

Professor Shelley Streeby
ETHN 182: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Fantasy and Science Fiction
Center 222, 12:30-1:50

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Office Hours: W 1:00-3:00 and by appointment

This seminar focuses on visions of race, gender, and sexuality in 20th and 21st century fantasy and science fiction. Partly in response to political and social movements and changing media politics, diverse forms of fantasy and science fiction in the last 100 years raise provocative questions about race, gender, sexuality, and empire, often on a global scale. Today, science fictions jump between and among multiple platforms, including literature, film, music, television, video games, and the internet. This class explores a variety of cultural forms in order to understand such visions of race, gender, and sexuality in comparative, transmedia contexts.

During the quarter, we will compare and connect works of fantasy and science fiction produced by several different groups, including Black Diasporans, Latinas/os, whites, indigenous people, and Asian Americans. We will read short essays on these identity categories as well as other keywords as we seek to develop an intersectional perspective. On the one hand, race, gender, sexuality, and empire have always been central to the fantasy and science fiction genres as they emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries: figures such as the alien, the last man, the zombie, and the vampire are inseparable from histories of gender and sexuality, race relations and colonial contact, violence, and settlement, as are tropes of space exploration and founding new worlds, terraforming, and digital embodiment. On the other hand, this course is inspired by the large body of recent work that has emerged in the last 15 years or so on the significance of the genres of fantasy and science fiction for writers of color inside and outside of the United States, including work on indigenous futurisms and Afrofuturisms; borderlands critical dystopias; and alternate histories of race, gender, and sexuality.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Required Books: Available at the UCSD Bookstore: Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*; Burgett and Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*; Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest*; Nalo Hopkinson, ed. *Mojo: Conjure Stories*; Dillon, ed. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*; Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*; Octavia Butler, *Fledgling*. **Recommended Books:** Ben Harvey, *Night of the Living Dead* and Sheree Thomas, *Dark Matter*.

Films: With the exception of *Night of the Living Dead* you should watch each film on the syllabus **BEFORE** the class in which we are discussing it. I want you to come in with thoughts and ideas about each film before we discuss it. All of them will be on reserve at the Film and Video Library; most are also available through Netflix, Amazon, and other on-line media services.

Everything that has **(CR)** following it is in the **Course Reader**, available later this week from **Cal Copy La Jolla**, 3251 Holiday Ct, La Jolla, CA 92037, (858) 452-9949. In a few cases, the syllabus links to VERY SHORT texts on-line. Please print these out and bring them with you to class, as every time we are discussing any text I want you to have a copy you can bring to class and underline, mark up, and refer to in order to participate in class. I will also hand out one text, the Arthur C. Clarke story,

READING AND DISCUSSION SCHEDULE:

Borderlands Near Futures

TUES JAN 7 INTRODUCTION

TH JAN 9 NO CLASS BUT READ AND VIEW THE FOLLOWING BEFORE NEXT TUESDAY:

-Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, *Lunar Braceros* 2125-2148

-*The Sleep Dealer* (Rivera, 2009). It is available on Netflix and is also on reserve at the Film and Video Library in Geisel Library. It can also be purchased for \$4.99 on Amazon.

-*Keywords for American Cultural Studies*: Mary Pat Brady, "Border"

TU JAN 14 Finish reading and viewing *Lunar Braceros*, *The Sleep Dealer*, and the Keyword "Border" so that we can discuss them in class. If you'd like to read a few short pieces on *Sleep Dealer*, I recommend the following: Malcolm Harris, "Border Control" at <http://thenewinquiry.com/features/border-control/>; Jason Silverman, "Sleep Dealer Injects Sci-Fi into Immigration Debate" at http://www.wired.com/entertainment/hollywood/news/2008/01/sleep_dealer; and Mark Engler, "Science Fiction from Below" at http://www.fpiif.org/articles/science_fiction_from_below.

"The Last Man": Post-Apocalyptic Visions of Gender, Race, and Empire

TH JAN 17 Mary Shelley, Book III, Chapter X (last chapter) from *The Last Man* (1826) (CR); W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Comet" (1920) in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (CR); *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*: Ferguson, "Race"

Presentation Questions: What other examples of the "last man" or post-apocalyptic genre can you think of in visual culture, whether in films, TV, video games, or some other form? Bring in one example and explain how it fits the sub-genre; when it was produced and how it speaks to its historical moment; and what it is saying about race, specifically.

TU JAN 21 James Tiptree, Jr. "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976) from *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever*, 163-216 and "Note on Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1986) from *Meet Me At Infinity*, 373-75 (1984) (CR); Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds" (1983) from Adams, *Wastelands: Stories of the Apocalypse* (1983), 245-255 (CR); N.K. Jemisin, "Valedictorian" (2012) from *After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia* (CR); *Keywords*: Judith Halberstam, "Gender"

Presentation Questions: Bring in an example of the post-apocalyptic genre in which women and gender are significant; explain how it fits the sub-genre; when it was produced and how it speaks to its historical moment; and what it is saying about gender and sexuality.

Aliens

TH JAN 23 Arthur C. Clarke, "Publicity Campaign" (1955), **handed out in class**; *District 9* (Blomkamp, 2009); *Keywords*: Internment; Start Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest* (1976)

Presentation Questions: Who was Arthur C. Clarke? What are the most significant ways Arthur C. Clarke has made an impact on our culture? What is the Arthur C. Clarke Center for Human Imagination at UCSD (check out the website at <http://imagination.ucsd.edu>)?

TU JAN 28 Finish Le Guin, *Word for World is Forest* (1976)

Presentation Questions: Who is Ursula K Le Guin? What are the most significant ways she has made an impact on our culture? Bring in a specific example, text, quote, idea, or picture.

Zombies

TH JAN 30 Paper #1 Due. In-Class Viewing: *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968).
Recommended: Ben Harvey, *Night of the Living Dead* (BFI Film Classics)

TU FEB 4 Sherman Alexie, "Ghost Dance" from *McSweeney's Massive Treasury of Thrilling Tales* (CR); Steven Barnes, "Heartspace"; Neil Gaiman, "Bitter Grounds" in Nalo Hopkinson, ed. *Mojo: Conjure Stories*; *Keywords:* Kevin Gaines, "African"

Presentation Questions: How did the legends of zombies emerge out of the cultures of African slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean? Bring in an example of a "zombie text" that alludes to or somehow references those origins; tell us when it was produced and how it speaks to its moment;

Afrofuturisms and Indigenous Futurisms

TH FEB 6 Michael Gonzalez, "[Black Alt]: What is Afrofuturism?," *Ebony*, October 1, 2013, <http://www.ebony.com/entertainment-culture/black-alt-enter-afrofuturism-999#axzz2gUpCbb37>; Internet Assignment: Explore Afrofuturism website <www.afrofuturism.net>; Nnedi Akorafor, "Spider the Artist" (2008) available on-line at <http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/spider-the-artist/>; *Keywords:* Brent Hayes Edwards, "Diaspora"

Presentation Question: Bring in one example of art, music, or some other cultural text that you believe is a good example of Afrofuturism and be able to explain why.

TU FEB 11 Selections from Dillon, ed. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*: Dillon, "Introduction"; Vizenor, "Custer on the Slipstream"; Alexie from *Flight*; Ortiz, "Men on the Moon"; Alexie, "Distances"; Silko, from *Almanac of the Dead*; *Keywords:* Robert Warrior, "Indian"; David Kazanjian, "Colonial"

Presentation Questions: Where else can we find signs of a "native presence" in science fiction and fantasy? There are a lot of great examples in Dillon's introduction; you could choose one of the films, comics, or other texts she mentions there and tell us more about it. Or another text in this anthology that we didn't read. Or come up with your own example.

Critical Dystopia and the Disappearing Public

TH FEB 13 Start Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*; *Keywords:* Robbins, "Public"; Mike Davis, "Fortress L.A." in *City of Quartz* (CR)

Presentation Questions: Butler's novel is famous as a speculative reimagining of the world of the 1993 Los Angeles uprisings. Bring in another example of a science fiction or fantasy text that raises issues of race and social justice in Los Angeles; tell us when it was produced and how it responds to its moment; and speculate about what it is trying to say about those issues.

TU FEB 18 Butler, *Parable*; *Keywords:* Newfield, "Corporation" and Grace Hong, "Property"

Presentation Questions: In Butler's novel, a corporation tries to take advantage of disaster and make people into neo-slaves. Bring in another example of a science fiction or fantasy text that focuses on abuses of corporate power; tell us when it was made and why that matters; and speculate about what it is saying about corporations in its moment.

TH FEB 20 Butler, *Parable*; Keywords: Walter Johnson, "Slavery"

Presentation Questions: In Butler's novel, slavery is not only part of the past but also part of our present. Discuss one other example of a science fiction or fantasy text in which reimagining slavery across time and space is central and be ready to tell us how and why.

Avatars, Digital Embodiment, and Settler Colonial Fantasy

TU FEB 25 Paper #2 Due; *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009); *Avatar* and Digital Embodiment: University of Washington's Keywords for Video Games Study Project at <https://depts.washington.edu/critgame/wordpress/keywords/>. Read the notes from the meeting on the keyword "Avatar" and "A Declaration of the Rights of Avatars."

Presentation Questions: What are the most interesting video games today that deal with race, gender, and sexuality? Bring in an especially compelling example and tell us what we can learn about these issues from the game.

TH FEB 27 On *Avatar* and Settler Colonial Fantasy: Orin Starn, "Here Come the Anthros Again"; Audra Simpson, "Settlement's Secret"; and James Clifford, "Response to Orrin Starn"; *Cultural Anthropology* 26(2) (May 2011) (CR)

Presentation Questions: Find a specific example of an appropriation of something in *Avatar* that reframes and changes its meanings. It would be especially interesting if you could find an example that questions and complicates settler colonialism, but in any case tell us what kind of cultural work the particular adaptation you have chosen seems to be doing.

Race, Gender, the Human, and AI

TU March 4 Ted Chiang, *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* (2010) in CR; Keywords: Laura Briggs, "Science"

Presentation Questions: In this novella, Chiang raises questions about artificial intelligence and its relationship to the human by focusing on the software development industry. Bring in another example of a science fiction or fantasy text that raises similar questions about AI and the human; tell us when it was produced and why that matters; and find at least one interesting way to compare it to Chiang's text.

TH March 6 *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982) and Keywords: Tchen, "Asian"; Prashad, "Orientalism"; Perry, "White"

Presentation Questions: Philip K. Dick wrote the novella "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" which *Blade Runner* is based on and which we would be reading if I could fit it in. You may want to read the novella and bring in one passage to hand out to the class so they can compare and contrast it with the film: this passage should represent something significant. Or you can bring in another example of another cultural text derived from Dick's work that engages questions of race, gender, and/or sexuality.

Vampires

TU March 11 Start Octavia Butler, *Fledgling* (2005); Keywords: Carla Peterson, "Family"

Presentation Questions: Bring in another example from film or television of a vampire story that puts questions of race at the center. Tell us when your example was produced and what it says about the time and the issues.

TH March 13 Finish Butler, *Fledgling*

Presentation Questions: Bring in another example from literature, music, or fan fiction/adaptations of a vampire story that puts questions of race at the center. Tell us when your example was produced and what it says about the time and the issues.

Class Requirements:

Class Participation (10%) is important! Please come to class ready to participate and with the day's reading/viewing completed. You must bring hard copies of assigned reading materials to section in order to receive full participation points. Class discussion is really important because, among other things, I want to help you work on developing and articulating your ideas about what you read. Improving each student's ability to articulate ideas effectively in public is one of the goals of this class; for most people this takes practice, rather than being something that comes naturally. Also, we will all learn more by encountering many different ideas about the topics we are studying. You must actively participate as well as attend to get an "A" for this part of the course. Unexcused absences will affect your grade, and if you have several unexcused absences you may fail the class. Please let me know if you have a doctor's note, family emergency, or some other serious reason for missing class so I can mark your absence as excused rather than unexcused. If you miss a substantial part of any class session, it will count as an absence. Please come to class on time. If once or twice you must leave class a little early for a very good reason, be sure to tell me before class begins.

5-Minute Class Presentation and 1-Page Write-up of Presentation (10%). Each student will be asked to speak for 5 minutes in response to a question that I have posed for that day on the syllabus. You will do this as part of a group presentation, and I encourage the group to meet before the class to discuss the coordination of the presentation and to think about possible connections and differences between the individual presentations. No more than four people will be allowed to sign up for any given day. The presentations invite you to focus on **one example** of your own choosing (images, songs, other cultural texts, material objects, etc.) in order to develop a specific idea of your own in relation to the ideas of others in response to the material we are learning together. They should ideally help to generate class discussion. If possible, you should try to consult at least two sources for your presentation, and be careful to choose good sources rather than randomly reading whatever shows up at the top of a Google search. Be sure to tell the class about the sources you use in the presentation and why you chose these sources. On the day of the presentation, please hand in a one-page, typed write-up telling me what sources you used and why as you explain your response to the question. You will have the opportunity to turn your presentation into one of the 3 short papers if you desire. On the take-home final, I will also ask you one question in which you will have to draw on your presentation.

3 papers, 6-7 pages long (20% each, 60% total) due 1/30, 2/25, and 3/14. I will hand out prompts for these papers at least 2 weeks in advance: the prompts for the first paper will be handed out in class next Tuesday, 1/14. These papers will focus on the cluster of texts we are studying in each unit and will ask you to develop an argument in response to the prompt by drawing on those texts and, in some cases, other sources. Papers must be double-spaced and typed in 10- or 12-point font. Late papers will not be accepted unless you have asked for and received an extension in advance.

A take-home final exam (20%). On the last day of class I will hand out the take-home final exam,

which you will complete and hand in by 3:00 Wednesday March 19 in my mailbox in the Ethnic Studies office, which is located in SSB 201. The office is open Monday thru Friday 8 am to 12 pm and 1 pm to 4:30 pm. It closes for lunch from 12-1. This final will cover all of the material assigned in the class and will require you to identify and discuss keywords, quotes, and concepts from the class and also to write brief essays in response to questions I will pose.

ADA Statement. If you have a documented disability needing accommodations, please inform me and bring a notification letter outlining your approved accommodations. I will make all reasonable efforts to assist you. If, as a result of a disability, you cannot accept the content or terms of this syllabus, you must notify me in writing within one week of receipt of the syllabus. You may also seek assistance or information from the Office for Students with Disabilities, 858/534/4382.

Cheating and Plagiarism: Whether intentional or inadvertent, plagiarism is a serious violation. All work submitted in this course must be your own. The use of sources such as ideas, quotations, paraphrases, or anything written by someone else must be properly acknowledged and cited. If you have questions about the proper citation of sources, please ask your Teaching Assistants. Students who plagiarize, or who cheat on an exam, will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with University policy. Students are expected to be familiar with UCSD's Policy on Integrity of Scholarship, available at <http://www.senate.ucsd.edu/manual/appendices/app2.htm#AP14>.

Discussion Ethics: This class is intended for students interested in challenging commonly held understandings of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation. Given the nature of the course there will likely be a wide range of opinions. Ideally the course will prompt you to think for yourself and to raise questions about conventional views and received wisdom. However, please engage one another in discussion with respect and consideration. Abusive and harsh language, the UCSD Principles of Community that we are all expected to follow (<http://www.vcb.ucsd.edu/principles.htm>).