



TEACHING LITERATURE BOOK AWARD

2021

Committee Commendation

Tarshia L. Stanley, ed. *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Octavia E. Butler*, Approaches to Teaching World Literature Series (Modern Language Association 2019)

Approaches to Teaching the Work of Octavia E. Butler presents a clear case for teaching the innovative and rich novels and short stories of this most significant writer of speculative fiction. Citing De Witt Douglas Kilgore, the Introduction explains that “social and political realism no longer set[s] the parameters of African American contemporary literature.” Currently, the genre of speculative fiction “best captures the texture and meaning of the black experience.” The volume then offers grounded essays that are short enough for teachers to read and digest as they prepare their own lesson plans while presenting them with theoretical approaches that fit most orientations.

The twenty-one essays also speak to each other, illuminating connections across different teaching approaches: traditional literary; rhetorical, problem-based, and transdisciplinary; social justice; and those emerging from Afrofuturism as a genre and way of reading. These points of contact facilitate not only the teaching of Butler but also other authors of speculative fiction, especially writers of color and women. Black speculative fiction is at the center, raising transformative and transdisciplinary possibilities for teachers and those involved in curricular design.

The essays in this collection make clear that Butler’s work gives students the opportunity to question history, the human, science, and the body; and Stanley’s contributors are engaged in ecocriticism, disability studies, the posthuman, critical race theory, and feminist philosophy. Essays are thoroughly and thoughtfully theorized while being accessible and precise. This volume is worthwhile reading for anyone looking to bring Butler into the classroom, and also for anyone looking to apply innovative thinking and reading practices in the humanities to the powerful worldbuilding of speculative fiction, particularly that being written by Black authors, especially women. And in turn, these writers will inform and broaden those practices yet again.

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The Teaching Literature Book Award is a juried prize, awarded biennially by the graduate faculty in English at Idaho State University. The 2021 external reviewers were: Darryl Dickson-Carr, Professor of English, Southern Methodist University; Miriamne Ara Krummel, Associate Professor of English, University of Dayton; and Janine Utell, Professor of English, Widener University.