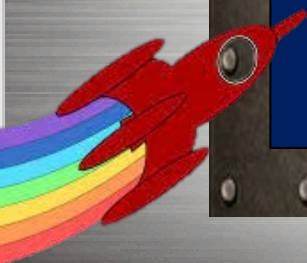


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QUEER SCIENCE FICTION



Department of
Gender, Sexuality,
and Women's
Studies

2022

COURSE OUTLINE

Western University, London, Ontario is situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape, Attawandaron and Huron-Wendat peoples, at the forks of Deshkan Ziibi (Antler River), an area subject to the Dish with One Spoon Wampum and other treaties.

COURSE DESCRIPTION



This course will look at queer depictions of sexuality in science fiction (SF), a genre that has been arguably somewhat queer from its inception in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Although we will touch on historical concerns, the primary focus of the course will be on work published after Ursula K Le Guin's monumentally influential novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1967). The course will cover topics such as critiques of heteronormativity in science fiction, futures that imagine alternative epistemologies of sexuality, futures without binary sex/gender systems, the question of what roles sexuality plays in robotics and Artificial Intelligence, sexuality and post-humanism, sexuality in cyberpunk and its offshoots, dystopia and sexuality, and responses to the AIDS crisis. The focus in this course will be on SF novels, although we may also look at film and television. However, literary SF has, by and large, been much more inventive and thoughtful about sex and gender than a lot of televisual and cinematic SF. By reading and studying novels, we will have the space to consider sexuality and gender in depth, with due attention of issues of intersectionality. Whether set in the future, near or distant, or in some alternative history, SF uses its particular tropes as ways to comment on and critique contemporary reality. Students will also become familiar with some of the critical work on these literary texts, including the relevance of many aspects of queer theory, from the very invention of sexuality and its discursive regulation to contemporary work on Trans theory, queer temporality, queer utopianism, and so on.

Since some of the novels are fairly long, it would be advisable to start reading ahead of the course. However, they are fiction, so don't require the same reading effort as theoretical texts. But if you're not familiar with SF, remember that it calls for some quite specific reading techniques, which we will discuss in class. As Samuel Delany once wrote, SF tends to literalize language that might otherwise be used metaphorically (he gives the example of "her world exploded," a short sentence whose meaning is controlled almost entirely by its generic context – from SF (in which it may have a literal meaning), to tragedy, to porn. We'll talk about this in the first few classes. Most of all, though, we should have fun reading and talking about these works.

Required Texts

All of these books are available from Western bookstore, but you can also find many second-hand copies and you can find most of them as ebooks, if that's your preference. We will be reading them in chronological order, so as to look at how earlier works cleared the way for later ones and also about how more recent works are in dialogue with their predecessors. Please be warned that some of them tell tales that can be quite painful, particularly *Kindred* and *The Salt Roads*, both of which tackle the awfulness of slavery (as, in its own way, does *Autonomous*). Note that the reading list for graduate and undergraduate students is different.

Undergraduate Required Readings

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)
Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (1976)
Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979)
Geoff Ryman, *The Child Garden* (1989)
Eleanor Arnason, *Ring of Swords* (1993)
Candas Jane Dorsey, *A Paradigm of Earth* (2001)
Ann Leckie, *Provenance* (2017)
Annalee Newitz, *Autonomous* (2017)

Graduate Required Readings

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)
Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (1976)
Samuel R. Delany, *Triton* (1976)
Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979)
Geoff Ryman, *The Child Garden* (1989)
Eleanor Arnason, *Ring of Swords* (1993)
Candas Jane Dorsey, *A Paradigm of Earth* (2001)
Nalo Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads* (2003)
Ann Leckie, *Provenance* (2017)
Annalee Newitz, *Autonomous* (2017)
Larissa Lai, *The Tiger Flu* (2018)



We will be reading for a broad sense of what queer science fiction can be and what it can do, so please make an effort to read all of the novels in full. The instructor will assist you with this, in part by providing questions to think about as you read. However, I don't want to limit the perspectives you bring to this work, so this will be about *how* to read SF, but not about the particular reading that eventuates. There are multiple possible meanings we can take from any novel; SF is no different.

I know that some of you will be thinking that this is a lot of reading, so we will also talk about how to deal with volume of reading as well. But remember that reading fiction is a lot different from reading theory.

Assessment

1. Participation/Contribution (20%)

This is an upper year/graduate seminar, so the emphasis is on discussion rather than on lectures. While I may give brief lectures, especially in the early weeks, this will not be in any way the focus of the course. You need to read the material and come with questions, insights, perplexities ... indeed, all of these readings have a great deal to say about sexuality and gender, not to mention its intersections with other identity categories,

such as race and class. While theory tackles these issues directly, seeking to understand them with specific tools (queer theory, as a postmodernist approach, relies a lot on methods like deconstruction, something which we will also discuss as we're reading the texts), fiction writers not only analyze and critique how gender and sexuality function in contemporary society, they imagine how it could look different. In a sense, sf novelists often demonstrate Foucault's call to "think thought itself differently." The classroom should be a space in which students are free to experiment with ideas and even to make mistakes, change their minds, and re-think. Debate should be lively, but also courteous.

A note about classroom etiquette: it's fine to disagree (indeed, I hope we do, as it's those discussions from which we often learn the most), but disagreement should always be respectful. There will certainly be some moments of discomfort, as some of the material we are reading is disquieting. But a lot of it is also fun, thought-provoking, and open to imagination. What we are aiming for is a mutually supportive classroom community able to take on challenging questions, emphasis on *community*. As part of the community building exercise, we will be pairing graduate and undergraduate students in a kind of mentorship – more on this in the first class.

2. Module assignments (10% each)

The course is divided into three modules based on when the works were written. Each module will end with a short written assignment. There will be different deadlines for graduate and undergraduate students, both in terms of questions and of length. Answers should be 3-5 pages. See the OWL site for more details.

3. Presentation (15%)

Yes, I know, everyone hates these. But presenting is a useful skill to master, as it's something many jobs call for. It's also a useful way of jump-starting discussion. We will create a presentation schedule in the first class and I will give out a detailed set of instructions at that time.

4. Research essay (35%)

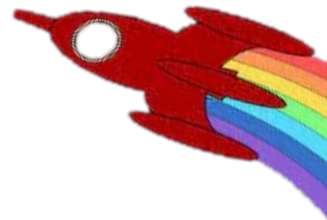
For undergraduates, this will be an 8-10 page paper on a topic of your choice. For graduate students, the assignment is the same, but your page length is 12-20 pages. Yes, I'm providing a fair amount of leeway there because experience has taught me that I'll get multiple requests to exceed the page limit. In practice, I'm fairly flexible about length because I care more about the quality of your argument – that you have a clearly stated thesis, that you muster good evidence for your argument from the books, that you have a clear theoretical framework, etc. I will ask everybody to run their topics by me first, mainly to make sure you're not taking on something that would need a Master's thesis to do properly. Again, there will be detailed instructions on OWL.

The Boring (But Important) Stuff

Learning Outcomes:

In this course, you will learn

1. To identify, read, and understand queer science fiction
2. To identify the specific issues around genders and sexualities dealt with both by the genre as a whole and by specific works and authors
3. To use theoretical tools to analyze works of fiction in relation to their depiction of queer sexuality, in particular



4. To understand the relationship between queer sf novels and their history, particularly the sorts of conversations they generate among authors, so that one novel responds to another, albeit not always in obvious ways
5. To understand the intersectional issues that arise when discussing the depiction of sexualities in science fiction
6. To articulate the ways in which a specific novel or writer speaks about sexualities and genders and to improve your own ability to communicate about the topic, both orally and in writing
7. To read critical writing about queer sf and to enter into the larger conversation the academic world is having about the field



Course Policies:

Attendance:

“This course does not have a final exam; persistent absenteeism may be rendered grounds for failure in the course, in accordance with the policy of the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies.”

Email:

I normally answer emails fairly promptly, but please allow 48 hours for a response, especially if you are emailing on the weekend. Please use your UWO email address, as emails from sexykitten69@aol.com tend to end up in the spam trap (although I’ve changed the name of the service provider, I really did get emails from a student whose address was “sexykitten69”).

Etiquette:

When addressing professors you don’t know, it is always most courteous to address that person as “Professor [Last Name].” Once your instructors get to know you, they may invite you to address them by a first name – or they may not. No-one who has put years of effort into obtaining a doctorate wishes to be addressed as “Ms” or “Mr.” This is not high school. “Hey Prof” is also not an advisable mode of address if you wish to be taken seriously.

Lateness Policy:

Students will be permitted **one free extension**, of no more than **five** working days, on any written assignment; the extension request must be made at least **24 hours in advance** of the deadline **by email** to the instructor. Other than that, late assignments will be penalized unless there is a valid medical or other reason and documentation has been filed with the Office of the Dean of the student’s faculty.

This extension may only be used once per term.

University Policies:

Prerequisites:

“Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.”

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/courseoutlines.pdf

The prerequisites for this course are, for graduate students, enrolment in the graduate program. For undergraduate students, they are completion of either [Women's Studies 2273E](#) or [Women's Studies 2220E](#) or permission of the department.

Turnitin:

“All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licencing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).”

(<https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/TurnItIn.html>)

Academic Offences:

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate

policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

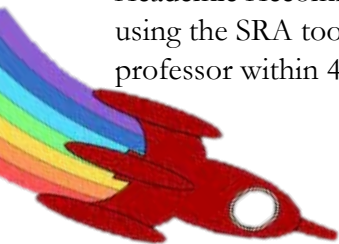
<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/courseoutlines.pdf>”

Note for students with disabilities: Please contact gswsugchair@uwo.ca if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you. You may also contact aew@uwo.ca to find out the full range of services available to you.

Missed assignments and academic accommodation:

Academic Accommodation must be requested within 28 days of the missed assignment unless the student is using the SRA tool, in which case those policies apply (and remember that they require you to contact the professor within 48 hours of making the request).



Where to Get Help

Life is complicated, especially these days as we negotiate the pandemic and the possibility of a 4th wave. It's important to recognize when we need help – and the university tries to provide many kinds of assistance for students at all levels.

If you are feeling lost or overwhelmed...

1. Make an appointment with me

You are welcome to email me, or to make an appointment to meet during office hours. Many questions and issues can be easily resolved this way.

2. Use online resources

Check the OWL site for links to some useful online resources.

3. Get to know the Reference Desk

Our library staff is eager to help guide your research and to orient you to paper and online resources.

4. Use the Writing Support Centre

The Writing Support Centre is a free resource that offers workshops, seminars, individual help, and an online writing lab. You can visit them at Western Student Services Building, Suite 4100, or call 519-661-3655.

5. Use Learning Skills Services

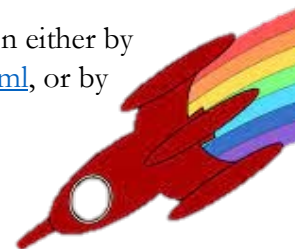
Learning Skills Services offers help with everything from note-taking to exam writing to time management. Help is available both in person and online. To schedule a **confidential individual appointment** with a learning skills professional call 519-661-2183 or go to the Student Development Centre in Room 4100, Western Student Services Building.

6. Accommodations

If you need accommodation to help you succeed in this course, please contact Accessible Education either by phone at (519) 661-2147, online at http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html, or by email at acw@uwo.ca.

7. Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.



Weekly Schedule (Summary)		
Module	Topic	Required Readings
Week 1	Introduction: What is Queer SF?	Pearson, “Alien Cryptographies”; Haggerty, “What is Queer about <i>Frankenstein</i> ?”
Module 1: The 1960s and 70s		
1 – Week 2	Le Guin: the question of androgyny	<i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i>
1 – Week 3	Le Guin’s legacy	“Coming of Age in Karhide”; “Does Gender Matter, Redux”
1 – Week 4	Russ: lesbian feminism	<i>The Female Man</i> and “When It Changed”
1 – Week 5*	Delany: the last patriarchal man	<i>Triton</i> (aka <i>Trouble on Triton</i>) and John Varley “Picnic on Nearside”
Module 2: The 1980s and 90s (with a step into the new millennium)		
2 – Week 6	Butler: the queering of history	<i>Kindred</i>
2 – Week 7*	Ryman: diseases and cures	<i>The Child Garden</i>
2 – Week 8	Arnason: queer for grey furry aliens	<i>Ring of Swords</i>
2 – Week 9	Dorsey: learning humanity	<i>A Paradigm of Earth</i>
Module 3: The 21 st century (so far)		
3 – Week 10*	Hopkinson: more queering history	<i>The Salt Roads</i>
3 – Week 11	Leckie: (how) is the future gendered?	<i>Provenance</i>
3 – Week 12	Newitz: queering humanity	<i>Autonomous</i>
3 – Week 13	Lai: queering the end times	<i>The Tiger Flu</i>
THE END		

*Undergraduate students are encouraged, but not required, to read the novel for this week and to attend the class discussion.