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Spring 2023 office hours: Mondays 4:00-5:00pm (via Zoom), Wednesdays & Fridays 10:00am – 11:00am & 12:30pm - 1:30pm (CU325).

English Dept. Office: 561-297-3830

**LIT2010.012: Interpretation of Fiction (3 credits)**  
**Spring 2023: World-Making through Climate Fiction**

**Land Acknowledgement:** As participants in this class we recognize that Florida Atlantic University resides on the ancestral territories of the Apalachee, the Muscogee Creek, the Miccosukee, and the Seminole nations. This acknowledgement is not a memorial, but a testament to the ongoing histories of Indigenous peoples to whom we offer our gratitude as we work and live on these lands.

**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. This spring we will examine works that fall within the category of climate fiction (or “cli-fi”), which is a subgenre of science fiction in which writers engage in radical forms of imaginative “world-making” in the context of imminent climate disaster. However, rather than engage (exclusively) with the conventionally dystopian landscapes of popular cli-fi, we shall read science fiction texts that ask us to consider futures in which environmental collapse presages not merely ruin but new ways of being in the world. These are futures in which renewable forms of energy and collaborative models of community-building prevail; these are the “critical utopias” of science fiction writers like Octavia Butler and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein. Butler and Hossein, along with writers like Rachel Carson and adrienne marie brown, will serve as our guides as we explore the concept of “world-making” in an era that has come to be known as 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.*

*University-wide WAC Assessment project: If this class is selected to participate in the university-wide WAC assessment program, you will be required to access the online assessment server, complete the consent form and survey, and submit electronically a first and final draft of a near-end-of-term paper.*

**Required Texts:**

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

Hossain, Rokeya. *Sultana's Dream*, ISBN-13: 9780935312836

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

## **Class requirements and Policies:**

### **Grading criteria:**

#### **Critical Essays: 60%**

\*Two thesis-driven critical essays (approximately 2000 words each) which offer concise syntheses of assigned texts with critical attention to formal literary elements.

***\*Students will receive substantive written feedback (from Dr. Balkan) within 1-2 weeks of essay submission; students will then have one week to revise according to written feedback.***

#### **Weekly forum discussions: 40%**

\*Each week students will participate in our online “discussion board”: this shall be a forum for exploratory (and more informal) writing in preparation for the two “critical essays.” We might view the discussion board as a pre-rough draft (200+ words). Students will then be required to respond (substantively) to a peer’s discussion post—further directions will be posted on our Canvas site.

***\*Students will receive substantive written feedback from Dr. Balkan in the form of a collective post/response each week, which shall be addressed to the class community; students will also receive weekly feedback from peers in the form of a required peer response.***

### **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](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: (1/11, 1/13)**

**Introductions & Beginnings**

Margaret Atwood, "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet"\*

A.R. Ammons, from "Expressions of Sea Level"\*

**\*Discussion (DUE Friday 1/13):** 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?

**Week 2 (1/18, 1/20): World-Making Through Science Fiction**

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

Rachel Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow," from *Silent Spring*\*

**\*Discussion (DUE Friday 1/20):** 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 3 (1/25, 1/27): Environmental Racism, Climate Change, and the Fruits of AfroFuturism**

Ross Gay, "A Small Needful Fact"\*

J. Drew Lanham, "Birding While Black"\*

Wanjiku Gatheru, "It's Time for Environmental Studies to Own Up to Erasing Black People"\*

**\*Discussion (DUE Friday 1/27):** Please respond to Gatheru's argument (and Lanham's field observations) regarding Environmental Studies in light of Ross Gay's poem about Eric Garner. How, for example, does the poem illuminate Garner's life in ways not commonly associated with his story?

**Week 4 (2/1, 2/3): Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower***

Stephanie LeMenager, "To Get Ready for Climate Change, Read Octavia Butler"\*

\**Parable of the Sower*, chapters 1-9.

**\*Discussion (DUE Friday 2/3):** 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, as a “critical utopia,” engage in world-making through science fiction (as Streeby defines it)? Finally, what do you make of LeMenager offering a NOVEL as a viable means of surviving climate apocalypse?

**Week 5 (2/8, 2/10): *Parable of the Sower***

\**Parable of the Sower*, chapters 10-18.

**\*Discussion (DUE Friday 2/10):** The novel uses an epistolary form to convey Lauren's interiority—that is, it is told as a series of diary entries. Additionally, 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”? Or perhaps a vision of habitability that is at odds with the imperialist perspective that finds many Earthlings (from Elon Musk to Jeff Bezos) looking to “space” as a new frontier for settlement and planetary exploitation? If the latter, what do we make of the hubristic longings of Lauren's community to eventually abandon their Earthly home?

**Week 6 (2/15, 2/17): *Parable of the Sower***

\**Parable of the Sower*, finish

**\*Discussion (DUE Wednesday 2/15):** This week's discussion board will be reserved for queries regarding our first formal essay.

**\*Essay #1 (DUE Friday 2/17):** Formal essay of approximately 1500 words (or four pages) in which you develop your argument regarding Streeby and Carson (from the discussion board) 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.

**Week 7 (2/22, 2/24): Petrocultures**

Bruce Springsteen, “Born to Run”\*

China Miéville, “Covehīthe”\*

Dale Jamieson & Bonnie Nadzam, “Carbon”\*

**\*Discussion (DUE Friday 2/24):** The term “petroculture” describes the ways in which contemporary life is (in many ways) founded on oil: it lubricates the “fuel-injected” fantasies embedded in Bruce Springsteen's tribute to “freedom” (in the hit song “Born to Run”); it moves

giant container ships carrying the “cheap” goods enjoyed by many American families; its byproducts constitute the vast majority of the products that we use—the laptop upon which I am now writing for example, contains quite a bit of it; and the American love affair with speed, convenience, and “affordability”—all of which are further enhanced by oil—is thus the driving force behind many a successful political campaign. Adding to this, and unlike coal, the means of its extraction are often invisible to consumers; moving silently through off-sited pipelines, and routed through communities that are understood as “disposable” (not unlike Rex’s community in “Carbon”), oil is as beloved as apple pie.

Consequently, its perceived end—whether because of its finitude as a resource, or because of the imperative to transition to cleaner fuels in the face of cataclysmic increases to atmospheric carbon—logically produces nightmarish images such as we see in films like *Mad Max: Fury Road*, or in stories like China Miéville’s “Coveh̄the.” Both, and quite notably, conjure what “petro-critic” Stephanie LeMenager describes as “petromelancholia”—the affective state produced by the loss of petroleum. Please discuss one of this week’s readings as a representation of “petroculture”—whether Springsteen’s anthem; Miéville’s magical realist horror story of oil’s grand revenge; or Jamieson and Nadzam’s dystopian glimpse into the social injustices that will accompany certain forms of “energy transition.”

### **Week 8 (3/1, 3/3) After Oil?**

Jeffrey Insko, “How to Dream Beyond Oil”\*

After Oil Collective, from *After Oil*\*

After Oil Collective, from *Solarities: Seeking Energy Justice*\*

**\*Discussion (Due 3/3):** Popular representations of post-oil futures are generally cloaked in doom—whether in the literal ruins of fallen cities, or the fear that transitioning to renewable energy sources will force consumers to relinquish the many benefits of “cheap” fuels like oil. Consequently, while some have argued for radical shifts to the American lifestyle, others have championed something like “green capitalism” in order to secure as little disruption to American consumption as possible. Still others, however, argue for something rather different: a future “after oil” framed by a radically reconfigured vision of the common good. Per Energy Humanities scholar Jeffrey Insko, we ought to be considering “new social narratives that might help us generate something like infrastructural justice” rather than continue to live in the sort of world dramatized in the story “Carbon.” Please respond to the arguments presented by Insko and the After Oil collective regarding the possibility of crafting new worlds no longer framed by injustice; so too, the imperative to seek out narratives (stories!) that represent the possibility of “form[ing] collectives across boundaries of difference—racial, national, human and nonhuman,” rather than stories that imagine a bunch of starving humans fighting it out when the waters rise and the cities fall.

### **Week 9 (3/8, 3/10): Spring Recess**

### **Weeks 10 & 11 (3/15, 3/17 & 3/22, 3/24): Solar Fascism**

Ganzeer, *The Solar Grid*\*

**\*Discussion #1, *The Solar Grid* Parts 1-3 (DUE Friday 3/17):** The After Oil collective (in *Solarities* especially) present an argument that may strike us as odd in this moment of climate emergency: renewable energy, the authors argue, may not necessarily solve our problems. Indeed, they suggest (and quite powerfully) that it may be a particular form of economy—and the political

institutions that have long accompanied such an economy—that ought to be scrutinized as we begin to imagine a life “after oil.” In the previous discussion, we addressed the imperative to imagine new worlds that depart from something like Ganzeer’s terrifying dystopia—one produced in the wake of the *unjust* transition to corporate solar power. Please read the first three installments of this as-yet unfinished novel and explain how it responds to/illustrates the argument(s) presented by the Collective.

**\*Discussion #2, *The Solar Grid* Parts 4-5 (DUE Friday 3/24):** As we anticipate writing our second essay on the utility of climate fiction, please describe how Ganzeer’s dystopian hellscape differs from Octavia Butler’s critical utopia. Surely, they are both riddled with similarly dystopian imagery; and we must remember that “Olivar” is powered by renewables. But how do they differ? Specifically? And why is this important?

**Weeks 12 & 13 (3/29, 3/31 & 4/5, 4/7): Solarpunk**

Christoph Rupprecht, Deborah Cleland, Norie Tamura, Rajat Chaudhuri & Sarena Ulibarri,

“Introduction,” *Multispecies Cities: Solarpunk Urban Futures*\*

Rokeya Hossain, “Sultana’s Dream”

Kate V. Bui, “Deer, Tiger, Witch”\*

Stacey Balkan, “Can Solarpunk Save the World”\*

Phoebe Wagner, “Children of Asphalt”\*

**\*Discussion #1 (DUE Friday 3/31):** In the introduction to *Multispecies Cities*, the authors propose a critical utopian vision of the future whereby renewable energy is no longer employed in the interest of supporting unjust political systems that necessarily dispossess the global poor. Instead, they have cultivated a collection of stories that seek to “re-imagin[e] cities as gentle, as contributing to the ecosystem and landscape, as more-than-human habitats home to diverse forms of life [where] we can learn to negotiate, coexist, and flourish together” (5). Against the more violent techno-utopian vision of Ganzeer’s fictional “Algebrī”—his worldmaking project but a profit-driven nightmare that ends in catastrophe—the stories in *Multispecies Cities* seem to favor a techno-utopian imaginary, but one more in line with the equitable future imagined by the editors: such is certainly the case in Kate V. Bui’s “Deer, Tiger, Witch”; so too, in the solar-powered “feminist utopia” presented by Rokeya Hossain in 1905. Please consider the ways in which Bui and Hossein imagine more progressive techno-utopian worlds—equitable imaginaries that defy the settler- (masculinist-) violence of something like the “solar grid.” How, specifically, do the authors figure such radical worlds? How are their worlds different from Algebrī’s? Who and what powers them? And from a formal perspective, what is the utility of such radical imaginings at this historical moment?

**\*Discussion #2 (DUE Friday 4/7):** In my essay, “Can Solarpunk Save the World,” I follow Stephanie LeMenager in considering speculative fiction as a viable guide for imagining brighter futures. Ultimately, and in support of this argument, I turn to Phoebe Wagner’s story “Children of Asphalt.” I read Wagner’s tale as a fable, and one somewhat similar to Rachel Carson’s “A Fable for Tomorrow” (with which we began this class). What did you make of Wagner’s story? Would you agree that there is virtue in entertaining radical new ideas as we face the folly of climate policies that continue to fail?

**\*Essay #2 (DUE Monday 4/10):** For the second essay (also approximately 2000 words), you are to build upon your discussion post regarding the techno-utopian landscapes imagined by Bui and

Hossain; and you are likewise to consider how both stories present a form of “solarity” in line with what the After Oil collective suggests as the singular means of establishing a just (and hopeful) future after oil—one contingent not merely on the power of the sun, but also on the power of the collective (e.g., “Ladyland”).

For your formal essay you shall also consider not only the ways in which Bui and Hossain imagine techno-utopian worlds that are clearly at odds with the world of Ganzeer’s monomaniacal “Algebri”—an obvious parody of Elon Musk; you shall likewise consider the relationship(s) between energy forms, social structures, and political power.

#### **Week 14 (4/12, 4/14): Apocalypse & Affect**

adrienne marie brown, “The River”\*

Dale Jameison and Rachel Nadzam, “Flyfishing”\*

**\*Discussion #1 (DUE Friday 4/14):** In our short time together, we have endeavored to achieve something rather great: an intersectional understanding of climate and political inequality—no small feat it seems given the woeful dearth of attention to the issue of environmental injustice in popular political discourse. In our final week together, I thus assigned two stories that reflect upon the losses associated with environmental decay and climate change in two distinctly different ways: “The River” reflects upon the violent histories of erasure that the narrator’s family suffered while offering a sort of revenge fantasy; in contrast, “Fly Fishing” meditates on a more conventional loss—that is, conventional to literary representations of the late Anthropocene. “Fly Fishing” centers a nostalgia for familial loss that is detached from any broader political concerns. For your final discussion post, please comment on the difference in tone that the two stories employ.

**\*Optional final paper revision (DUE Thursday 4/27):** The final paper revision is to be a formal and substantive revision of the first critical essay in which you add “Sultana’s Dream” to your argument regarding “world-making” in the context of Carson and Butler. It is expected that you will revise according to both instructor and peer feedback.