

Syllabus

English 418: Chicano/a Futurism

Instructor: Professor Lysa Rivera, Lysa.Rivera@wwu.edu

This upper-division seminar explores how, beginning in the final decade of the twentieth century, Chicano and Chicana writers began to deploy the conventions of science fiction (specifically the subgenre “cyberpunk”) to wrestle with on the page, what was happening all around, namely: radically changing social, economic, environmental, technological and even aesthetic landscapes that are all symptomatic of one primary condition: the rise of multinational capitalism along the U.S./Mexico border region. Our questions for this class will be simply to mine the texts for connections, contradictions, and interesting conversations both within and between the texts. Perhaps the most guiding question is this: How does genre science fiction enable new ways of configuring, but also understanding the other-worldly social, political, and cultural landscape of this, the world's most heavily trafficked border. We will pay particular attention to narratives of migration and labor produced in direct response to three specific socio-economic developments: the establishment of the Bracero Program of the 1940s; the fight for labor rights during the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s (*el movimiento*); and the stunning rise of “desert capitalism” and the *maquiladora* industry after the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s.

In addition to exploring these specific contexts, this course also offers the broader intellectual goal of investigating the ways in which Chicano/a narrative, rather than constituting a single literary tradition, manifests, as Ramon Saldívar has argued, “a common idea of the *function* of literature” that is the direct result of shared historical, social, and economic experiences.

Broader Course Objectives:

While a major goal of this course is to introduce you to an underrepresented community of American writers, additional learning objectives have influenced the design of this course. One of the most important of these is the art of critical thinking, a skill whose utility extends far beyond the classroom. I define critical thinking as the ability to identify, understand, and solve problems by asking incisive questions and exercising purposeful and reflective reasoning to answer them. As critical thinkers, we will work together to locate and address critical problems and issues, not only in the texts we examine, but in the cultural texts that characterize contemporary U.S. society as well. My role is to encourage you to develop a knack for and love of critical thinking by modeling it in lecture and discussion, and, quite simply, by expecting it of you in the reading and writing assignments.

Required Reading Material:

- Alejandro Morales, Rag Doll Plagues (1992)
- Ernest Hogan, High Aztech (1992)
- Sesshu Foster, Atomik Aztek (2005)
- Rosaura Sanchez and Beatrice Pita, Lunar Braceros: 2124-2148 (2009)
- Course Packet (via Canvas)

Graded Requirements:

CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION (10%): A portion of your grade is determined by how consistent and thorough you work in completing in-class assignments, which include various things like in-class writing, group work, and overall classroom discussion. Because this is a seminar class and not a lecture-oriented class, the goal is for you, the student, to take charge in the classroom. I will do my part to provide context and moderate/facilitate discussion, but I am counting on you to do much of the in-class thinking and speaking.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (30%): Students are to post twice weekly to the Canvas discussion forums. Prompts may vary throughout the quarter, so be sure to read them closely. Once the weekly discussion forum is open, you can post any time and have until Friday at 11:30 to do so. You are also required to respond to/engage with at least one student post -- again something you must do before Friday at 11:30.

COURSE ZINE (20%): At the end of the quarter, students will work to put together a course zine -- even coming up with the title and content -- which I will print and showcase to the class and department. (You will also get your own copy!). Although due at the end of the quarter, you will actually have to start thinking about your contribution to the zine well before then as become more familiar with (and excited about!) the course's theme: Chican@futurism. I will provide more details on the nature of the zine and its goals at some point during weeks three or four.

RESEARCH PAPER (40%): Instead of an exam, students will complete an 8-10 page research paper on one of the required readings (or an approved alternative) from the class. Papers are to articulate, support and sustain an argument through textual analysis and scholarly research (6-8 secondary sources). Students will have an opportunity to draft and workshop their essays well before the revisions are due. These papers must demonstrate your ability to engage in critical inquiry (ask complex questions), develop a research agenda and identify appropriate research sources, read multiple texts other than the primary text, and produce the project in draft, peer review, and revision stages. Students will meet with

me individually for an extended discussion of their project at least once during the final two weeks of the term.