justice*. New York: Orbit, 2013. Print. ISBN: 031624662X
Merril, Judith. *Daughters of Earth and Other Stories*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985.
Print. ISBN: 0771058373
Moore, C. L. *Judgment Night*. New York: Paperback Library, 1965. Print. ISBN: 0974889512

You will also be required to purchase one ebook for this course: "[Scorched Supper on New Niger](#)" by Suzy McKee Charnas (\$1.99)

Tentative Course Schedule

NOTE: This schedule is subject to change with advance notification. The page numbers are inexact and will change as we become aware of the various editions being used for the course. Excerpted works will be relatively short in comparison to other readings; most of the texts from which they are derived are available at the library.

SOR = Space Opera Renaissance

Unit One: Origins, Definitions, SO Archetypes, and Rippin' Space Yarns

Week 1: August 24 – 28

M: Introductions
W: The Origins of Space Opera and "SF's Shame" (Lecture)
"[Space Opera](#)" in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*
"[Future-War Fiction: the First Main Phase, 1871-1900](#)" by I.F. Clarke (Science Fiction Studies)
F: Empires and Space Adventures
E.E. "Doc" Smith, [The Skylark of Space](#) (1-46)

Week 2: Aug. 31 - Sept. 4

M: Smith (FIN)
W: "Introduction" from *The Space Opera Renaissance*
"The Star Stealers" by Edmond Hamilton (SOR)
F: Leigh Brackett, "[Water Pirate](#)" (in *Super Science Stories*, January 1941)

Week 3: Sept. 7 - 11

M: No Class; Labor Day
W: Empire Reappraised
C.L. Moore, *Judgment Night* (1-50)
F: Moore (FIN)
Group Panel #1

Unit Two: The Built Subgenre Empire and Early Reassessments

Week 4: Sept. 14 - 18

M: Frank Herbert, *Dune* (1-105)

W: Frank Herbert, *Dune* (105-157)
F: Herbert (157-203)
Group Panel #2

Week 5: Sept. 21 - 25

M: Herbert (203-309)
W: Herbert (309-365)
F: Herbert (365-408)
Group Panel #3

Week 6: Sept. 28 - Oct. 2

M: Herbert (FIN)
Group Panel #4
W: Gender Paradigms and Responses to the "Boy's Adventure" of SO (Lecture)
"Daughters of Earth" by Judith Merrill
F: "Empire Star" by Samuel R. Delany (SOR)

Unit Three: Reappraising Space Opera and the New Space Opera (Begins)

Week 7: Oct. 5 - 9

M: The New Wave "Attacks"
Ursula K. Le Guin, *Rocannon's World* (1-50)
Due: Short Essay #1
W: Le Guin (FIN)
Group Panel #5
F: Brian Aldiss and the Repositioning of Space Opera (Lecture)
Brian Aldiss, "Introduction" from *Space Opera*
"The Warlord of Saturn's Moons" by Eleanor Arnason

An Intermission: The British New Wave and the British SF Boom

Week 8: Oct. 12 - 16

M: The British Influence, Then and Now (Lecture)
"A Gift from the Culture" by Iain M. Banks (SOR)
W: "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the British Boom" by Andrew M. Butler
"The Well Wishers" by Colin Greenland (SOR)
F: Rumbblings of the New Space Opera
"Escape Route" by Peter F. Hamilton (SOR)

**Unit Five: Reappraising Space Opera (Again),
the New Space Opera and Pro(re)jections of the Old**

Week 9: Oct. 19 - 23

M: Reappraisals in the Wake of Aldiss (Lecture)
Patricia Monk, "Not Just 'Cosmic Skullduggery': A Partial Reconsideration of Space Opera" (MAYBE?)
["Scorched Supper on New Niger"](#) by Suzy McKee Charnas
W: C.J. Cherryh, *The Pride of Chanur* (1-50)
F: Cherryh (50-100)

Week 10: Oct. 26 - 30

- M: Cherryh (FIN)
Group Panel #6
W: New Space Opera and the Political Rebuttal
"The Remoras" by Robert Reed (SOR)
F: "Aurora in Four Voices" by Catherine Asaro (SOR)

Week 11: Nov. 2 - 6

- M: Colonialism, Empire, and Space (Lecture)
Tobias S. Buckell, *Ragamuffin* (11-108)
W: Buckell (109-151)
F: No Class; Homecoming

Week 12: Nov. 9 - 13

- M: Buckell (155-234)
W: No Class; Veterans Day
F: Buckell (FIN)
Group Panel #7

Week 13: Nov. 16 - 20

- M: Parodies, Revivals, and Adaptations (Lecture)
"The Death of Captain Future" by Allen Steele (SOR)
Group Panel #8
W: "Grist" by Tony Daniel (SOR)
F: "[Boojum](#)" by Elizabeth Bear and Sarah Monette

Week 14: Nov. 23 - 27

- M: "[Ghostweight](#)" by Yoon Ha Lee
Due: Short Essay #2
W: No Class; Thanksgiving
F: No Class; Thanksgiving

Week 15: Nov. 30 - Dec. 4

- M: Recalling the Whispers of the American New Wave, Gender and All (Lecture)
Ann Leckie, *Ancillary Justice* (1-125)
W: Leckie (126-182)
F: Leckie (183-233)
Group Panel #9

Week 16: Dec. 7 - 11

- M: Leckie (234-308)
W: Leckie (FIN)
Group Panel #10
Concluding Note: Old Space Opera Lives (Lecture)
F: No Class; Conferences

Week 17: Dec. 14 – 18

M: **Due: Final Essay**

Course Policies

Attendance

This course is heavily oriented towards discussion and lecture. Therefore, attendance is crucial. Unexcused absences exceeding **six periods** may result in a failing grade for the course.

It is also expected that you will arrive on time for class. If you are five minutes late, you are absent. This is non-negotiable. Arriving late for class disrupts the learning process.

Absences related to university-sponsored events, religious observances, and court appearances must be discussed with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed (at least a week before) or they will not be counted. Other absence-related issues should be discussed with your professor in advance where reasonable.

You can see additional attendance policy information on [UF's website](#).

PLEASE NOTE: If you are absent, it is still your responsibility to make yourself aware of all due dates. You are still responsible for turning assignments in on time. In class assignments and so on cannot be made up.

Participation

Participation is a crucial part of your success in this class. You will be expected to work in small groups, participate in group discussions, and complete various other activities. Writing workshops require that you provide constructive feedback about your peers' writing. In general, you are expected to contribute constructively to each class session.

Preparation

It is required that you complete and bring all readings to class; electronic texts are acceptable where available, but it is strongly recommended that you use a device which allows you to take notes. You must also be prepared to discuss the readings in class. If you cannot complete the readings, then do not take this course. You should take notes and you should read every text closely. It is okay if you are confused; you are encouraged to ask questions, no matter how simple.

Papers and drafts are due at the beginning of class on the day listed on the syllabus (unless specified otherwise). Late papers **will not be accepted** (they will receive an automatic zero). Acquire a Dropbox account or some other online, automated file-backup system to prevent loss of materials. Failure of technology is **not an excuse** for failing to turn in a paper.

Classroom Behavior

Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Likewise, some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and present controversial opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative

texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal and accordingly, absence, from the class. You may criticize an idea in this course (indeed, you are encouraged to debate interpretations), as literary analysis is often about subjective interpretation, but you must remain civil and respectful.

Additionally, use of cell phones and other electronic devices for any purpose other than contributing to the class will not be tolerated. You may use laptops and you may do brief searches on the Internet to look for something we are discussing in class, but you may not text, take phone calls, hold separate discussions with your neighbors, surf the Internet, check your email, or any other activity which is not related to the course. Doing so is disruptive and may result in dismissal from the class, which will be counted as an absence.

If such devices become a problem in the course, I will require all devices to be turned off or placed in silent mode.

Paper Format

Your papers must conform to basic MLA format. This means your paper must meet the basic formatting guidelines:

- Double-spaced
- 12 point Times New Roman
- 1 inch margins
- MLA style headers w/ page numbers
- MLA-style citations (in-text and end-text)
- Your name and other relevant heading information

If you are not familiar with MLA format, find a copy of the *MLA Handbook* in the library or use Purdue's OWL website. Final drafts should be polished and presented in a professional manner.

All papers must be submitted in paper and electronic form by the beginning of class on the due date. **No late assignments will be accepted for this course.**

All papers submitted online must be in .doc (MS Word) or .rtf (Rich Text Format) and must be submitted via Sakai. Please do not send .docx files; while I do have the conversion pack for the older version of MS Word, .doc and .rtf are less buggy and quicker for my computer.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Student Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits and defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism. A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

a) Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.

b) Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.

(University of Florida, Student Honor Code, 15 Aug. 2007

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>)

University of Florida students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the entire Student Honor Code.

Important Tip: You should never copy and paste something from the internet without providing the exact location from which it came.

This class has a **zero tolerance policy** for plagiarism. If you plagiarize, you will fail the assignment; you may be reported to the Dean of Students Office, depending on the severity of the theft. It is better to cite something incorrectly than to not give any bibliographic citation.

Paper Maintenance Responsibilities

Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers, it is the student's responsibility to have and to make available this material. *Do not throw away papers.*

General Education Requirement

Composition

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities.

For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggened.html>

Writing Requirement (formerly Gordon Rule)

This course can satisfy the UF requirement for Writing. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggordon.html>

University Policies

Disability Services

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom.

It is your responsibility to contact the school administration regarding any disability you may have, and to inform me so we can make any necessary arrangements.

For more information, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Academic Honesty

All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

Assignment Descriptions

Participation (300 pts)

Participation includes speaking in class, group activities, quizzes, peer review, attendance, and all assignments assigned for the course. Quizzes will not be assigned unless it is clear that students are not reading the assigned texts. In that event, I will assign questions in the form of short answer responses; they will not be announced and cannot be made up.

Short Essays (2 essays x 3 pages)(150 pts per essay)

Twice this semester, you will be required to contribute a short literary analysis of an assigned text of your choosing. Each essay must focus on a specific literary text from the appropriate section of the course (one for texts preceding Week 7 and one for texts between Week 7 and Week 14). They should also provide a clear engagement with the chosen text and the related material. Additional guidelines will be provided in Week 2. These responses may be expanded for one of your longer papers and will be treated as exploratory writings.

Group Discussion Panel (100 pts for the presentation; 50 pts for the written portion)

Once during the semester, you will be asked to participate in a group discussion panel on one of the days listed in the syllabus. Your group will be tasked with collaborating on a presentation on a specific element of your chosen text, offering relevant quotes and analysis to back up a thesis. Presentations should be delivered in under 8 minutes. Additional guidelines will be provided on Canvas.

These are "first come, first serve," so it is up to you to select your preferred panel or a replacement.

Discussion Starters (100 pts total)

Each week, you will be required to submit 1-2 short analytical points OR questions. These should take the form either of an analytical reading of a specific text or section or a question about a reading that you'd like the class to discuss. These may be submitted on any day during the week and must be submitted via email the evening prior to that day's class. You may be called upon to further explain your idea or question in class; other students are encouraged to offer their input or ask their own questions.

Final Essay (2,500 words; 300 pts)

This final paper will include an extensive analysis of a text we have read this semester. You are required to research your topic and chosen text and use at least three *academic* sources in your analysis. You are encouraged to expand on your short essays and to find unique avenues for engagement with your chosen text. This essay should demonstrate your ability to place the text within its historical and literary moment and in conversation with the numerous themes of this course.

Grading Scale

A	930-1000
A-	900-929
B+	870-899
B	840-869

- B- 800-839
- C+ 770-799
- C 740-769
- C- 700-739
- D+ 670-699
- D 630-669
- D- 600-629
- E 0-599

Points Breakdown

Assignments	Word Count	Points	Percentage
Participation	N/A	200	20%
Discussion Starters	N/A	50	5%
Midterm Essay	1,000	100	10%
Discussions/Responses	N/A	300/100	30%/10%
Final Exam	N/A	150	15%
Final Paper	2,500	250	25%

Grade Meanings

The following is a basic rubric which will be used to grade your papers:

- A An A paper is well-argued, well-supported, well-organized, and demonstrates thorough engagement with the text and its relation to the themes and/or concepts discussed in the course (if relevant). Papers at this level contain strong prose and are generally free of typos and mechanical errors.
- B A B paper falls noticeably short in **one** of the above areas, but still demonstrates a thorough engagement with the text and its relation to the themes and/or concepts discussed in the course (if relevant). Work in this range needs minor revision, but is otherwise stylistically and mechanically sound, with few errors.
- C A C paper falls noticeably short in **two or more** of the areas listed above. Work in this range needs significant revision in terms of its content and organization and may contain several spelling and/or mechanical errors. A C paper, however, shows potential.
- D A D paper is generally disorganized, poorly-argued, lacking in support, and simplistic in terms of its argument. Work in this range is in need of significant rewriting and contains numerous spelling and/or mechanical errors that disrupt reading.
- E An E paper falls short in **almost all** of the areas listed above OR may be incomplete/late/missing. Work in this range is full of spelling and mechanical errors, unclear, and usually close to unreadable. An E paper may also fail to follow the guidelines set up by your instructor. **Read the instructions for every assignment.**

Please note that the above rubric is not exact. Other factors, such as assignment requirements, obvious inaccurate textual references, and so on, will influence your grade.