

**English 660**  
**Latina/o Speculative Realism & Environmental Justice**  
**Winter 2016**

Professor: Dr. David J. Vázquez  
Office: 118 PLC  
Phone: 541-346-1502  
Email: vazquez@uoregon.edu

Class time: Thurs. 9:00 – 11:50 am, 253 PLC  
Office Hours: Thurs: 12:00 – 2:00 pm, and by appt.

**Course Description:**

In the opening pages of Junot Díaz's 2005 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the eponymous protagonist utters the words, "What more sci-fi than Santo Domingo? What more fantasy than the Antilles?" Despite the more than 200 years of literary history during which Latina/os have written and published in the United States, it has only been for the past 20 or so that we have engaged genres like science fiction, fantasy, romance, and detective fiction to express what Ramón Saldívar describes as a "new imaginary" that is oriented around the irresolvable tension between a desire for justice and the impossibility of its fulfillment. In this course we will examine a series of "genre" fiction novels, with an eye towards how, as critic Ralph Rodríguez observes, these texts function as "cultural commodities that have much to tell us about the historical, social, and political milieu in which they emerged." Consequently, we will think about how "serious" literary texts engage such non-serious forms. In particular we'll pay careful attention to how Latina/o authors engage sci-fi and fantasy in order to express environmental imaginaries that are in excess of "mainstream environmentalism." Along the way, we'll think about how these novels use non-traditional forms to speak to and represent issues of race and racialization, sexuality and gender, history and colonization, environmental justice and space, and labor and migration as intimately intertwined.

**Course Goals:**

1. Introduce the history, scope, and major critical trends in Latina/o genre fiction from the 1990s to the present.
2. Consider some of the ways in which Latina/o genre fiction represents race, gender, sexuality, labor, and citizenship.
3. Consider how Latina/o authors and artists engage environmental ideas and social justice concerns as intertwined phenomena.
4. Deepen student understanding of the complexity of Latina/o culture and environmental thinking in the U.S.

**Learning Outcomes**

(Students will be able to...)

1. Provide working definitions of the terms Latina/o, Chicana/o, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality
2. Comparatively analyze how Latina/os imagine resistance to race, gender, sexual, class, and environmental marginalization in genre fiction and to communicate these interpretations verbally and in prose formats.
3. Develop advanced close reading and textual analysis skills.
4. Demonstrate an advanced understanding of the social construction of race, gender, sexuality, and class.
5. Develop and demonstrate facility with literary criticism and theory.
6. Develop a deeper understanding of the history and critical trends in genres such as sci-fi, romance, speculative realism, and historical fantasy.

**Required Texts**

All texts available at the U of O Bookstore, unless otherwise noted

Acevedo, Mario, *X-Rated Bloodsuckers*

Díaz, Junot, "Monstro" (available at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro>)

Foster, Sesshu, *Atomik Aztex*  
Morales, Alejandro, *The Rag Doll Plagues*  
Plascencia, Salvador, *The People of Paper*  
Sánchez, Rosaura and Beatrice Pita, *Lunar Braceros*  
Other readings available on Canvas

## Requirements

1. Paper: There is one seminar paper required in this course. It will be a 7-10 page conference-style paper. We will work together on developing papers beginning in week 5. The final version of the paper will be due on the Monday following our last class.
2. Presentation: One presentation on which you will base and lead the day's discussion. Presentations should provide historical context, critical framing, and biographical information about the author or authors. Presenters may choose to focus on one text over others on a particular day. If you choose to take this approach, please let me know so that I can say a few words about other texts.
3. A weekly one- to two-page response paper due at the beginning of each class. Each response paper should briefly summarize the author's argument and identify at least one generative contribution for the piece. Please note that **you should not use this paper as an opportunity to criticize** authors or their positions. Instead, use it to summarize and demonstrate how you understand the argument, perhaps placing the piece in relation to other work in the seminar.

## Grading

Response Papers: 20 percent

Final Paper: 30 percent

Presentation: 30 percent

Participation: 20 percent

## Timeline

*This syllabus is primarily a reading guide. As such, it may be subject to revision.*

<u>Week 1</u>	<u>Ready by This Date:</u>
Thursday 1/7	Samuel R. Delaney, "Racism and Science Fiction" ( <a href="http://www.nyrsf.com/racism-and-science-fiction-.html">http://www.nyrsf.com/racism-and-science-fiction-.html</a> ), Ramón Saldívar, "Historical Fantasy, Speculative Realism, and Postrace Aesthetics in Contemporary American Fiction," Eduardo Bonilla Silva, from <i>Racism without Racists</i>
<u>Week 2</u>	
Thursday 1/14	Special Class Visit: Elena Machado, Professor of English, Bucknell University. Reading, from <i>Market Aesthetics: The Purchase of the Past in Caribbean fiction</i>
<u>Week 3</u>	
Thursday 1/21	Alejandro Morales, <i>The Rag Doll Plagues</i> , Lysa Rivera, "Future Histories and Cyborg Labor: Reading Borderlands Science Fiction after NAFTA," Kate Marshall, "What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene: American Fiction in Geologic Time"
<u>Week 4</u>	
Thursday 1/28	Mario Acevedo, <i>X-Rated Bloodsuckers</i> , Ralph Rodríguez, from <i>Brown Gumshoes</i> , T.V. Reed, "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism"
<u>Week 5</u>	
Thursday 2/4	Junot Díaz "Monstro" ( <a href="http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro">http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro</a> ) Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism." <b>Paper abstract and proposal due.</b>
<u>Week 6</u>	
Thursday 2/11	Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, <i>Lunar Braceros</i> , Catherine S. Ramírez, "Afrofuturism/Chicanafuturism: Fictive Kin,"
<u>Week 7</u>	
Thursday 2/18	Sesshu Foster, <i>Atomik Aztex</i> , Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martínez Alier, from <i>Varieties of Environmentalism</i> . <b>3-5 page paper draft due.</b>
<u>Week 8</u>	
Thursday 2/25	Salvador Plascencia, <i>The People of Paper</i> , Rob Nixon: From <i>Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor</i>
<u>Week 9</u>	
Thursday 3/3	<i>Sleep Dealer</i> , Sharada Balachandran Orihuela and Andrew Carl Hageman, "The Virtual Realities of US/Mexico Border Ecologies in <i>Maquilapolis</i> and <i>Sleep Dealer</i> ." <b>5-7 page paper draft due.</b>
<u>Week 10</u>	
Thursday 3/10	Mini-Conference: Prepare final projects for 10 minute presentations. <b>Final Paper due Monday 3/14.</b>