

Envisioning Other Worlds

Amer. Studies 316: 21st Century Expression, Rutgers University, Fall 2015

Instructor: Frances Tran

Class: Monday/ Wednesday 2:15-3:35pm; Heldrich Science Building rm. 204

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:00-2:00pm & by appt., Room #017A Ruth Adams

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Course Description

Mutants, robots, zombies, vampires, and other super- or non-human beings abound in popular literature and media today. These extraordinary figures and the fantastical, often dystopian worlds they inhabit have become rather ordinary components of our shared cultural landscape. They point, moreover, to the ways in which science and speculative fiction as a genre speaks to our contemporary moment. In this course we will examine a range of cultural texts, including short stories, novels, film, comics, and visual art, to explore how science and speculative fictions allow us to envision other timespaces, dimensions, and worlds. Contemplating these texts in relation to each other and the genre of science and speculative fiction will create room for discussing changing conceptions of the human, alternate representations of race, gender, and sexuality, the contradictions of technology, and the possibilities for social justice in the present.

Learning Goals

- To acquire a deeper understanding of the 21st century by engaging in critical dialogue about the genre of science and speculative fiction and its relationship to contemporary phenomena
- To sharpen textual analysis skills by close reading different media forms in short blogging assignments and formal papers
- To develop confidence in written and oral expression by thinking and writing collaboratively as well as facilitating class discussion in response to cultural texts of the present moment

Core Goals Fulfilled by this Course

- 21st Century Challenges: a. Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on the world; d. Analyze issues of social justice across local and global contexts.
 - *We will fulfill this goal through an engagement with contemporary science and speculative fictions written by authors of diverse backgrounds as well as through a deep exploration of questions pertaining to social and material inequality, racial and sexual discrimination, global climate change, etc.*
- Areas of Inquiry--Arts and the Humanities: b. Analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies.
 - *We will fulfill this goal by carefully situating and close reading all course texts.*

Required Materials

- *Ink*, Sabrina Vourvoulias (2012)- ISBN-13: 978-0615657813
- *Fledgling*, Octavia Butler (2007)- ISBN-13: 978-0446696166
- *The Shadow Hero*, Gene Luen Yang & Sonny Liew (2014)- ISBN-13: 978-1596436978
- *Ms. Marvel Volume 1: No Normal*, G. Willow Wilson & Adrian Alphona (2014); ISBN-13: 978-0785190219
- *Orleans*, Sherri L. Smith (2014)- ISBN-13: 978-0147509963
- A journal

*All other required texts will be posted as .PDFs on the “course readings” page on the class blog

Additional resource: Purdue Online Writing Lab: MLA Formatting and Style Guide (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>)

Course Requirements

Participation: Good participation entails coming to class prepared, having done the reading, blog responses, and comments. It also involves bringing the assigned texts (including those online) and being engaged in class discussions. In order to participate fully, it is therefore in your best interest to attend class, and to attend on time. We will be moving through complex material at a very quick pace, so absences and/or tardiness will make it difficult for you to keep up. If you are absent, you will not be allowed to make up in-class activities. It is your responsibility to find out what you have missed either by speaking to me or asking a fellow student.

- **Attendance and lateness policy:** You are allowed a **maximum of three absences** during the semester--so, be it illness, a family emergency, extracurricular activities, bad weather, or laziness, an absence is an absence, and you are allowed three. Being late three times equals one absence (latecomers are disruptive and discourteous). Students who are late must remember to consult with me after class to make sure that they have been marked present for the day. If you are more than 20 minutes late, you will be recorded as absent. Since missing more than three classes will result in your inability to fully participate in class discussions and activities, your final grade will be marked down $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade for each additional day you are absent (e.g., your final grade is a B, but you have missed 4 classes. You now have a B-). This attendance/lateness policy is non-negotiable so please keep it in mind if you choose to remain in the course.

If you do miss a class, please use the University absence reporting website (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>) to indicate the date and reason for your absence.

Journals: One of the required materials for this course is a journal, which you must bring to class every day (unless otherwise stated). This journal should be separate from your usual note-taking device. For certain in-class activities, I will ask you to complete short free writing and brainstorming exercises in your journal. These activities cannot be made up if you miss a class.

Course Blog: Throughout the semester I will be posting announcements, readings, links, etc. on to the course blog, which you may access here:

URL: <https://envisioningotherworlds.wordpress.com/>

Password for protected pages: amstudies316

This blog will serve as a collaborative space outside of the classroom for reflecting on course readings and questions. Its primary purpose is to help you strengthen your writing skills by critically engaging each other through frequent blog responses and comments (discussed in greater detail below). However, since this class is about “21st Century Expression,” the blog’s secondary purpose is to act as a space where we can share texts and objects we encounter in our daily lives that are related to the course theme and questions, including the occasional news article, blog post, youtube video, illustration, event announcement, etc. Although this aspect of the blog is not a requirement, I want to encourage you to use it as a forum for communicating the connections you might come across between the readings and topics we discuss in class and your own lived experiences. As such, feel free to start new conversations and share your thoughts, questions, and epiphanies because that is what will truly make this blog a class-authored site.

Blogging: For almost every class, students will be expected to make a contribution to the course blog either as a **poster** or as a **commenter**. The main purpose of this online forum is to develop and strengthen your close reading skills collaboratively. The general guidelines for effective posts and comments are listed below:

Posts: Throughout the semester each student will be required to compose two blog responses. These responses should be posted by no later than **5:00pm the day before class** so other students will have ample time to comment. You will select your response dates at the beginning of the semester, so please mark them clearly in your calendar. Late responses cannot be made up.

Your blog response should offer a close reading of a passage (5-10 lines of typed prose) from one of the assigned texts, which is to be re-typed at the beginning of your post. (If you are close reading a scene from a graphic novel or film, you should offer a brief 5-10 line summary of the scene in lieu of the typed passage). Your response should provide careful, detailed analysis of this passage/scene, paying particular attention to the use of language and literary devices, aesthetic techniques (lines and shading, color, lighting, costumes, etc.) as well as the larger themes, issues, and questions, the passage/scene raises. Responses should be well thought out and organized, but do not have to be written as formal papers. These posts should be approximately 250-500 words long (not including the passage/scene text). Quotations and passages referenced should be accompanied by parenthetical citations with the appropriate page numbers, if applicable.

Comments: During classes when you are not responsible for writing a blog post, you are expected to comment on at least one student’s close reading response. Comments

are due by no later than **9:00am the day of class** and should be between 100-150 words long. Late comments cannot be made up.

Comments should demonstrate careful engagement with other students' ideas. As a commenter, you may do one of two things: (1) Extend another student's close reading of the text by drawing out additional details, themes, and/or questions that have not yet been addressed by the original poster or subsequent commenters; (2) Alternatively, you may introduce an additional passage/scene from the text that is related to the original poster's close reading analysis. If you choose this option, please quote/summarize the passage/scene you have selected and offer a brief explanation of the connections between them.

Facilitation: Each student will be responsible for facilitating class discussion once during the semester. Please mark your chosen date clearly in your calendar to ensure that you will be able to make it to class on time. We will begin class with student-facilitated discussions, so if you are late, you might miss the opportunity to fulfill your facilitation role. (Tardiness *will* factor into your grade and facilitation cannot be made up). If you discover that you are going to be absent when you are the assigned facilitator, please let me know as soon as possible so we can try to reschedule. Keep in mind, however, that this may not always be feasible depending on how many students are signed up for certain dates as well as where we are in the semester.

As a facilitator, your role is to **situate the text(s)** and **stimulate class discussion** about the assigned reading(s) for **10 minutes**. (I will be keeping track of time). During this period, it is your responsibility to guide conversation around at least one of the assigned readings for the day. You may open with remarks about the text, distribute handouts, ask for volunteers to read, write on the blackboard, invite us to participate in an activity, or call on your classmates at your own discretion. As a facilitator, you may *not* read from your response or a prepared speech, but consulting bullet points or note cards is permissible. Remember that your job is less to give a formal presentation, than to engage class conversation about the reading(s). Facilitators may choose to work together to develop handouts or activities, but keep in mind that you will still be evaluated individually.

Formal Assignments: In this class, you will complete a **close reading essay** (3-4 pages), a **midterm paper** (4-5 pages), and a **final group presentation** and **reflection paper** (1-2 pages). More details on these assignments will be distributed in class at least 1-2 weeks in advance of the due dates.

- Assignments are due on the date they appear in the syllabus. Students should be prepared to turn in a printed and stapled hard copy of their essay at the beginning of class. I also want a digital copy of your essay for my records, which should be emailed to me by 11:00pm on the due date.
- **Lateness policy:** The final grade for a late paper will be dropped one whole letter grade for each day it is late, including weekends. For example, a paper that merits a "B" will result in a "C" grade if it is turned in one day late. Deadline extensions, though rare, may

be granted for extenuating circumstances. Students must consult me for an extension at least one week before a paper is due.

Course content: The nature of this course will ask you to read and discuss issues that may be sensitive and controversial, such as sexuality, racism, colonialism, violence, political and religious beliefs, etc. In a college level course you are expected to think about these issues in a way that is critical, analytical, and mature even if certain issues excite strong personal opinions from you. It is crucial that this class be a forum for the respectful exchange of ideas. Students engaging in conduct inappropriate for the classroom will be asked to leave; the same applies to the course blog. If you are unable to engage with the aforementioned topics in an open-minded and sophisticated manner, I encourage you to reconsider your enrollment in this class.

Policies

Final Grade Breakdown

Participation	10%
Blogging	20%
Facilitation	10%
Close reading essay	10%
Midterm paper	20%
Final project	
Presentation	20%
Reflection paper	10%
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	30%

Academic Integrity

Examples of plagiarism and academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- Submitting essays or portions of essays written by other people, including well-intentioned friends and family
- Failing to document paraphrases, ideas, or verbatim phrases taken from outside sources
- Collaborating on an assignment without the explicit permission of the professor
- Submitting an essay written for one course to another course without the explicit permission of both professors
- Submitting work as one's own that has been purchased or copied from a paper preparation service or website

Any work submitted to me that has been plagiarized will receive a zero for the assignment and will be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs. Author integrity is crucial to the mission of this course, so any event of plagiarism will most likely result in a failing grade.

*You may consult the University's current academic integrity policy by visiting this page: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>. I strongly advise you to familiarize yourself with this document, both for this class and for your future work.

Classroom Etiquette: Please avoid any distracting or disruptive behavior. Turn off your cell phone before class starts and put it away for the duration of class. Laptops are permitted so long as you do not abuse the privilege by surfing the internet, checking email, going on Facebook, etc. Most importantly, treat your classmates and me with respect; rude, mean-spirited, discriminatory, and/or inappropriate comments will *not* be tolerated.

Contact: You may contact me via email or during my office hours, both of which are listed at the top of the syllabus. I am happy to continue discussions from class, clarify readings and writing assignments, or offer any other course-related advice you might need. As a general rule, if you email me, include a subject heading, the course title and number, and sign your full name. Keep in mind that I try to avoid work-related emails over the weekend and please wait at least 48 hours before sending a follow-up email.

Special Accommodations: If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation in this class, (including special formats, assignments, auxiliary aids, non-traditional instructional formats, etc.), please inform me in private as soon as possible. You should also visit the “My Accommodations” page (<https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations>) on the Rutgers University website to submit requests for special services and/or accommodations.

Statement of Contractual Obligation

This syllabus is your contract with me and by choosing to remain in this course, you agree to abide by the above policies and procedures. If you feel you are unable to fulfill any of the terms of this syllabus, please drop the course or contact me so we can make alternative arrangements if possible.

Tentative Course Schedule

Time Travel & Alien Encounters	
W. 09/02	Introductions “First Contact,” <i>American Galactic</i> , Laura Madeline Wiseman (2014) “We Gave Them to the Aliens,” <i>Wild Hunt of the Stars</i> , Ann K. Schwader (2010)
M. 09/07	*Labor Day- no classes scheduled
T. 09/08	*Monday schedule <i>Octavia’s Brood</i> - Introduction and Foreward (2015) “Revolution Shuffle,” Bao Phi (2015) “Hollow,” Mia Mingus (2015) “Small and Bright,” Autumn Brown (2015)
W. 09/09	“Trade Winds,” Devorah Major (2004)

	"The Runner of n-Vamana," Indrapramit Das (2013)
M. 09/14	"Standard Loneliness Package," Charles Yu (2012) "The Semplica-Girl Diaries," George Saunders (2012)
W. 09/16	Excerpts from <i>Zong!</i> (Os- #1, #4, #14, #15, #17, #20, #22, #24, "Manifest," & "Notanda"), M. NourbeSe Philip (2011) *Use glossary for unfamiliar words "Protected Entity," Daniel José Older (2013)
More/Less Than Human	
M. 09/21	<i>Ink</i> , Sabrina Vourvoulias (2012)- pgs. 1-67 Peer-review
W. 09/23	<i>Ink</i> , Sabrina Vourvoulias (2012)- pgs. 68-111 *First paper due
M. 09/28	<i>Ink</i> , Sabrina Vourvoulias (2012)- pgs. 112-185
W. 09/30	<i>Ink</i> , Sabrina Vourvoulias (2012)- pgs. 186-229
M. 10/05	<i>Fledgling</i> , Octavia Butler (2007)- pgs. 1-81
W. 10/07	<i>Fledgling</i> , Octavia Butler (2007)- pgs. 83-149
M. 10/12	<i>Fledgling</i> , Octavia Butler (2007)- pgs. 151-240
W. 10/14	<i>Fledgling</i> , Octavia Butler (2007)- pgs. 241-310
M. 10/19	"Third Class Superhero," Charles Yu (2006) <i>The Shadow Hero</i> , Gene Luen Yang & Sonny Liew (2014)- pgs. 1-71
W. 10/21	<i>The Shadow Hero</i> , Gene Luen Yang & Sonny Liew (2014)- pgs. 75-152, author's note at end & original issue of green turtle
M. 10/26	<i>Ms. Marvel Volume 1: No Normal</i> , G. Willow Wilson & Adrian Alphona (2014)
Future Earth	
W. 10/28	<i>Big Hero 6</i> (2014)
M. 11/02	<i>Big Hero 6</i> (2014) Peer-review
W. 11/04	<i>Orleans</i> , Sherri L. Smith (2014)- "Before" & pgs. 13-69 *Midterm paper due
M. 11/09	<i>Orleans</i> , Sherri L. Smith (2014)- pgs. 70-159
W. 11/11	<i>Orleans</i> , Sherri L. Smith (2014)- pgs. 160-234

M. 11/16	<i>Orleans</i> , Sherri L. Smith (2014)- pgs. 235-324
W. 11/18	<i>Snowpiercer</i> (2013)
M. 11/23	<i>Snowpiercer</i> (2013)
W. 11/25	*Friday schedule
M. 11/30	Student presentations
W. 12/02	Student presentations
M. 12/07	Student presentations
W. 12/09	Student presentations
W. 12/16	*Final reflection paper due by 3:00pm