

ARTSSCI 4ST3 - Selected Topics in Inquiry Speculative Fictions and Who We Are

Arts & Science Program
McMaster University

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Term: Winter 2022 (2021/22)
Lecture: Wednesdays 2:30-5:20pm, IWC-224
Office hours: Wednesdays 12:30-2:20pm

Course Description

This course is dedicated to the study of “speculative fiction,” including but not limited to fantasy, science fiction, horror and dystopic narratives as practiced in short stories and novels, though we will also discuss comic books, TV series, video games, podcasts and films. Seminars focus on the genre’s various codes, tropes, modes and conventions as they relate to broader constructions of ideology, identity and culture.

Classes are divided between seminars on assigned readings and group workshops of weekly writing exercises. The course readings are thematically organized to develop, examine and analyze the conventions of certain stories—who has told them, about whom and for whom—and how conscientious writers might challenge the codifications that these stories have historically reified. Related weekly writing exercises require students to put each module’s respective techniques and ideas into creative practice.

As this is a discussion-based course, students must contribute actively in conversations about assigned readings and one another’s work. Evaluation will be based partly on the quality of these in-class contributions or their written equivalents.

Course Objectives

This course is designed to help students:

- Understand the historical, cultural and political contexts of various modes of SF;
- Develop their critical reading capacities and depth of textual analysis;
- Extrapolate and analyze social and cultural implications from works of fiction;
- Participate in mutually respectful, intellectually stimulating discussion;
- Articulate their ideas and perspectives through creative and academic writing.

Required Texts

- Rachel Ingalls, *Mrs. Caliban*
- Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

(Additional required and supplementary readings will be posted to the course website. Please note, also, that content advisories will be provided when required, but if you would like a heads-up for specific content, please let me know.)

Evaluation

The final grade for the course will be based on the following rubric:

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|-------------------------------------|-----|
| • Workshops/Participation | 20% |
| • Midterm exercises (due Feb 16) | 10% |
| • Midterm critiques (due Feb 16) | 15% |
| • End-of-term critiques (due Apr 6) | 15% |
| • End-of-term exercises (due Apr 6) | 10% |
| • Final assignment (due Apr 13) | 30% |

The **participation** grade is based on punctuality, attendance, contribution to class discussions and active engagement in oral critiques.

You will choose **three weekly writing exercises** from those assigned in the first and second halves of the class, respectively, to hand in at midterm and at the end of the course. (Six total.)

Three 300-350-word **critiques** of your classmates' work will be submitted at midterm and at the end of the course.

The **final assignment** is a 2500-word/six-page essay that incorporates at least three of the assigned texts, including one of the books, to formulate a cogent argument based on the themes of the course.

Late assignments will be deducted 5%/day. **Extensions** must be requested **at least one week** prior to the deadline. There will be no extensions for the final assignment.

Writing Exercises, Workshops and Critiques

Each class will include a prompt for a creative **writing exercise** related to the course content. In every week, three-four students will be afforded the opportunity to share their work and benefit from an instructor-guided **workshop**.

In these workshops, students will discuss their classmates' weekly writing exercises with respect to each piece's goals, intentions, strengths and areas of potential improvement. Each student is responsible for submitting one writing exercise to be workshopped over the semester; these submissions need not correspond to the week's readings or subject matter. An online schedule for sign-up will be provided after the first class.

At least **a week prior** to your workshop, submissions will be emailed to me; I will forward them to the rest of the class and post them to the course website. Everyone is responsible for reading the week's workshop submissions and participating in the discussions. While personal taste is unavoidable, your goal as peer editors is to figure out

what each piece is trying to do, not to shape it into what you'd like it to be. As such, please provide feedback that will help guide each piece toward realization of its own goals and intentions, not what you "like" or "don't like."

Workshop submissions will be sent to the instructor by email as **.doc file attachments**; these emails should be composed as if they were being addressed to a human being. Double-space your lines, number your pages and title the files: **ARTSSCI 4ST3 – Your Name – Exercise # and Name – Date of Workshop** (e.g.: ARTSSCI 4ST3 – Pasha Malla – Exercise #1: A Speculative Fiction – Jan 11 2022). Your exercise requires a title. Failure to follow these simple instructions will result in deducted marks.

Students are also expected to hand in two rounds of **written critiques** at midterm and in the final class. Each written critique will examine **three of that term's workshop submissions** and should include things you liked about each piece as well as potential areas for improvement. Each critique should be about 300-350 words for a total submission of 1000 words.

Students who miss or are unable to participate in workshop discussions will provide a written, 300-word critique of their classmates' submissions. These responses are to be emailed to the instructor, who will forward them to the respective writers.

Readings

With the exception of the assigned books, all readings will be posted to the course website. Students are expected to have read the week's readings before each class and come to class prepared to discuss them. Active involvement in these discussions will comprise a portion of the Participation Grade; students unable to discuss readings in class will be expected to submit short written responses to avoid deducted marks.

Final Assignment

This will be short essay (6 pages) that examines at least three of the assigned readings and incorporates and responds to the major themes of the course. More detailed information will be made available before Reading Week.

Course Schedule

Week One – Jan 12

Seminar: Course Introduction – What is SF?

Reading: Link – "The Specialist's Hat;" Atwood – from *Other Worlds*

Exercise: What is SF?

Week Two – Jan 19

Seminar: Worldbuilding

Reading: Wendig – "25 Things You Should Know About Worldbuilding;" Michel – "Against Worldbuilding;" De Mille – "Chapter 16. The Kosekin" (from *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*)

Exercise: Creation Story

Week Three – Jan 26

Seminar: Plotting, Conflict and Suspense

Reading: Percy – “Urgency;” from *Hitchcock/Truffaut*; Dahl – “Lamb to the Slaughter”

Exercise: Suspense

Workshop #1

Week Four – Feb 2

Seminar: Conflicted about Conflict

Reading: Ruiz – “Central Conflict Theory;” Ocampo stories; Kharms stories

Exercise: Unconflicted Fiction

Workshop #2

Week Five – Feb 9

Seminar: Science Fiction & Fantasy

Reading: Butler – “Bloodchild;” Saunders – “Escape from Spiderhead;” Tolkien – “On Fairy Stories”

Exercise: A Fairy Story

Workshop #3

Week Six – Feb 16

Seminar: Parody vs. Pastiche

Reading: *Mrs. Caliban*; from Jameson – *Postmodernism*

Exercise: Fictionalizing the Other

Workshop #4

DUE: Midterm Exercises and Critiques**Week Seven: Reading Week****Week Eight – Mar 2**

Seminar: Horror

Reading: Wong – “Hungry Daughters of Starving Mothers;” King – “Graveyard Shift”

Exercise: The Jump-Scare

Workshop #5

Week Nine – Mar 9

Seminar: Counternarratives

Reading: Keene – “Rivers;” from Belcourt – *A History of My Brief Body*; Davis – “My First Real Home”

Exercise: A Rewrite

Workshop #6

Week Ten – Mar 16

Lecture: Dystopias and Utopias

Reading: LeGuin – “The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas;” Hossain – “Sultana’s Dream;” from Moore – *Utopia*

Exercise: A Topia

Workshop #7

Week Eleven – Mar 23

Lecture: Cli-Fi

Reading: From Blanchot – *The Writing of the Disaster*; Sudbanthad – “Floating;”
Machado – “Inventory”

Exercise: The Apocalypse!

Workshop #8

Week Twelve – Mar 30

Lecture: Futurisms

Reading: *Brown Girl in the Ring*; Dery – “Black to the Future: Afro-Futurism 1.0”

Exercise: Telling the Future

Workshop #9

Week Thirteen – Apr 6

LAST CLASS

Screening: TBA

DUE: End-of-term Exercises and Critiques

SENATE-APPROVED ADVISORY STATEMENTS

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., online search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ONLINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use online elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course

that uses online elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the [Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](#).

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should

submit their request to their Faculty Office ***normally within 10 working days*** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors. The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done either by the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

NOTES FOR ALL ARTS & SCIENCE COURSES

1. Some of the statements above refer to a “Faculty Office”; please note that the Arts & Science Program Office serves in this capacity.
2. It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster email regularly. Announcements will be made in class, via A2L, and/or via the course email distribution list.
3. For additional information regarding requests for accommodation, relief for missed term work (e.g. MSAF), deferred examinations, etc., students should read carefully the [Requests](#) and [Resources](#) pages on the Arts & Science Program website.