“The alien is the creation of a need—man’s need to designate something that is genuinely outside himself, something that is truly nonman, that has no initial relation to man except for the fact that it has no relation.”
   --from Slusser and Rabkin, “Introduction: The Anthropology of the Alien”

“You’re filled with so much life and death and potential for change,” [the alien] continued. “I understand now why some people took so long to get over their fear of your kind.”
   --from Lilith’s Brood

“How do you expect to communicate with the ocean, when you can’t even understand one another?”
   –from Solaris

This seminar focuses on fiction about non-terrestrial worlds, the alien beings that populate these worlds, and the overarching question of what such imaginative constructions might have to do with we humans and the planet Earth. We shall begin by surveying the early modern history of ideas about extraterrestrial worlds and extraterrestrial life, after which we’ll be in position to study what remains one of the most ambitious and influential of SF texts on these subjects, Olaf Stapledon’s Star Maker (1937). Where Stapledon extends the category of the “human” to some of the most alien life forms one can imagine, Stanislaw Lem (in Solaris, Eden, Fiasco, and other works) would have us understand that the truly alien must remain utterly unknowable. These two authors will function as our conceptual poles, between which we’ll explore a variety of ways SF uses alien otherness to challenge us to think more critically about aspects of our human and (as the case may be) post-human selves and the manifold other-than-human entities of Earth and beyond.

Required Texts:

- Orson Scott Card, Speaker for the Dead (Tor, 1994). ISBN: 978-0812550757
- Readings on Moodle (see class schedule)

Graded Work:

Bi-weekly response essays (40% of final grade).
These are informal, one to two page (single-spaced) explorations of some aspect of a text we have read recently. They are due every other Wednesday we meet, for a total of six. You should use these papers as an aid to your reading (one typically thinks differently when writing about literature than when reading
only) and as a forum for generating interesting questions and topics you might pursue in your term paper. Otherwise, you have considerable freedom in how you go about these papers. You may revise and build upon a previous paper so long as your revisions are substantial and reflect your engagement with an additional text.

**Presentation (10% of final grade).**
Each of you will be assigned one of the critical or theoretical essays we will be reading, which you should read well in advance of the date we’re scheduled to discuss it. Your main task for the presentation will be to lead us into discussion of the scholar’s ideas and how these relate to the literature we’re reading. Since everyone will already have read the essay you do not need to provide us with a summary of its full content. Rather, you should steer us to those parts of the argument you have found to be most interesting, promising, or problematic and then engage us in thoughtful consideration of these matters. Feel free to bring other texts (primary or secondary) into your presentation if you think these can help us; the same goes for film clips, illustrations, and other kinds of cultural artifacts.

You should provide everyone in the class with a copy of a handout that will help us to remember your main points and questions. Include bibliographical information for any additional sources you mention.

**Term paper (50% of final grade).**
This is to be on a topic of your own devising that’s relevant to the subject of the seminar. Your paper should engage thoughtfully with critical or theoretical scholarship that bears upon your primary text(s) and topic. It should be no fewer than 18 double-spaced pages. Please follow either MLA or Chicago style guidelines.

**Attendance:**
Of course I would like everyone to be present for all our classes, especially since we have so few opportunities to meet. Please let me know when you anticipate needing to miss a class. When you have to be absent, I’ll be happy to talk with you about the literature outside of class time.

**Participation:**
This is a seminar, which, by definition, is about exploring and examining a subject matter in conversation with one another. Everyone in the class will, at different times, have valuable or interesting things to say. Please make every effort to jump into the discussion whenever you have an idea, a question, a protest, a relevant side note, or even a half-thought (since others may have thoughts about the other half to that thought).

**Academic Honesty:**
Plagiarism is a violation of scholarly trust. According to the Provost, “Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321.” Violators of the Student Conduct Code will receive an “F” for the offending paper. Each essay you submit must be signed at the bottom of the last page, assuring that the work is your own, except where indicated by proper documentation. Your signature is your word that the essay is free of plagiarism.
SCHEDULE:

The following schedule is tentative. At the beginning or end of each class I’ll confirm the reading for the next class. All secondary sources are on (or linked to) Moodle.

9/2 (week 1) Historical, cultural, and theoretical overviews of the subject. Gregory Benford, “Effing the Ineffable


9/16 (wk. 3) Olaf Stapledon, *Star Maker* (finish); Fredric Jameson, “The Alien Body”; Michael Beehler, “Border Patrols”


10/7 (wk. 6) Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris* (1961); Fredric Jameson, “The Unknowability Thesis”


11/25  Student Travel Day: no classes

12/2 (wk. 13)  Octavia E. Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*; Walter Benn Michaels, “Political Science Fictions”


Post term-paper get-together: date, time, and place to be decided. Term papers due.