

English 660 Monsters in the Anthropocene Spring 2018

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Class time: Thurs. 9:00 – 11:50 am, 448 PLC
Office Hours: Thurs: 1:00 – 2:00 pm, and by appt.

Course Description:

During the past 20 or so years, we've seen a radical increase in the use of the monster figure in contemporary U.S. literature. Whether it's the vampires of Justin Cronin's *The Passage Series* or the zombies of Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, monsters have increasingly served as a mode through which anxieties about climate change, globalization, and neo-liberal multiculturalism are expressed. In this course we will read a series of "monster" narratives, with a particular eye toward how questions of global climate change and violence are envisioned--especially as they intersect with representations of race and ethnicity.

Course Goals:

1. Introduce the history, scope, and major critical trends in monster narratives from the 1990s to the present.
2. Consider some of the ways in which the figure of the monster relates to issues of race, gender, sexuality, labor, citizenship, climate change, and environmental justice.
3. Consider how contemporary authors and artists engage environmental ideas and social justice concerns as intertwined phenomena.
4. Deepen student understanding of the complexity of environmental thinking in the U.S.

Learning Outcomes

(Students will be able to...)

1. Provide working definitions of the race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality
2. Comparatively analyze how contemporary authors imagine resistance to race, gender, sexual, class, and environmental marginalization 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 the monster genre, speculative realism, and historical fantasy.

Required Texts

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

Acevedo, Mario, *X-Rated Bloodsuckers*

Cronin, Justin, *The Passage*

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

Lavalle, Victor, *The Changeling*

Johnson, Mat, *Pym*

Yanagihara, Hanya, *The People in the Trees*

Whitehead, Colson, *Zone One*

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 4/5	Preliminary reading , Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History”; Jeffrey J. Cohen, “Preface” and “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”
<u>Week 2</u>	
Thursday 4/12	Colson Whitehead, <i>Zone One</i> , Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism.” Kate Marshall, “What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene: American Fiction in Geologic Time”
<u>Week 3</u>	
Thursday 4/19	Junot Díaz “Monstro” (http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/monstro) Special visit by J.C. Sibara. “Disability and Dissent in Ann Petry’s <i>The Street</i> ”
<u>Week 4</u>	
Thursday 4/26	Mario Acevedo, <i>X-Rated Bloodsuckers</i> ; Frank Grady “Vampire Culture”
<u>Week 5</u>	
Thursday 5/3	Justin Cronin, <i>The Passage</i> (1-401). Paper abstract and proposal due
<u>Week 6</u>	
Thursday 5/10	<i>The Passage</i> (402-766)
<u>Week 7</u>	
Thursday 5/17	Mat Johnson, <i>Pym</i> ; Ramón Saldivar, “Historical Fantasy, Speculative Realism, and Posttrace Aesthetics in Contemporary American Fiction” Special Skype visit from Mat Johnson Paper Draft 1 (Thesis and 1-2 pages) due
<u>Week 8</u>	
Thursday 5/24	Hanya Yanagihara <i>The People in the Trees</i> ; Byrne “Ecogothic Dislocations in Hanya Yanagihara’s <i>The People in the Trees</i> ”; Ambrose Paré “On the Causes of Monsters”
<u>Week 9</u>	
Thursday 5/31	Victor Lavalle, <i>The Changeling</i> ; Matt Staggs, “The Dark Myth that Inspired Victor Lavalle’s <i>The Changeling</i> ” (http://www.unboundworlds.com/2017/06/dark-myth-inspired-victor-lavalles-changeling/); W. Scott Poole “The Bloody Chords of Memory” Paper Draft 2 (3-5 pages) due
<u>Week 10</u>	
Thursday 6/7	Mini-Conference: Prepare final projects for 10 minute presentations. Final Paper due Monday 6/11