1. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*

I might go to Canada eventually, but I think I’ll stop along the Columbia on the way. I’d like to check around Portland and Hood River and The Dalles to see if there’s any of the guys I used to know back in the village who haven’t drunk themselves goofy. I’d like to see what they’ve been doing since the government tried to buy their right to be Indians. I’ve even heard that some of the tribe have took to building their old ramshackle wood scaffolding all over that big million-dollar hydroelectric dam, and are spearing salmon on the spillway. I’d give something to see that. Mostly, I’d just like to look over the gorge again, just to bring some of it clear in my mind again.

I been away a long time.

Critically analyse this passage, explaining its importance in the novel as a whole.

2. *Sula*

The narrative strongly suggests that one cannot belong to the community and preserve the imagination, for the orthodox vocations for women – marriage and motherhood – restrict if not preclude imaginative expression.

Deborah E. McDowell

Using the above quotation as a starting point, discuss the representation of the friendship between Sula and Nel with particular reference to significant episodes. What points is Toni
Morrison making with regard to gender, autonomy, relationships, the institution of marriage, ethical behaviour, acceptability in a community, and imaginative expression?

3. The Rocky Horror Picture Show

Explore the implications of the triangular relationship between Frank N Furter, Brad and Janet in The Rocky Horror Picture Show.

4. A Private Life

A Private Life details the physical, social, sexual and psychological consequences of women’s absence from the symbolic order except as man’s other. Chen Ran adopts a separatist stance of non-engagement for her protagonist, Ni Niuniu, who also suffers from a lifetime of negative encounters with men. Refusing the male gaze and the paternal order of language, Ni Niuniu, whose name translates as “refusal,” remarks that “A name is nothing more than a name ... a string of sounds.” She withdraws from the substantiality of words. Her identity resists categories and functions. Adopting the name and the metaphysical stance of “Lady Zero,” she refuses identification within the patriarchal order and withdraws both physically and symbolically into “a room of one’s own.” Chen refashions this room into a borderless space of the bathroom in which mirrors fail to reflect images of unified selfhood. Lady Zero refuses all ideologies, all value systems, all “isms.” She forms a homoerotic bond with her neighbour, the Widow Ho, with whom she merges in a fluid, borderless expanse of intersubjectivity that is physical, sensual, intellectual and spiritual all at once. Hers is a female-centred stance, but one also embedded within a Chinese sense of inheritance. Ni Niuniu raves like a mad person, but her nonsense nevertheless illuminates the truth of women’s lives. Chen Ran has created a special discursive space for the exploration of private lives.

Kay Schaffer and Song Xianlin

Discuss Chen Ran’s experiments with prose forms that act to produce a female poetic aesthetic of interiority.

5. Shallow Grave

Analyse the characterisation as it develops over the course of Shallow Grave. Explain your understanding of the end of the film based on this analysis.
6. Specimen Days

Quoted below are the endings to each of the three sections of Specimen Days, “In the Machine,” “The Children’s Crusade” and “Like Beauty.” Carefully analyse the effects achieved in each of the endings, then offer a conclusion as to what unites the three sections and the overall feeling-tone of the novel.

He saw the woman cross the sky. He saw above her, above the smoke and the sky, a glittering horse made of stars. He saw Catherine’s face, pained and inspired. She spoke his name. He knew that his heart had stopped. He wanted to say, I am large, I contain multitudes. I am in the grass under your feet. He made as if to speak but did not speak. In the sky, the great celestial horse turned its enormous head. An unspeakable beauty announced itself.

He had ended her life and taken her into this new one, this crazy rebirth, hurtling forward on a train into the vast confusion of the world, its simultaneous and never-ending collapse and regeneration, its rock-hard little promises, its owners and workers, its sanctuaries that never endured, that were never meant to endure.

To die is different from what any one supposes, and luckier.
The child kept smiling his murderous smile.
Cat smiled back.

The woman was in the ground. The child was on his way to another world. Simon was on his way someplace, and there might be nothing there. No, there was something everywhere. He was going into his future. There was nothing to do but ride into it.

A pure change happened. He felt it buzzing through his circuits. He had no name for it.

He said aloud, “The earth, that is sufficient, I do not want the constellations any nearer. I know they are very well where they are, I know they suffice for those who belong to them.”

He rode on then, through the long grass toward the mountains.

7. Transamerica

There are two types of attitudes towards transgender within the community. The first seeks to affirm existing sex/gender categories but allows people to cross over and to adopt the “other” category. This position is underpinned by an acceptance of a binary sex/gender system where one’s gender should mirror one’s biological sex – men are masculine, and women are feminine. This is usually connected to a discourse of transsexuality rather than
transgender. The overriding aim for many individuals identifying as transsexual is to cross from the sex/gender assigned at birth to that experienced as their true sex/gender, where this crossing is ultimately rendered invisible.

The second attitude towards transgender aims to deconstruct sex/gender categories. For this group of trans people, passing is tantamount to “selling out” as it is seen as being complicit with normative gendering and is contrary to the gender-transgressive ethic of transgender politics. For these people, being trans is about gender fluidity and challenging the heteronormative binaries of sex/gender. Passing is seen as assimilationist. The discourse on this position usually refers to the status of being transgender or trans rather than transsexual. Advocates of this viewpoint view sex and gender as contingent and fluid.

Bearing in mind that Transamerica is a mainstream film, discuss these two viewpoints as illuminating the film’s depiction of transgender as assimilationist or radical, or some combination of the two. Provide ample examples of relevant scenes to substantiate your argument.

8. The Virgin of Flames

Cross-dressing is an ingenious tool as it does not fit categories of sex or gender alone and as such exposes both and so in this way is a form of gender iconography, making visible the spaces of possibility which are closed off by dichotomous conceptualization.

Lisa Isherwood

Evaluate the significance of Chris Abani’s use of cross-dressing within The Virgin of Flames, with some use of close textual analysis to support your point of view.

9. District 9

There is hope in the film’s suggestion that the boundaries between Self and Other are permeable. Wikus undergoes a process of mutation, becoming an alien himself. One of the visitors makes his own journey from threatening potential terrorist, cooking up a technological device in a hidden lab in the slum, to protector and saviour of the weak and wounded Wikus. By the end of his transformation he has been given a human name, Christopher, and begins to display human emotions. That which separates man from alien, and hence race from race, is fragile and perishable; the Self and the Other are ultimately the same thing.

This marks a drastic change from the science fiction of the 1950s, from which this film draws stylistically. The bug-eyed aliens and gigantic monsters that stalked America’s cinema screens in the middle of the 20th century were not there to be understood but to be eliminated. District 9 serves to highlight just how far cinema has come by depicting the human Self and the alien Other as two halves of the same.
whole. The message that the film has for the world, it seems, is that, if science fiction cinema can abandon its age-old belief that biological (and hence racial) difference equates to manifest distinctions, why is the rest of the world still cutting each other open, prejudging one another according to skin colour and responding as if pigmentation were destiny? This is a science fiction blockbuster that truly highlights the potential of its medium to challenge the socio-political status quo.

These are, however, too lofty ambitions for a film with such populist tendencies. Ultimately the tightrope walk between respectability and commerciality proves too difficult for District 9. As the film moves into its final act, and slowly but surely the guns and robots emerge from the shadows for one final battle, it is pervaded by a creeping sense of disappointment; all those glittering fragments of ideas that flashed before our eyes, all those promises of a truly complicated blockbuster, are killed off just as violently as the cannon fodder within the diegesis. District 9 is, in the final analysis, a film that promises to challenge not just our prejudices, both past and present, but also the very medium in which this challenge is delivered. Unfortunately it falls disappointingly short of these laudable goals, with the result that it ends its runtime hiding behind the clichés that it at first sought to destroy.

Matthew Jones

Engage carefully with the opinions expressed in this extract from a review of the film.

10. Zoo City

Comment on ways in which the novel depicts countercultural elements, and conclude your discussion by interpreting the significance of the trajectory followed by the character of Zinzi.