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LIT2010.018: Interpretation of Fiction (3 credits)
Summer 2019: World-Making through Science Fiction

Course Description: LIT 2010 is designed as an introduction to the close reading and analysis of fiction in which dual emphasis is placed on critical thinking and writing. Focusing on the short story and the novel, the course will provide students with the tools to read, analyze, critically think, and write about fiction, and to communicate their insights in both formal and informal written assignments. We will use the methods and language of literary criticism to explore fundamental elements of the works under study.

This summer we will examine works that fall within the broad category of speculative, or science fiction. More specifically, we will read science fiction texts that ask us to consider alternative futures in which environmental collapse presages not merely ruin, but new ways of being in the world. We will read Rachel Carson, Octavia Butler, and Ursula LeGuin (among others) as we investigate the concept of “world-making” in the context of climate disaster.

Artists have long provided a means through which to experience the affective substrate of modernity—an era made possible by our disastrous reliance on fossil fuels, along with other finite resources like groundwater. While some provide catharsis, others issue a prescient warning: consider the villain in *Mad Max: Fury Road* siphoning water from the local aquifer. If we are to engage substantively and sufficiently with the climate crisis, it may be in the realm of imagination where we ought to begin. Thus, we begin our class with a fable from Rachel Carson: “there was once a town in America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings”; and we end with stories that ask us to consider the possibility of life beyond environmental ruin—that is, the possibility of cultivating “love in the Anthropocene.”

LIT 2010 is a Gordon Rule class, which means that students must write 6,000 words or more and achieve a grade of C or above to pass the course. It is designed to meet the criteria of a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) course. We will approach writing as a recursive process, involving prewriting, drafting, peer critique, and substantial revision.

Required Texts:

Butler, Octavia E., *Parable of the Sower*, ISBN-13: 978-0446675505

LeGuin, Ursula. *The Word for World is Forest* ISBN-13: 978-0765324641

Dale Jamieson & Bonnie Nadzam, *Love in the Anthropocene*, ISBN-13: 978-1939293909

All readings appended with an asterisk () will be made available digitally.

Class requirements and Policies:**Grading criteria:****Critical Essays: 50%**

*Two critical essays (approximately 1500 words/4-5 pages each) which offer concise syntheses of assigned texts with critical attention to formal literary elements.

Formal Revision/Final Paper: 15%

*A final essay of approximately 2500 words that demonstrates substantial revision of an existing critical essay.

Weekly forum discussions: 35%

*Each week students will participate in two required discussions: one will be reserved for informal writing in preparation for formal assignments; the other will function as a peer critique.

Written assignments must be formatted according to MLA standards.

Papers will be due on dates stipulated below. Late work will not be accepted.

Grade Scale:

Florida Atlantic University follows a plus/minus (+/-) grading system. Numeric Values for this course are as follows: 93-100 A+; 92-90 A; 89-87 B+; 86-83 B; 82-80 B-; 79-77 C+; 76-73 C; 72-70 C-; 69-60 D; 59-0 F

FAU ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Students are expected to attend all of their scheduled University classes and to satisfy all academic objectives as outlined by the instructor. The effect of absences upon grades is determined by the instructor, and the University reserves the right to deal at any time with individual cases of non-attendance.

Students are responsible for arranging to make up work missed because of legitimate class absence, such as illness, family emergencies, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations or participation in University- approved activities. Examples of University-approved reasons for absences include participating on an athletic or scholastic team, musical and theatrical performances and debate activities. It is the student's responsibility to give the instructor notice prior to any anticipated absences and within a reasonable amount of time after an unanticipated absence, ordinarily by the next scheduled class meeting. Instructors must allow each student who is absent for a University-approved reason the opportunity to make up work missed without any reduction in the student's final course grade as a direct result of such absence.

ON-LINE CLASS POLICY:

*Your *presence* is required. As this course is conducted on line, it is expected that students will participate in *all* discussion forums and peer review workshops. Failure to do so will result in reduced assignment grades and reduced final course grade.

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES: In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)—in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 203 (954-236-1222); or in Jupiter, SR 110 (561-799-8585) —and follow all SAS procedures. For more information, see <http://www.fau.edu/sas/>

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS) CENTER: Life as a university student can be challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. Students who find stress negatively affecting their ability to achieve academic or personal goals may wish to consider utilizing FAU's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center. CAPS provides FAU students a range of services – individual counseling, support meetings, and psychiatric services, to name a few – offered to help improve and maintain emotional well-being. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/counseling/>

CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see: http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf

Class Schedule: (subject to change depending on class progress)

Week 1: (Saturday 5/11 – Friday 5/17)

Introductions & Beginnings

Rebecca Solnit, “Call Climate Change What It Is: Violence”*

Shelley Streeby, “Introduction,” *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making Through Science Fiction and Activism**

Rachel Carson, “A Fable for Tomorrow,” *Silent Spring**

***Discussion #1 (due Tuesday 5/14):** What was your initial reaction to the theme of this course? How do you think about our planetary future? Is this something that you think about? Read about?

***Discussion #2 (due Thursday 5/16):** How do we read Rachel Carson’s “A Fable for Tomorrow” in light of Shelley Streeby’s argument regarding “world-making through science fiction”? For this response you will need to address Streeby’s argument specifically before attending to Carson. So too, you are expected to consider the formal literary elements of Carson’s fable.

Week 2: (Saturday 5/18 – Friday 5/24):

Stephanie LeMenager, “To Get Ready for Climate Change, Read Octavia Butler”*

Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, chapters 1-14

***Discussion #1 (due Tuesday 5/21):** Given the focus on collectivism—perhaps literally in the form of “hyperempathy,” or “sharing”—how does Butler’s novel imagine another possible future? Additionally, how does Butler’s novel engage in world-making through science fiction (as Streeby defines it)?

***Discussion #2 (due Thursday 5/23):** Please respond to a peer’s discussion post by analyzing and critiquing its argument, internal logic, and supporting evidence.

Week 3: (Saturday 5/25 – Friday 5/31):

Parable of the Sower, finish.

***Discussion #1 (due Tuesday 5/28):** The novel uses an epistolary form to convey Lauren’s interiority—that is, it is told as a series of diary entries. So too, the reader is entreated to what ultimately becomes both an origin myth and a sort of survival guide. What do you make of Earthseed? Is Lauren offering a new template for religion? Is Earthseed, in its emphasis on *making* change and on *shaping* environments, somehow different than what Bankole argues is perhaps just another form of Christianity or Buddhism? And why is it called Earthseed? Is Butler offering a more materialist understanding of “God”?

***Discussion #2 (due Thursday 5/30):** Please respond to a peer’s discussion post by analyzing and critiquing its argument, internal logic, and supporting evidence.

***Essay #1 (due Saturday 6/1):** Formal essay of approximately 1500 words (or four pages) in which you develop your argument regarding Streeby and Carson by adding Butler’s novel. That is, you will make a case for how both Carson and Butler engage in world-making through science fiction. It is expected that you will transform your informal discussion with an eye toward the peer critique.

Week 4: (Saturday 6/1 – Friday 6/7):

Jedediah Purdy, “Introduction,” *After Nature**

Ursula LeGuin, *The Word for World is Forest*

***Discussion #1 (due Tuesday 6/4):** Ursula LeGuin’s novel *The Word for World is Forest* might be read in a number of ways: a speculative critique of the war in Vietnam; a postcolonial novel indicting the removal of Native communities in the Americas and elsewhere; a meditation on the categories of the human and nonhuman—the “Creechie” figure seemingly another form of human that hasn’t “evolved”; and perhaps also as a praxis for thinking about the different ways in which we view “nature”—what Purdy outlines as providential, Romantic, utilitarian, and ecological worldviews. Please read the novel from one of the interpretative lenses outlined above being sure to attend to the text’s formal elements to make your case.

***Discussion #2 (due Thursday 6/6):** Please respond to a peer’s discussion post by analyzing and critiquing its argument, internal logic, and supporting evidence.

Week 5: (Saturday 6/8 – Friday 6/14):

Ashley Dawson, “Disaster Communism,” *Extreme Cities: The Peril and Promise of Urban Life in the Age of Climate Change**

Dale Jamieson & Bonnie Nadzam, *Love in the Anthropocene*

***Discussion #1 (due Tuesday 6/11):** The stories collected in *Love in the Anthropocene* present a series of possible futures, all of which figure an image of “nature” that is radically transformed due to anthropogenic climate change. So too, however, Jamieson and Nadzam are careful to attend to the affective qualities of life after environmental collapse—familial “love” as we see in “Fly-Fishing,” or forms of human and nonhuman intimacy as we see in “Zoo” or “Holiday.” Why take such a perspective? For this discussion, you are to consider “love in the Anthropocene” in any form

you choose and in any of the five stories. You may also want to consider Ashley Dawson's argument here regarding the way(s) in which human beings are hardwired for collectivism and for helping one another and not, as many detractors would argue, for greed and selfishness.

***Discussion #2 (due Thursday 6/13):** Please respond to a peer's discussion post by analyzing and critiquing its argument, internal logic, and supporting evidence.

***Essay #2 (due Friday 6/14):** Formal essay of approximately 1500 words (or four pages) in which you develop your argument regarding the LeGuin novel. It is expected that you will transform your informal discussion with an eye toward the peer critique.

Week 6: (Saturday 6/15 – Friday 6/21):

Dale Jamieson & Bonnie Nadzam, "Carbon" (*Love in the Anthropocene*)

Karina Baptista, "Petroculture"*

Bruce Springsteen, "Born to Run"*

***Discussion #1 (due Tuesday 6/18):** For your final post, and in preparation for the final paper revision, please offer a formal critique of the story "Carbon" from the Jamieson and Nadzam collection. In addition to attending to the text's formal literary elements, you are to consider the following: how does the removal and re-use of carbon (which is being discussed here) illustrate a form of utopian geo-engineering (see Streeby)? That is, how does the economic commitment to carbon make clear a cultural commitment to something called "petroculture"? How are we to understand the relationship between the removal of local communities and the investment projects being touted as environmentally progressive?

***Final paper revision (due Thursday 6/20):** The final paper revision is to be a formal and substantive revision of one of the unit essays or unit discussions. The paper will be approximately 2500 words (or 6 pages) and must attend to peer and instructor feedback.

***Final reflection/discussion #2 (due Friday 6/21):** After reading such works as Butler's, and considering the promise of community-building and "hyperempathy," how might you answer the question that I posed during the first week regarding our planetary future? How has your thinking changed?