**Amber Strother**

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**Fall 2014**

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**Fall 2014**

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**Amber Strother**

**Rationale for Special Area**

**Fall 2014**

**Rationale for Issues of Reproduction in Biopunk’s Literature and Film**

I intend to take my Ph. D. qualifying examinations in the fall semester of 2014. My first exam area is Contemporary American Literature since 1945, which focuses on the postmodernist movement, the latter part of the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st century. My second exam area is Gender Theory and the Body, and it examines issues of gender and sexuality that focus on the body and reproduction. My special area is Speculative Fiction which focuses on the incorporation of biotechnologies into human and nonhuman bodies as well as issues of non-natural reproduction.

My dissertation will examine the ways in which bodies are constructed in speculative fiction, how the incorporation of biotechnologies affects those bodies, and the ways in which natural reproduction is circumvented by these technologies. I believe that modifications to the female body actually empower women in speculative fiction, and by focusing on issues of reproduction, I want to illustrate that the genre is able to voice real-world anxieties about control over women’s bodies. Women are often connected to nature and the birth process, which limits the ways in which women’s bodies are viewed. Artificial reproduction outside of the womb and the possibility that nonhumans could be capable of reproduction allow for a disassociation of women with natural reproduction which allows for new inscriptions of “mother” and “woman” to be discussed. Seeing the female body as disconnected from procreation allows us to revise societal views of sexuality and gender.

This research is important because genetic manipulation and artificial reproduction are no longer relegated to the pages of speculative fiction. As science fiction becomes simply science, technology affects the ways in which we view the female reproductive body and the nonhuman. Speculative fiction challenges the ways in which gender and perceptions of the body are constructed in society, and it has the ability to push readers to consider a future where these technological advancements could occur in a way that realistic fiction cannot. The speculative fiction that focuses on the incorporation of biotechnologies into human bodies and lives is known as biopunk.

While there is a vast conversation surrounding many of the subgenres of speculative fiction, there is very little discussion of biopunk as a subgenre of science fiction. Because I want to focus issues of reproduction and the treatment of the female body in speculative fiction, this genre (the offspring of cyberpunk and steampunk which focuses on the genetic manipulation of the body) provides a wealth of primary texts that highlight the malleability and possibility of the body.

 My work will trace the beginnings of the biopunk genre by examining fundamental science fiction texts. These foundational texts will include 19th century texts like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and H. G. Wells’ *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, early 20th century texts such as Alduous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and texts from the golden age of science fiction such as Kurt Vonnegut’s *Galapagos*. In addition, the work of influential feminist science fiction female authors during the 1970s and 1980s such as the works of Angela Carter, Joanna Rhuss, Octavia Butler, and Margaret Atwood will provide the female perspective of the body in speculative fiction. Given the origins of biopunk, cyberpunk and steampunk authors such as William Gibson and Neal Stephenson will also play a vital role my discussion of the origins and elements of the biopunk genre.

Paulo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl* is often classified as steampunk, yet it moves beyond the boundaries of that genre through the discussion of the genetically engineered food, animals, and nonhumans. China Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station*, also typically categorized as steampunk, relies less on the steampowered beings often associated with that genre and more on the attachment of fully functional, extra body parts. One of the few works that is actually labelled biopunk is Paul Di Filippo’s *Ribofunk*; this collection of stories explores the consequences of genetically manipulating the body. Feminist works like Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, and Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis*, highlight issues of biotechnological advancements, reproductive abilities and rights, and manipulation of both human and nonhuman bodies.

 Because there is little to no academic scholarship that directly discusses this subgenre of science fiction, I will rely on secondary sources from a variety of areas including literary studies of speculative fiction, gender and sexuality studies, body and reproductive studies, posthuman studies, and feminist science studies . This dissertation will require me to pull from a number classic texts such as Fredric Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future* which discusses the otherness of aliens and other nonhuman science fiction creatures; Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto,” which is one of the foundational discussions of not only cyborgs but also women and the sciences; and Larry McCaffrey’s *Storming the Reality Studio*, which illustrates through both fiction and critical works that demonstrate the place of cyberpunk within postmodernism.

 In addition to these foundational texts, more recent works that highlight the technological advancements being imagined and problematized in science ficiton will also be improtant to my discussion of the biopunk genre. For example, Daniel Denillo’s *Technophobia!...”* examines the vast differences between the utopian and dystopian depictions of biotechnologies in science fiction, and Jon Turney’s *Frankenstein’s Footsteps…* discusses the influence of Shelley’s novel on the science and science fiction surrounding biotechnology.

These texts provide a generic context for my discussion of the female body and reproduction as well as help me to further demonstrate the possiblities that biopunk offers. I believe that my three reading lists will provide a foundation for my dissertation that allows me to situate the female body in biopunk, to demonstrate the issues of reproduction that are being explored in speculative and postmodern fiction, and to illustrate that the primary texts are rewriting our perceptions of gender and sexuality through their depictions of the female body.