

Amer. Studies 316, Rutgers University, Fall 2015
Instructor: Frances Tran

Assignment #2 Midterm Paper

Peer-review: Monday, November 2nd (please come to class with 4 hard copies of your draft)

Due date: Wednesday, November 4th (papers are due at the beginning of class; an electronic copy should be sent to me by 11:00pm)

Essay Prompts (4-5 pages): You are expected to write a thesis-driven paper in response to one of the three essay prompts listed below. You can write on any of the texts we have read in the second or third sections of the class (“More/Less Than Human” and “Future Earth”).

Midterm Prompts:

1. Many of the works we have read raise questions about difference, otherness, and alienation in often unfamiliar times and landscapes. Select one text and examine the relationship between the author’s representation of minor/marginal characters and the fantastical/sci-fi elements in the narrative.

Some questions to consider include, but are not limited to:

- How are characters marginalized or alienated in your chosen text? How does their difference manifest through the author’s use of language and literary devices?
- What is significant about the world or landscape the characters inhabit? How do their differences and/or marginality impact the way they navigate this world?

Advice:

- Focusing on one or two minor/marginalized characters might make this prompt more manageable.
- Remember to define key terms. Never assume that your readers immediately understand what makes a specific character “different” or “marginal,” or, why a particular aspect of a text is “fantastical” or “science fictional.”

2. In the texts we have read the body is often depicted as a site of great social anxiety and conflict as well as enormous power and potential. Select one or two characters and demonstrate how the author’s discussion of the conflicts and questions surrounding their relationship to their bodies furthers a broader social critique.

Some questions to consider include, but are not limited to:

- In what ways is the author of your chosen text(s) inviting us to think about the body? --As integrated, whole, fragmented, broken? Is the body purely physical (skin, color, touch)? Or, is it also metaphorical (connected to questions about identity, memory, community)?
- What kinds of conflicts arise for your chosen character(s) as a result of their bodies? How might the tensions and questions they face be connected to commentaries the author is making on sexuality, desire, difference, social relationships, contemporary politics, etc.?

Advice:

- Remember to define your key terms. For this prompt, “body” will be an especially tricky concept to work with. Try to draw on the author’s depiction of specific characters and their conflicts to elaborate on the understanding of the body that you will be using in your essay.
- The texts we have read engage a broad range of contemporary social issues and political debates. Remember to specify what “broader social critique” you think the author is addressing in your writing.

3. Select one or two texts and examine how the author’s use of literary, aesthetic, and/or formal techniques illuminates an understanding of science/speculative/visionary fiction as a genre and its significance to our contemporary moment.

Some questions to consider include, but are not limited to:

- What specific qualities (e.g. characterization, setting, plot) allow us to recognize your chosen text(s) as a representative of science/speculative/visionary fiction and how do they offer a deeper understanding of this genre?
- Although we often think of science/speculative/visionary fiction in relation to the future, how might the questions and conflicts raised in the text be relevant to contemporary social issues and concerns? What details in the text enable us to draw these connections?
- What are the possibilities and limits of science/speculative/visionary fiction as a genre?

Advice:

- As indicated through the slashes between “science/speculative/visionary” fiction, selecting a specific genre (e.g. “science fiction,” “speculative fiction” or “visionary fiction”) will help keep your essay as clear and focused as possible.
- Remember to define your key terms. Regardless of which formulation of science/speculative/visionary fiction you choose, take the time to unpack and explain how you understand the qualities and parameters of this genre in your own words.

Things to Keep in Mind:

- Have you provided a clear, explicit and focused thesis? **What is the main point that you are arguing?**
- How does the paper explain, elaborate on, and support your thesis? In other words, what is the **structure of your argument?**
- Have you used textual support to make your argument as compelling as possible? You should quote and close read **at least three passages** as evidence for your thesis. When you quote from the text, you want to provide an analysis of why that quote is relevant -- explain fully how that quote supports your argument at that particular point. In other words, it should make sense to a reader why you decided to include this quote here.
- **Avoid over-quoting** or layering quotes on top of each other. A general rule to follow is that your analysis of a passage should be about twice as long as the quotation you cite, so think carefully before inserting overly long quotes into your essay.
- **Never generalize** or make broad, sweeping claims--always be specific and explicit, and say only what you can prove in the scope of your essay.

Formatting and other details*

- 4-5 pages (i.e. no less than four FULL pages), typed, double-spaced, in standard 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins, and page numbers in the upper right-hand corner
- Include a heading in the upper-left-hand corner that includes your name, professor's name, course number and date
- Include parenthetical citations and a Works Cited page formatted according to MLA style
- Do not include a cover page, and do staple your work prior to class
- A late assignment will be penalized a full letter grade for each day it is late

*Points will be deducted for incorrect formatting

Email policy: You are welcome to email me any questions or concerns you have about the assignment and I will do my best to help you. I cannot read full paper drafts because I simply do not have the time. You can, however, email me a **working thesis paragraph** and up to a **one-page outline** of your paper. I will answer any questions about the assignment up until 6:00pm on the peer-review date (Monday, November 2nd).