

DIVERSITY ARC#2: Fantasy Fiction

Northeastern MA Readers' Advisory Round Table 3/26/19

Danvers's Peabody Institute Library

Notes 3/26/19 submitted by Veronica Rodriguez

[Leane's note]

MLS Announcement

- ★ Leane will [teach] MLS's Introduction to Reader's Advisory course.
- ★ May 2019
- ★ MA locations:
 - [Marlborough 5/02//19](#)
 - [Westwood 5/09/19](#)
 - [Northampton 5/16/19](#)
- ★ Anyone interested in promoting event can contact Leane.

Next Meeting

- ★ [DIVERSITY ARC#3: Mystery Fiction \(5/28/19\)](#)
 - Tewksbury Public Library
- ★ The last hour will be dedicated to the RA Toolbox.
- ★ [Using scenarios,] we'll be divided into smaller groups and conduct reference interviews.

What does diversity mean?

- ★ Representation
 - Readers can see themselves in fiction.
- ★ Reflection of people's identities.
 - Novelist uses [Own Voices](#) as a diversity [Theme] appeal.
- ★ Self-identity
- ★ We shouldn't assume the main character is a white male.
- ★ Doesn't necessarily relate [only] to race and culture [differently-abled?].
- ★ Ambiguity can also fit into this.
- ★ Stories from the marginalized.
 - Who gets to tell the story? [The winner? Oppressor? Powerful?]
- ★ Sexuality, race, gender, class, ability
- ★ [Retelling/Flipping the narrative from one perspective to another]
- ★ Recommendation: *Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor
- ★ [Closely tied to Collection Development]

BENCHMARK: *The Fifth Season* by N.K. Jemisin

- ★ Works as a trilogy. (Broken Earth: *Obelisk Gate* #2; *Stone Sky* #3)
- ★ The author shows restraint in the first book by not giving it all away.
 - You have to give [the narrative] time.
- ★ Frame and storyline work together.
- ★ [Meditation on identity & human nature]
- ★ [Nature of personhood and the ways in which systems of oppression operate]
- ★ [What is perceived to be civilized and barbarism?]
- ★ Tone [is least] important [appeal, but works w/frame, storyline & ch]

How do we talk about genre?

[Genre] Classification

- ★ We use this in libraries to categorize. [RAs use to begin somewhere...]
- ★ Publishers use this for marketing.

How would you classify “*The Fifth Season*?”

- ★ Fantasy
 - Most obvious genre.
 - Even though N.K. Jemisin blurs genres, the central premise of the book’s world is based on magic. [Orogenic magic at the heart of the world.]
 - The most important aspect of any fantasy book is magic.
- ★ Speculative Fiction
- ★ Science Fiction
 - Due to scientific elements in world-building.
- ★ Apocalyptic/Dystopian
- ★ [Afrofuturism/Afrofantasy]
- ★ [Horror, Clify elements, too]

Magic in the book is:

- ★ Connected with nature/Earth.
- ★ Magical geology [TY Jim!]
- ★ Ability to manipulate the natural world.
- ★ The main character in the book has trouble controlling her magic. [Tried & true F trope.]

Was this book good at world-building?

- ★ Creates/develops a language.
 - Evolution of language.
 - Makes the story real.
 - [Details are vibrant, mesmerizing]
- ★ Historical aspect
 - History textbook [& Journal] snippets.
- ★ Scientific explanations
- ★ The map is an important element for world-building. [As are Glossary & Appendices]

(Benchmark continued)

Storyline

- ★ The book contains red flags. [Children's deaths]
- ★ Not easy to read at first due to different perspectives and storytelling styles, but it comes together.
- ★ [Deft & Intricate storylines]
- ★ ["fish out of water" who must navigate dark magical world to remain alive and bring change (Nassun, too)]

Themes in Fantasy

- ★ Good vs. Evil
 - Who is really evil? Essun? Guardians? Earth?
 - Ambiguity [human?]
 - [Are Comm's people evil by allowing racism regarding Orogenes?]
- ★ Social commentary
 - [Social commentary parallels history as we know it]
 - An important part of [most] speculative fiction.

Tone

- ★ Suspense
- ★ Dark
- ★ Menace
- ★ Bleakness

Characterization

- ★ You empathize with characters.
- ★ Characterization plays into tone due to menace.
- ★ Character development
 - All three characters/narrators [(Damaya/Syenite/Essen)] become Essun [also Style]
 - Three unreliable narrators that are one person.
 - Husband [Jija] can be seen as a motivating force
 - Is he well developed?
 - Is he just motivation?
 - He's used in later events [books] to compare and contrast.
 - Characters are developed as well as they can be [in 1st book of trilogy]
 - Jemisin is capable of having more than one character with scope.
 - Loss is important in the book for character building.
 - The creation of different races is also important for characterization.
 - [Inventive characters' perspectives]

[GENERAL FANTASY APPEAL]

- ★ Landscape Genre (like Historical & Western)
 - World Building
 - Evocative Landscapes.
 - Framing Detail
- ★ Fantasy Setting draws readers into new worlds
 - Author's skill in creating rich, believable, magical realm
 - Magic = ordering principle of world
 - F = worlds/being that never and could not exist Vs
SF= worlds accepted as possible if improbable
 - Setting provides context to new world
 - Framing elements breathe life into story and often create structure
- ★ Storytelling
 - What happens is as important as the world it occurs in
 - More often continuous story; series and requires commitment from readers
 - Important Themes: Good vs Evil; Quests; Retell Myth/Fairy Tale; Coming-of-Age; Outsider claims the Throne; Overthrow Tyranny; Defeat of Army/Evil Creature; Discover/Mastery Magic Ability
- ★ Tone
 - Ultimately optimistic but ranges from humorous to dark, can be melancholy even in victory
- ★ Character
 - F = Embodiment of ideas Vs SF = Secondary to ideas
 - Heroic lead characters; Anti-Heroes grow and change over series
 - Nonhuman and fantastical creatures
- ★ Language/Style
 - Stylized jargon & language fit world
 - Cadence/sound of words important
 - Unique language creation & naming reinforce world building
 - Maps/Illustrations/Glossary/Appendices add value and readers may expect them
- ★ Pace
 - Slow to start to set-up world building then increases pace with Adventure elements
- ★ Subgenres tell RA a great deal about what appeals to reader
 - Epic; Sword & Sorcery; Legends, Myths & Fairy Tales; Urban & Historical, etc.
 - Readers know genre well and not easily appeased by lesser writing
 - Readers are imaginative, flexible, and happy to suspend disbelief in aid of a good tale and are eager for new invented worlds
 - Readers appreciate the fundamental ideas embedded in the story; relating to human experience
 - and magic of all kinds and seek books that make magic "real," and allow for free exercise of imagination
- ★ Fantasy stories speak to the nature of being human and the defining of self

(General Fantasy Appeal continued)

- ★ Trick of pleasing fans of either F or SF when moving between titles/authors is keeping core appeal in place
- ★ Ageism does not exist in Fantasy, appeals to readers of many ages

[Notes taken from Saricks/Wyatt RA Guide to Genres 3rd ed. 2019]

Second Titles

[Visit blog for more thorough second title entries](#)

- ★ **Beth R.: *Sisters of the Winter Wood* by Rena Rossner**
 - The setting is important
 - Ukraine
 - 1700s
 - Historical Fantasy
 - Atmosphere
 - Creepy woods
 - Characters feel safe in woods
 - Uses prose and poetry
 - Melodramatic
 - Sensual
 - Teens coming into sexuality
 - Read-Alike: Naomi Novik's *Uprooted*.
- ★ **Eileen: *The Stone Gods* by Jeanette Winterson**
 - Science Fiction
 - Science fiction [has] rational [explanation]/plausible while fantasy [has] irrational [explanation.]
 - Cautionary tale
 - Humankind repeats history
 - Humans = Destruction
 - Book is divided into three sections spanning 100 years.
 - Focus on second chances
 - Protagonists are rebels
 - Tone is depressing, dark, and bleak.
 - Thematic material for discourse [may be top appeal]
 - Brings up relevant issues today.
 - Diverse
 - Divisiveness between species
 - Good vs. Evil; [forbidden love]

★ **Beth S.: *A Taste of Honey* by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace**

- Culturally diverse
- Afrofuturism/Afrofantasy
- Fantasy
- Gay romance
- Writing is compelling
 - Shifting chronology
- Short book
- Appealing to readers of speculative fiction looking for diversity.

★ **Gwenn: *The Gilded Wolves* by Roshani Chokshi**

- Characterization is important
 - Told from the perspective of different characters
- Good world-building
- Frame
 - Historical
 - Paris
 - 1800s
- Racial diversity and ability inclusive
- Suspenseful and dark
- Dark elements
 - Related to a lost inheritance and what happens next.
- Red flag
 - Tough/surprise ending

★ **Jerusha: *Empire of Sand* by Tasha Suri**

- Fairy tale frame
 - Evil step-mom
- Romantic
- Mythological elements
 - Gods' magic
- Lyrical
- World-building
 - Beautiful descriptions; [Gorgeous]
- Diverse characters with powers
 - Oppressed/marginalized peoples

Alyssa & Jeanne: *The Black God's Drums* by P. Djèlí Clark

- Short book/novella
- Fantasy
 - Girl with special abilities
 - Good vs. Evil
 - Involves a battle to attain a weapon of mass destruction
 - African gods'/goddesses' powers
- First person narrative
 - Coming of age story
- Genres
 - Urban Fantasy (because it's gritty and dark)
 - Historical Fantasy (alternate reality to Civil War)
 - References real events and people.
 - Steampunk elements
- Frame and setting are less developed.
 - Takes place in New Orleans.
 - Mardi Gras
- Main characters are strong and likable.
 - Well-developed
 - Wide-range diversity
- Language-building
 - Book is written using dialect.
- Fast-paced from beginning.
- Read-Alikes: Jemisin's work and people who enjoy reading about African mythology/folklore.

★ Jim: *My Soul to Keep* by Tananarive Due

- Modern world
- Upper-middle-class African Americans
- Magic
 - Immortality
- A major theme involves the main character moving through time facing terrible situations/events.
 - Facing discrimination over hundreds of years.
- Urban Fantasy/Horror

★ **Veronica & Leane: *The Belles* by Dhonielle Clayton**

- YA Fantasy
 - Characters with powers
 - Some steampunk elements
- Diversity
 - Black author
 - Characters that can change their appearance
 - Marginalized people
- Good vs. evil
 - Who is evil?
- Thematic
 - Brings up relevant topics for discussion, including objectification, abuse of power, oppression, and superficiality.
- A world where gods create “ugly” humans and “beautiful” humans.
 - The Belles “beautify” the ugly.
- Characterization and frame are important
 - The story is told through the main character’s perspective
 - Highly descriptive [lush] world-building that brings to mind Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*
 - Alt. New Orleans, maybe?
- Pace isn’t as important
 - First book in a series
 - Generally fast-paced but descriptions can slow the narrative down.
- Read-Alikes: The Uglies series by Scott Westerfield and The Selection series by Kiera Cass

★ **Michelle: *The Haunting of Tramcar 015* by P. Djèlí Clark**

- Short book/novella
- Tramcar possessed by entity
- Frame
 - Cairo, Egypt
 - Alternate 1912
 - City is the hub of modernity
 - Suffragettes
 - Very descriptive world-building
- Diversity
 - No white characters
 - Gender fluid character
- Thematic
 - Relevant topics for discussion
- Fast Paced
- Fun read
 - Buddy-cop comedy

★ **Lisa: *Akata Witch* by Nnedi Okorafor**

- Genre
 - Afro-futurism
 - Fantasy
 - Good vs. evil
 - Magical abilities
 - Nigerian Harry Potter ([or is it?](#))
- Present Day Nigeria
 - A portrayal of Nigerian culture
 - Diversity within Nigeria
 - Vast culture
- Perception of albinism in Nigeria.
 - Character as witch/ghost
- Coming of age
 - Search for identity
- Serial killer
 - Recognizing powers to take down a serial killer.
- Humorous tone amongst darker/bleak tone

★ **Leane: *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi**

- Author's debut title
- Part of a series
- Blurb from Leane's [second title post](#):
 - This is a refreshing YA fantasy that easily appeals to any adult fantasy lover intent on experiencing character diversity, a quest for justice and a rejection of apathy by a strong female protagonist. Perfect for fans of the expansive fantasy worlds of N.K. Jemisin, as well as Leigh Bardugo, Daniel José Older, and Sabaa Tahir. I also would recommend to fans of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* series for the pacing and character hooks, as well as the plotting and stunning world-building.
- Read-Alike: The Broken Earth Trilogy