

LT 167 Writing African Futures

Meeting times: Fridays 13:00-14:00pm Berlin/15:00-16:00 Kenya
plus a 60-minute weekly tutorial and additional weekly asynchronous hours

Seminar Leader: Kerry Bystrom
Email: k.bystrom@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

In this course, students will explore the long African tradition of speculative fiction and science fiction storytelling and critically examine recent (post-Cold War) examples of this genre as political and artistic interventions. Why do people tell stories about the future? Is it a mode of escapism, a way of engaging with complicated histories or making current kinds of oppression visible in new ways, a format for imagining new social configurations and fulfilling dreams, or something else altogether? How does such storytelling rooted in the African continent and particular African histories differ from similar projects elsewhere? What effects can such storytelling have? Students will engage with theoretical and historical writings that address such questions as well as films, poems, novels and short stories from South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and beyond by authors including Nnedi Okarafor, Dilman Dila and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Students in the course will also have the opportunity to hear from professional writers and editors and craft their own poems or stories of the future. Students who successfully pass the course will receive 3 US/6 ECTS credits.

Note: This class is being offered as part of the OSUN Hubs for Connected Learning Initiatives and will bring a small number of BCB students into dialogue with students pursuing a remote BA through the Borderless Higher Education Program based at the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. It is conducted entirely online.

Learning Outcomes

Over the course the semester, you will:

- Gain insight into the literary history of and the landscape of contemporary literary writing in sub-Saharan Africa;
- Develop or deepen your capacity to locate and critically analyze voice, narrative and authorship, placing stories in historical and contemporary structures of power;
- Improve your abilities in close reading and academic writing in English, particularly through workshop settings where students work together to enrich whole group capacity;
- Experiment with producing and sharing personal and group narratives beyond the classroom, in this case through creative writing for digital media platforms
- Practice critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills
- Critically reflect on the practices of the classroom for use in future education/teaching careers

Library and Book Purchase Policies

The following books and films are required for this class. Students should obtain their own copies or use the reserve copies in the library:

- *AfricanFuturism: An Anthology*, ed. Wole Talabi, Brittle Paper, 2020. Ebook. Free PDF download here:
<https://brittlepaper.com/2020/10/free-download-of-africanfuturism-an-anthology-stories-by-nnedi-okorafor-tl-huchu-dilman-dila-rafeeat-aliyu-tlotlo-tsamaase-mame-bougouma-diene-mazi-nwonwu-and-derek-lubangakene/>
- Nnedi Okarafor, *Binti*. Tom Doherty Associates, 2015. Ebook.
- *District 9* (NZ/US/ZA: dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2009). DVD.

Additional required readings and films will be linked or available as PDFs in the class Google Drive [GD]

Platforms and technology

This is an entirely remote class. Google Classroom will be the main Learning Management System (LMS) for the class. Other tools include Zoom and Padlet.

Requirements

- Come to every class meeting and tutorial sessions, having read the assigned material thoroughly and preferably more than once, and participate actively in our discussions
- Thoughtfully complete all informal assignments, including posting responses to readings and lectures on the course Padlet site and participating in tutorial workshops
- Write two short (3-5pp) critical essays focused on important themes in the course
- Create a piece of short fiction or poetry

Attendance and Participation

This class has both synchronous and asynchronous elements. Attendance at all synchronous class sessions and tutorials is a crucial and required part of the course. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. After this, in order for an absence not to impact your participation grade, notice must be provided to Kerry and Aeden as your instructors (preferably with medical documentation) and the make-up work that they assign must be completed. Please note that Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments

There will be three main written assignments for the course. The first (Essay #1) and second (Essay #2) assignments are critical analysis essays focused on a close reading of assigned class texts. They should be 3-5 pages long (double-spaced, 12 point font) and the first essay will be produced with the support

of a series of scaffolded exercises done in tutorial groups. The final assignment will be a creative piece of flash fiction or poetry modeled on the “Corona Diaries” project of *Warscapes* magazine. Further instruction sheets will be handed out for each assignment.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors’ office hours.

Grade Breakdown

Participation including informal assignments: 20% (10% first half of course, 10% second half of course)
 Paper #1: 30%
 Paper #2: 35%
 Flash Fiction/Poetry: 15%

Schedule

Please note that this schedule is provisional and it is the responsibility of the students to keep up to date with changes communicated by the course instructors

| Dates | Fridays | Saturday Tutorials |
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| Week 1 (Starts Fri Jan 15) | Introductory Session/Future of the Classroom I Read: Mazi Nwonwu, “Rainmaker” (<i>AfricanFuturism</i> , pp. 29-41) Padlet: Introduce yourself briefly (50 words) and then write about one part of the university or education that you think will look different in 100 years: what is it and what might it look like? (100 words) You can look at the following websites to spark ideas: http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/education_in_sf https://projekte.berlinergazette.de/unlearning-learning/project/ (Classrooms of the Future section) | Nnedi Okarafor, <i>Binti</i> (first half) |

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| Week 2 (starts Fri Jan 22) | <p>Future of the Classroom II</p> <p>Read: Nnedi Okarafor, <i>Binti</i> (second half)</p> | <p>Writing a thesis statement peer review exercise</p> |
| Week 3 (starts Fri Jan 29) | <p>Science Fiction, Afrofuturism and AfricanFuturism</p> <p>Guest: Kiprof Kimutai</p> <p>Read: Mohale Mashigo, “Afrofuturism: Ayashis’ Amateki” https://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2018/10/01/afrofuturism-is-not-for-africans-living-in-africa-an-essay-by-mohale-mashigo-excerpted-from-her-new-collection-of-short-stories-intruders/ Nnedi Okarafor, “AfricanFuturism Defined” (<i>AfricanFuturism</i>); Adam Roberts, “Defining Science Fiction” [GD]</p> <p>Watch: Wanuri Kahui “Afrofuturism in popular culture” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvxOLVaV2YY TJ Dema, “Dreams” http://tjdema.com/media-press/</p> | <p>Reading as a writer session with Kiprof Kimutai</p> <p>Read: Okwiri Oduor, “My Father’s Head” [GD]</p> |
| Week 4 (starts Fri Feb 5) | <p>Colonialism and Speculative Fiction</p> <p>Read: Ngugi wa Thiongo, “The Hermit in the Helmet” [GD] Lillian Akampurira Aujo, “Where Pumpkin Leaves Dwell”: https://jaladaafrica.org/2015/01/15/where-pumpkin-leaves-dwell-by-lillian-akampurira-aujo/ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, <i>Decolonizing the Mind</i> (excerpt) [GD]</p> | <p>Essay #1 draft due; peer review workshop</p> |
| Week 5 (starts Fri Feb 12) | <p>Cold War Modernity and Science Fiction</p> <p>Watch: Nuotama Bodomo, “Afronauts” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb3pu5jXWHU</p> <p>Read: T.L. Huchu, “Egoli” (<i>AfricanFuturism</i>) pp. 1-7</p> | <p>Essay #1 Final due</p> |
| Week 6 (starts Fri Feb 19) | <p>Visions of the Postcolony</p> <p>Read: Ngugi wa Thiongo, <i>Wizard of the Crow</i> (excerpt) [GD] Dilman Dila, “Yat Madit” (<i>AfricanFuturism</i>, pp. 21-28) Lesley Nneka Arimah, “What it means when a man falls from the sky” [GD] Franz Fanon, “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” (excerpt) [GD]</p> | <p><i>District 9</i> (dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2009) (first half)</p> |

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| Week 7 (starts Fri Feb 26) | <p>Alien Invasions</p> <p>Watch: <i>District 9</i> (second half)</p> <p>Read: Mohale Mashigo, "Ghost Strain N" [GD] Sarah Lotz, "Home Affairs" [GD]</p> | Thesis statement workshop |
| Week 8 (starts Fri Mar 5) | <p>Medical Technology, Corporations and Pandemics</p> <p>Read: Rafeeat Aliyu, "Fruit of the Calabash" (<i>AfricanFuturism</i>, pp. 65-74) Dilman Dila, "The Leafy Man" (<i>A Killing in the Sun</i>) [GD] Serubiri Moses, "Found: An Error in the System" https://jaladaafrica.org/2015/01/15/found-an-error-in-the-system-by-serubiri-moses/</p> | Essay #2 due |
| Week 9 (starts Fri Mar 12) | <p>In-class workshop Bhakti Shringarpure, editor-in-chief of <i>Warscapes</i> Magazine</p> <p>Read: http://www.warscapes.com/corona-notebooks/hassan-ghedi-santur-somalia-and-kenya http://www.warscapes.com/corona-notebooks/jehan-bseiso-palestine-and-jordan</p> | Writing Workshop |
| Week 10 (starts Fri Mar 19) | <p>In-class Fiction Writing workshop with Kiprop Kimutai: Description, Dialogue, Characterization, Setting</p> <p>Read: TBC</p> | Writing Workshop |
| Week 11 (starts Fri Mar 26) | <p>Confronting Apocalypse through Poetry Guest lecture: Simon van Schalkwyk</p> <p>Read: Simon van Schalkwyk, Work in progress [GD] TJ Dema, "Bread for the Birds" https://www.lyrikline.org/en/poems/bread-birds-10322 + additional poems TBC</p> | Writing Workshop |
| Week 12 (starts Fri Apr 2) | <p>Course wrap-up/Saving the Planet</p> <p>Watch: <i>Pumzi</i> (dir. Wanuri Kahui, 2011) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llR7L_B86Fc</p> <p>Flash fiction or poetry projects due</p> | |