

## Sample Proposal 1 for Culminating Thesis Essay Project

Working Title – **“What are you blind?...No, you are.” The “Queerness” of Blindness in Carla Trujillo’s *What Night Brings***

In Carla Trujillo’s 2003 Marmol Prize winning novel *What Night Brings*, an eleven year old Chicana lesbian, Marci Cruz, lives in an abusive household with her parents and younger sister in southern California in the midst of the Vietnam War. Every night Marci returns to her bed after her strenuous day and recites a prayer where she continually asks God for two things: for God to make her father disappear and to turn her into a boy. According to Marci, “When night comes, that is when everything is best (5).” Even if she cursed with nightmares, awakened by her parents’ squabbles, or pained by her father’s beatings, at night Marci is able to ask the only being she believes can deliver for all that she wants. In *What Night Brings*, night becomes a forum for queerness. Here, Marci is able to partake in conversation—albeit with a divine medium—about going against what is culturally expected of her. Marci does not fit into the patriarchal Chicano society due to her sexual identity and desire to be relinquished of her father.

While Marci wants to break out of her situation, she is unable to do so without the help of subsequent family members. In *What Night Brings*, many characters are associated with or characterized with blindness and visual abnormalities. In my paper, I plan to argue how *What Night Brings* depicts blindness as a type of “queer vision.” The characters that are described as metaphorically blind—Eddie and Delia Cruz—stand as the antagonists and pillars of the Chicano “norm.” However, the characters associated with actual visual impairment and blindness are also associated with giving a happier, alternative life to the Cruz girls. In this instant, the blind do not live a life of darkness but a life of *enlightenment*.

In this paper, I will further be discussing prominent theories and research done in the fields of disability studies, Chicano studies, queer studies, and will be looking back into the history of the blind community—specifically public perception and regulation of their sexuality.

## Sample Proposal 2 for Culminating Thesis Essay Project

### Working Title – **Ghosts of the Medieval: Race in Modern Fantasy Novels**

In my culminating essay, I plan to discuss the ways in which medieval ideas about race and the monstrous have influenced modern high fantasy novels. The primary texts I will look at are the four series *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin, *A Dirge for Prester John* by Catherynne M. Valente, and *Return to Neverjion* by Samuel R. Delany. Each of these series, two of which were published earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and two still ongoing, deals with either monstrous races, or actual human races living in fantasy settings based on medieval Europe, with varying degrees of connectedness to our own world and to history.

A guiding question that I hope to answer as I examine these texts is in what ways do medieval ideas, biases, beliefs, and fears about both human races and monstrous races inform the presentation of race in these texts? A corollary to this question is what modern ideas about the medieval world have further shaped these novels? All four of these series deal with race in interesting ways by either reproducing modern and medieval constructions of race in fantastic medieval settings, or by addressing and questioning these constructions directly. If time and space permit, I may examine other novels that combine the conventions of the high fantasy genre with non-medieval European cultures, such as *Throne of the Crescent Moon* by Saladin Ahmed, *The Mirror Empire* by Kameron Hurley, and *The Killing Moon* by N.K. Jemison as possible additional primary texts.