

BLAZING NEW WORLDS: WOMEN IN SCIENCE FICTION

ENG 167 • GWS 150 • Mondays and Wednesdays • 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. • Spring 2017 • 142 Dana Building



Image from “Demiurge” by Oakland-based visual artist Joshua Mays (2014).

CONTACT INFORMATION AND STUDENT HOURS

Professor: Dr. Nicholas E. Miller (He/Him/His)
Email: millerne@hollins.edu
Mobile: (314) 750-8185
Office: Swannanoa Hall 109
Student Hours: Mondays and Thursdays • 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Student hours are opportunities for you to ask questions, to get help with assignments, to review course readings, to talk about connections between our class materials and other work, etc. These conversations are generally student-directed, but I can also help you to articulate your questions and goals.

Please note that I am also available to meet by appointment.

ADDITIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

Assistant: Julie Borden
Email: bordenjm@hollins.edu

Librarian: Rebecca Seipp
Email: seippri@hollins.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will read about animals and amazons, as well as cyborgs and sorcerers. We will visit fantastic planets, witness apocalyptic visions of the future, and study alternative social orders. Science fiction is a fun genre, but underlying the fantasy is an unease about our own world, and a deep anxiety about what is to come. The novels, short stories, and films assigned for this course have all been written by women, and they grapple with issues of gender, race, and sexual orientation, as well as the difficulties women face in an increasingly technological society. Many of these writers are concerned about the threat that technology poses to the natural world, and they often point out the ties between the destruction of nature and the oppression of women. Other writers put forward the idea of technology as the ultimate liberator of women, and still others see a new kind of humanity emerging from our technological age.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND PLATFORMS

There are eight required texts for this course that are available for purchase in the bookstore or online:

- Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*. ISBN: 978-0140433722.
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. ISBN: 978-0143131847.
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*. ISBN: 978-0143105855.
- Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. ISBN: 978-0441478125.
- Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*. ISBN: 978-0143104919.
- Kameron Hurley, *God's War*. ISBN: 978-0091952785.
- Sabrina Vourvoulias, *Ink*. ISBN: 978-0998705996.
- Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*. ISBN: 978-0765385253.
- Magdalene Visaggio, Eva Cabrera, *Kim & Kim*. ISBN: 978-1628751604.

For those unfamiliar with comics, please note that *Kim & Kim* can be purchased electronically at sites like <http://comixology.com> or ordered through a local comics store. All other readings for this course—which are denoted with an asterisk (*) in the course calendar—can be found as PDFs on Moodle.

COURSE GRADING

- Class Participation (20%)
- Close Textual Analysis Essays (45%)
- Short Film Analyses (15%)
- Final Essay Exam (20%)

Please submit all assignments to the appropriate platform by 11:59 PM on the due date *unless otherwise directed*. For each day an assignment is late, I may lower your grade by one grade increment.

Please note that you must complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade for this course.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

CLASS PARTICIPATION

My philosophy on participation is adapted from an old David Foster Wallace syllabus: “Our class can’t function without student participation—it will become just me giving a half-assed ad-lib lecture for 90 minutes, which will be horrible. There is, therefore, a percentage of your grade that concerns the quantity and quality of your participation in class. The truth is, I’m more concerned about creating an environment in which all students feel free to say what they think, ask questions, object, criticize, request clarification, return to a previous subject, respond to someone else’s response, etc.”

CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS ESSAYS

These essays should be 750–1000 words. In each essay, you should focus on an individual text from the course and demonstrate your ability to present and motivate an argument about that text. I am primarily interested in your ability to analyze the text closely and use appropriate evidence in support of a coherent and sophisticated argument. Secondary sources are *not* required for these essays.

SHORT FILM ANALYSES

You will be asked to watch three short films at different points throughout the semester that were produced by women for the FUTURESTATES series: *Beholder* (Nisha Ganatra), *Crossover* (Tina Mabry), and *The 6th World* (Nanobah Becker). A short reading will be assigned alongside each film, and you will need to produce a critical essay of 500–750 words that analyzes each film through the lens of the accompanying reading. Links to the films and the assigned readings have been uploaded to Moodle.

FINAL ESSAY EXAM

Your final exam will consist of identification questions, close textual analysis questions, and several short essays. This will be an open-book and open-notes exam; you are free to use the assigned texts and your personal notes to complete the exam—which ultimately must be submitted to Moodle.

EXTRA CREDIT FILMS

There will be three extra credit film screenings held throughout the semester, with a thematic focus on cinematic depictions of women as androids or cyborg figures. Extra credit will be assigned as follows: for completing one screening, you will receive four points of extra credit on Close Textual Analysis Essay #1; for an additional screening, you will receive four points on Close Textual Analysis Essay #2; and, for a third screening, you will receive four points on Close Textual Analysis Essay #3. While I will be screening these films on campus, you may also watch them on your own time if you are unable to attend. To receive extra credit under those circumstances, you must write up a 500-word response to the film and submit that response to Moodle within one week of the screening.

COURSE POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are bound by the university policy on academic integrity. All references to ideas and texts other than your own must be indicated through appropriate citations and footnotes. *You are responsible for being aware of and following the rules regarding the university academic integrity policy.* I reserve the right to give you a failing grade in this course for acts of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty. Please be sure to review the Student Handbook or consult with me if you have questions.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance is essential to your learning experience and a necessary part of creating an engaged learning community in the classroom. *You will be allowed up to four unexcused absences for the semester with no questions asked.* Additional absences may lower your final grade by one grade increment per absence. I expect you to be in class on time and to finish required readings before class begins. Consistently showing up tardy to class is disruptive and may affect your final grade. In addition, consistently packing up your materials early or leaving before our class period has ended may affect your final grade. In the case of extenuating circumstances, please contact me as soon as possible.

POLICY ON CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM

As Hollins University does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom, I have decided to adopt my own. First, all exclusively breastfeeding babies are welcome in class as often as necessary. For older children and babies, I understand that unforeseen disruptions in childcare can place parents in the difficult position of having to miss class to stay home. Please know that you are welcome to bring your child to class to cover periodic gaps in childcare. I ask that *all* students work with me to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of our diversity in terms of parenting status. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you are having difficulty with the school-parenting balance.

TECHNOLOGY STATEMENT

The use of phones, tablets, notebook computers, and other electronic devices to access to course content *is strongly encouraged.* That being said, you should use your electronic devices in class *only* as readers for texts available in digital formats or for note-taking (unless otherwise instructed). We know that Intellectual work requires sustained focus; this cannot occur while you are also checking your messages, emails, or other websites. If I discover you using an electronic device for any reason other than class purposes, I reserve the right to mark you absent or tardy for that class period.

EMAIL AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Please address all emails to me using your Hollins email address. To reach me quickly, it is generally better to send emails outside of Moodle, if possible—I can be slow to respond in Moodle. When I need to communicate with you or send out class announcements, those messages will be addressed primarily to your Hollins email address. I generally try to respond to email inquiries within 24–48 hours.

CLASS CONTENT AND DISCOMFORT STATEMENT

In this course, we will address ideas, topics, and theories that may challenge your taken-for-granted and “sacred” beliefs about race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, religion, ability, etc. In discussing how power and injustice operate and how they are experienced as oppression, subjugation, and violence by various persons, it is possible that you may feel some discomfort, guilt, anger, anxiety, or sadness. These feelings are normal responses to exploring such issues and they can be critical to the learning process. These feelings also have the potential to support a deeper understanding of structural inequalities, individual suffering, empathy, and human interconnectedness. *I will do my best this semester to create an online community in which these feelings can be discussed openly and honestly among us.* I encourage you to share your ideas for making our class an inclusive online space in which all students can thrive. You are always welcome to contact me individually to discuss concerns.

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT SUPPORT

As an educator, I fully support the rights of undocumented students to an education and to live free from the fear of deportation. I also recognize that immigration is a complex phenomenon with broad impact—particularly for those who are directly affected by it, as well as those who are indirectly affected by their relationships with family members, friends, and loved ones. I want *all* students, regardless of immigration status or country of origin, to feel a sense of belonging and safety as they pursue their goals. With that in mind, *I commit to not sharing your status with anyone if you reveal it to me.* I would also remind you that, by federal law, faculty and school officials at Hollins *cannot* disclose personal information about students without permission—that includes your immigration status.

TITLE IX STATEMENT

Hollins is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive work and learning environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. Hollins is dedicated to creating an environment where campus community members feel valued, respected, and included. As such, Hollins prohibits discrimination—on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex (including sexual harassment and sexual violence), sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status—in the University's programs and activities as required by applicable laws and regulations such as Title IX. The individual designated with responsibility for coordination of compliance efforts and receipt of inquiries concerning nondiscrimination policies is the University's Title IX Coordinator.

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT

Those of you with disabilities who experience barriers in this course may contact the Office of the Dean of Academic Services for assistance in determining and implementing accommodations. Please feel free to contact me if you need additional assistance making the course more accessible to you.

MENTAL HEALTH STATEMENT

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that interfere with learning, such as strained or violent relationships, death and loss, anxiety, substance use, depression, difficulty concentrating, and lack of motivation. These concerns may diminish your performance in class and reduce your ability to participate in school activities. *There are professional services available to you.* You can learn about these mental health services at: <http://counselingservices.press.hollins.edu>.

USE OF THE SYLLABUS

A syllabus is a tentative document and may be revised at my discretion. You should check it regularly and update your calendars when deadlines or assignments change. Questions about class can often be answered by consulting the syllabus. A best practice for being successful is to read the syllabus in its entirety. *Once you have read this syllabus, please email me an image of your favorite android, cyborg, or robot.*

COURSE CALENDAR

WEEK ONE — GENDER AND GENRE: RECLAIMING SCIENCE FICTION

WEDNESDAY, 2/1

- **READ** — Kathleen Ann Goonan, “Women Take Back Science Fiction” (2016)*
- **WRITING FOCUS** — Introduction to Your Critical Toolkit

WEEK TWO — ‘A LAND SO STRANGE’: SCIENCE FICTION AS CONTACT NARRATIVE

MONDAY, 2/6

- **READ** — Margaret Cavendish, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1666)

WEDNESDAY, 2/8

- **READ** — Margaret Cavendish, *The Second Part of the New Blazing World* (1666)
- **READ** — Anonymous, “The Microscope” (1732)*
- **WRITING FOCUS** — Analysis vs. Summary

WEEK THREE — THE ‘MAD SCIENTIST’ AS SPECTACLE OF MASCULINITY

MONDAY, 2/13

- **READ** — Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818)

WEDNESDAY, 2/15

- **READ** — Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818)
- **WRITING FOCUS** — Key Analytical Moves

WEEK FOUR — ‘THEY WERE INCONVENIENTLY REASONABLE, THESE WOMEN’

MONDAY, 2/20

- **READ** — Annie Denton Cridge, “Man’s Rights; or, How Would You Like It?” (1870)*
- **READ** — Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, “Sultana’s Dream” (1905)*

TUESDAY, 2/21

- **EXTRA CREDIT SCREENING** — Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (1927)

WEDNESDAY, 2/22

- **READ** — Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (1915)
- **WRITING FOCUS** — Introduction to Close Reading

WEEK FIVE — THE ‘MAD SCIENTIST’ REVISITED

MONDAY, 2/27

- **READ** — Clare Winger Harris, “The Evolutionary Monstrosity” (1929)*
- **READ** — C.L. Moore, “No Woman Born” (1944)*

WEDNESDAY, 3/1

- **NO CLASS** — *Please enjoy this opportunity to work on your first essay!*

CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS ESSAY #1 DUE

WEEK SIX — ALIENS AND ANDROGYNES

MONDAY, 3/6

- **READ** — Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)

WEDNESDAY, 3/8

- **READ** — Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)
- **WRITING FOCUS** — Evidence and Claims

SHORT FILM ANALYSIS #1 DUE

WEEK SEVEN — FEMINISM AND FATALISM

MONDAY, 3/13

- **READ** — Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)

TUESDAY, 3/14

- **EXTRA CREDIT SCREENING** — Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (1982)

WEDNESDAY, 3/15

- **READ** — James Tiptree, Jr., “The Women Men Don’t See” (1973)*
- **READ** — James Tiptree, Jr., “The Screwfly Solution” (1977)*
- **WRITING FOCUS** — Interpretive Moves and Interpretive Contexts

WEEK EIGHT — SPRING RECESS

MONDAY, 3/20

- **NO CLASS** — *Please enjoy the university holiday!*

WEDNESDAY, 3/22

- **NO CLASS** — *Please enjoy the university holiday!*

WEEK NINE — CYCLICAL TIME AND INDIGENOUS FUTURES

MONDAY, 3/27

- **READ** — Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)

WEDNESDAY, 3/29

- **READ** — Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)
- **WRITING FOCUS** — The Evolving Thesis

CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS ESSAY #2 DUE

WEEK TEN — MOTHER SHIPS: THE SCIENCE FICTIONS OF REPRODUCTION

MONDAY, 4/3

- **READ** — Daína Chaviano, “The Annunciation” (1983)*
- **READ** — Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild” (1984)*

TUESDAY, 4/4

- **EXTRA CREDIT SCREENING** — Alex Garland, *Ex Machina* (2015)

WEDNESDAY, 4/5

- **READ** — Vandana Singh, “The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet” (2003)*
- **WRITING FOCUS** — Revising the Thesis

SHORT FILM ANALYSIS #2 DUE

WEEK ELEVEN — DISPLACEMENT, DIASPORA, AND DECOLONIZATION

MONDAY, 4/10

- **READ** — Celu Amberstone, “Refugees” (2004)*
- **READ** — Nalo Hopkinson, “Message in a Bottle” (2004)*

WEDNESDAY, 4/12

- **READ** — Kameron Hurley, *God’s War* (2011)
- **WRITING FOCUS** — Forms and Frameworks

WEEK TWELVE — BUGPUNK: GRRRLZ, GEOPOLITICS, AND GENE PIRACY

MONDAY, 4/17

- **READ** — Kameron Hurley, *God’s War* (2011)

WEDNESDAY, 4/19

- **READ** — Kameron Hurley, *God’s War* (2011)
- **WRITING FOCUS** — On Paragraphs

WEEK THIRTEEN — BIGOTRY, BIOMETRICS, AND BORDERLANDS

MONDAY, 4/24

- **READ** — Sabrina Vourvoulias, *Ink* (2012)

WEDNESDAY, 4/26

- **READ** — Sabrina Vourvoulias, *Ink* (2012)
- **WRITING FOCUS** — On Words and Sentences

CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS ESSAY #3 DUE

WEEK FOURTEEN — ‘WE PREFER TO EXPLORE THE UNIVERSE BY TRAVELING INWARD’

MONDAY, 5/1

- **READ** — Aliette de Bodard, “Immersion” (2012)*
- **READ** — Rochita Loenen-Ruiz, “Dancing in the Shadow of the Once” (2013)*

WEDNESDAY, 5/3

- **READ** — Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti* (2015)
- **WRITING FOCUS** — On Style

SHORT FILM ANALYSIS #3 DUE

WEEK FIFTEEN — QUEERPUNK COMICS: ON SCIENCE FICTION AND SEXUALITY

MONDAY, 5/8

- **READ** — Magdalene Visaggio, Eva Cabrera, *Kim & Kim* (2016)

WEEK SIXTEEN — FINAL EXAM WEEK

THURSDAY, 5/11

- **FINAL EXAM PERIOD** — 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM (ONLINE)