

English 348
Literature by Women: Science Fiction

2010
Times:
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Objectives: ENGL 348 will explore science fiction by women around the theme of "sustainability," in works by Julie Czerneda, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, Connie Willis, the Black writer Octavia Butler, the South American writer Angélica Gorodischer, and the Indian writer Padmanabran, as well as Judith Moffett's novel set in College Park. We will study the film *Making Mr. Right*, and read short stories by many other writers, as well as sample Japanese manga. We will ask if the history of science fiction by women is the same as that for male writers, and if women had (or have) a special tradition within the genre. We will use feminist theory to look at aspects of the science, psychology, and literary strategies of these works. And we will examine how the writers' differing (and changing) standpoints on the political issues of feminism, sexuality, colonizing, and sustainability are represented in their fictions.

Methods: Class will be almost entirely discussion, with student reports on the writers and student panels on the feminist readings.

Requirements and Grades: Midterm and final in-class examinations, 2 short papers (4-5 pages each), and class participation (discussion, report, panel, and attendance) are required. Each of these areas is worth 20% of the grade. Attendance will seriously affect the class participation part of your grade. You may revise the first paper for a higher grade.

Note: Small group discussion time is NOT break time. Remember to turn off telephones and beepers! No email on laptops during class, and no text messaging.

Every effort will be made to ensure students with documented disabilities equal participation in the course. The final examination will be untimed, to accommodate students with undocumented disabilities. Please let the professor know ahead of time that you will be absent for a religious holiday: you will not be counted absent, and you will not have exams or papers due on those dates.

Required Texts:

Note: Moffett is only available at BookHolders.Com in College Park. All the rest of the books for the course are available at BookHolders, University Book Center, and Maryland Book Exchange. Except for the Shelley, you may use any edition for these novels.

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter, Norton pb ISBN 0-393-96458-2
(only this edition of *Frankenstein*)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*

Hiromu Arakawa, *Fullmetal Alchemist*, vol. 5, VIZ pb, ISBN 1421501759

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Eye of the Heron*

Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*

Judith Moffett, *The Ragged World*, ISBN 0-345-37500-9

Octavia Butler, *Dawn*, DAW pb, ISBN 0445207795

Julie Czerneda, *Survival*, DAW pb, ISBN 0756401801

Note: Except for *Frankenstein*, you may use any edition of these works that you can find (all but the Takahashi are in multiple editions). Try the local used book stores Barbarian Books in Wheaton and Attic Books in Laurel. Try Abebooks.com (but either search only for nearby bookstores where you can pick up the book, or order right away and pay for the fast shipping).

Note: You are responsible for reading ahead of time all readings listed for any particular class period.

Summer schedule:

Week 1

T Introductions, logistics
What is science fiction?
MLA documentation workshop
Joanna Russ, "When It Changed" (handout)
Angélica Gorodischer, "The Perfect Married Woman" (handout)

Th Pamela Zoline, "Heat Death of the Universe" (handout)
James Tiptree, Jr. (Alice Sheldon), "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (handout)
Manjula Padmanabran, "Unfaithful Servants" (handout)
What is cognitive estrangement? (essay?)
 Biography Zoline
 Biography Tiptree

Week 2

T Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
Judith Butler, excerpts from *Gender Trouble* (handout)
Amittae Aviram, "Gender Theory" (handout)
 Biography Shelley
 Panel

Th Frankenstein's daughters: stories by Harris, Ludwick, Merrill, and Gunn
 Arakawa, *Full Metal Alchemist*
 Biography Arakawa

Week 3

T *Making Mr. Right*, directed Susan Seidelman: movie in class
 Paper #1 due
 Biography Seidelman

Th Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Eye of the Heron*
short essays by Barr, Donawerth, Khanna (handout)
Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (handout)
 Biography Gilman
 Biography Le Guin
 Panel

Week 4

T **Midterm Examination**
 Connie Willis, short story
 another Willis short story?
 Biography Willis

Th Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*
 Biography Piercy
 Essay (handout)
 Panel
 Paper #1 Revision Due

Week 5

T Judith Moffett, *The Ragged World*
 Joanna Russ, "Why Women Can't Write" (handout)
 Panel

Biography Moffett

Th Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
Biography Butler
Write Review Questions

Week 6

T Julie Czerneda, *Survival*
Biography Czerneda
Final Review

Th Teaching Evaluations
Final Examination

Note: For biographies, you report singly, and you use the resources in the reference room at McKeldin Library, especially the science fiction encyclopedias. The best one is *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 2nd ed., ed. John Clute and Peter Nicholls (and U.S. writers may be in *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writings*, ed. Cathy Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin). You can also do a web search for a living author's homepage. This report should last no more than five minutes.

For panels on feminist theory or criticism, the reading is in handouts, and all the class will have read it. The panel must read the material, briefly summarize the essay's main points, and apply it (a little) to the novel we have just read. The summary and application should take no more than 10 minutes for the whole panel. The panel must also start class discussion by asking questions on the theory in the essay and on the relation between the essay and novel. **DISCUSSION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SUMMARY!** One good way to start discussion is by having 7 or 8 good questions, dividing the class into small groups each with a question, and returning to whole group discussion after some ideas have been generated. But more creative exercises are also fun--talk shows, interviews, role-playing. The discussion in class may go for as long as 40 minutes. The panel will need to meet before the class to function smoothly.

For the reports on websites, fanzines, science fiction conventions, and Frankenstein movies, you will need to refer to the sf encyclopedias and use more specialized sources in the library. See me if you have trouble.

NOTE: The only web sites that count as research for your papers are the author websites and sf convention websites. There are no authorized, authoritative web sites for interpreting this literature. Reading and using in interpretation essays that we have read in class, or that we read for a different paper does count as research. Using essays from xerox packets in other classes also counts as research--but all must be documented.

Questions for Discussion To Return To Throughout the Course

1. Is this work science fiction, fantasy, utopia, dystopia, feminist fabulation?
2. How are gender roles represented--essential or constructed, performed, resisted, critiqued through hyperbole or misperformance?
3. How is consumer culture critiqued? How is society reimagined as offering a fair distribution of resources?
4. What sort of alternative world is created and how does this fiction estrange the reader from our current world?
5. How is environmental stewardship depicted in this fiction?
6. What does the cyborg or alien represent in this fiction?

7. Science fiction, according to Russ, is a genre of problem solving. How are the solutions offered in this novels based on interdependent solutions? How, for example, might equitable gender roles depend on environmental stewardship or sharing of resources? How is mistreatment of resources in these novels gendered (not as easy a question to answer as you first think)?