

LT171 Speculative Fiction

Seminar Leader: Sladja Blažan
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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Speculative fiction has been defined as exploring things that really could happen but haven't (quite) yet (Margaret Atwood), or postulating an as-yet-unknown future (Jewell Gomez). This focus gives the speculative mode a special resonance at the moment. We live in a world of shifting foundations, facing threats posed by political instability and environmental disaster, not to mention our experience of a frequently predicted but still incredible event: a global pandemic. It is no surprise that the hypothetical explorations of contemporary literature are expressed in the language of, among other genres, science fiction, fantasy, or horror. This seminar examines how post-millennial Anglo-American film and literature use speculative fiction to address the question of the human impact on nature. We will identify the narrative strategies artists have deployed to register their protest against those visions of tomorrow that are generated by relentlessly profit-oriented industries. As Daniel Heath Justice puts it: "we can't possibly live otherwise until we first imagine otherwise." For example, we will explore the attention given to the possibility of nonhuman sentience inscribed in landscapes endowed with intelligence, consciousness, and agency, all marks of the potential for communication and cooperation, as well as for feeling, needing, and plotting. We will learn about Afrofuturism, Indigenous Speculative Fiction, Climate Fiction, and Cyberculture. Primarily, we will discuss why speculative fiction came to matter at this historical juncture: the crossroads of colonization, decolonization, globalization, capitalism, and change. This seminar will include an excursion to a reading or exhibition.

Requirements

Regular active participation, one in-class presentation, two written papers

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. 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.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability

Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. 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.

Beyond that, instructors are free to set their own policies about requiring documentation for further excused absences, and on how further unexcused absences affect the participation grade. Please specify your policy here. Professors need not offer the option of remote participation in classes.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

Syllabi should include all assignments required for the course, the dates on which they are due, and any stipulations concerning specific required preparatory work, submission of drafts, or consultation with writing tutors/use of the Learning Commons.

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 a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. 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.

Schedule

Sept. 2, 2025

Introduction online, please join on zoom:
<https://bard.zoom.us/j/7109935001>

Sept. 9

Theory

Sept. 16

Empire of Wild by Cherie Dimaline

Sept 23

Empire of Wild by Cherie Dimaline

Sept. 30

Oct. 7

The Deep by Rivers Solomon

Oct. 14

The Deep by Rivers Solomon

Oct. 21

Fall Break

Oct. 28

Theory

Nov. 4

The Memory Police by Yoko Ogawa

Nov. 11

The Memory Police by Yoko Ogawa

Nov. 18

Theory

Nov. 25

"Ghosts and Empties" by Lauren Groff

Dec. 2

"Dogs Go Wolf" by Lauren Groff

Dec. 9

Bring your own text, video or music

Dec. 16

Completion Week

Essay Deadlines

Midterm due Oct. 22, 2025

**Final paper due for graduating students Dec. 7, 2025
all other students Dec. 24, 2025**