

Strange Ecologies: Weird Fiction and More than Human Nature

ENGL 6329-001 Topics in Comparative Literature

Spring 2018 Syllabus

Thursday 2:00 – 4:50 p.m. Carlisle 212

Prof. Neill Matheson office: 406 Carlisle

office hours: Tues. 2:00-4:00 p.m., Wed. 2:00-3:00, and by appointment

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Course Description:

This course explores the environmental imagination of American Gothic and weird fiction, participating in recent scholarly interest in ecogothic, nature horror, and fictions of environmental apocalypse. Gothic fiction has long been concerned with challenging a fundamentally anthropocentric view rooted in Enlightenment rationality, offering visions of worlds in which the human is unsettled or displaced, even glimpses of what philosopher Eugene Thacker calls “the world without us.” Nonhuman and posthuman forms of life proliferate in this strain of American literary writing, which features hybrids and monsters, chimerical beings that emerge on the borders of human and animal. Yet these often dark imaginings of troubled futures resonate with real life in our own time, in the Anthropocene, or what Donna Haraway has recently termed the “Chthulucene,” which she argues may require “tentacular thinking” for survival. While acknowledging the sometimes comic or grotesque elements of such fiction, we will also take seriously its potential for thinking differently about our place in a more than human world.

Course Texts:

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx & Crake* (Random House)

Algernon Blackwood, *Ancient Sorceries and Other Weird Stories* (Penguin)

H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (Modern Library)

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (Penguin)

Poe, *Selected Tales* (Oxford)

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Bedford/St. Martin's)

Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux)

Additional readings will be available as e-texts. I will create a UTA Box folder for the course, where you will be able to access and download them.

Films:

Little Otik (dir. Jan Svankmajer, 2000)

Okja (dir. Bong Joon-ho, 2017)

The Shape of Water (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2017)

Upstream Color (dir. Shane Carruth, 2013)

Course Requirements:

1. Eight response papers. Minimum two full pages double-spaced. Response papers should engage with the week's readings, especially emphasizing critical/theoretical readings as well as primary literary texts. You should address the arguments of the scholarly texts we read, but you can also use these papers to explore your own ideas about the readings (critical or literary). Topics for your seminar paper may emerge out of your response papers.

Note: Response papers should be submitted by email prior to the class meeting in which we will discuss the readings they address. These short papers will not be graded individually—I will give them an aggregate grade at the end of the course. However, I will let you know if your response papers are not at least B-level work.

2. Seminar paper. A substantial research paper (minimum 15 pages) drawing on readings and issues from the course. Students will give a presentation based on their papers at the end of the course. The final class meeting(s) will be set aside for this purpose.

3. Participation.

Note: All required work must be completed in order to pass the course.

Course Grade:

Eight response papers	25%
Participation and presentation	15%
Final paper	60%

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will become familiar with literary works by the authors covered in the course, as well as with important critical issues, particularly related to the course thematic, that have shaped scholarship on these writers individually, and in relationship to each other. Students will become acquainted with a range of contexts relevant to considering these authors, including literary historical accounts of literature in the period, and theoretical and cultural studies work in environmental studies, animal studies, and plant studies. Students will be able to produce original scholarship according to accepted academic standards, reflecting an awareness of existing scholarship on their topic.

Official UTA Policies & Course Policies

Attendance and Participation:

At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance.

Because this is a graduate seminar that meets once a week, absences will only be excused in the case of truly unavoidable circumstances. Two or more absences will have an effect on your final grade. I expect you to come to class each week having carefully read the texts for that day's meeting, prepared with questions, comments, thoughts, enthusiasms, or objections. Participation for the course includes informal contributions to class discussion as well as presentations.

UTA Drop Policy:

Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://web.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

Academic Integrity:

Students enrolled in all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero.

Americans with Disabilities Act:

UT Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including *The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, *The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA)*, and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of a letter certified by the **Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)**. Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting:

The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD) www.uta.edu/disability or calling 817-272-3364.

Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS) www.uta.edu/caps/ or calling 817-272-3671.

Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

Title IX:

The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit uta.edu/eos. For information regarding Title IX, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX.

Student Feedback Survey:

At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

Final Review Week:

A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. (In this course, there is no final exam.) During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

Emergency Exit Procedures:

Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located down the stairs across from the elevators on the second floor of Carlisle Hall. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

Student Support Services Available:

UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at <http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/index.php>

Electronic Communication Policy:

UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

I will use your UTA email address for course announcements, as well as to contact you individually if necessary. Please be sure to check your MavMail account frequently.

Reading Schedule

Note: There may be minor changes, additions, or deletions in the course readings.

- 1/18 Introduction
- 1/25 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
Timothy Morton, "Frankenstein and Ecocriticism"
Siobhan Carroll, "Crusades Against Frost: *Frankenstein*, Polar Ice, and Climate Change in 1818"
- 2/1 Edgar Allan Poe, "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Man of the Crowd," "The Black Cat," "Hop-Frog," "The Case of M. Valdemar," "Instinct vs. Reason—A Black Cat," "The Raven"
Giorgio Agamben, from *The Open: Man and Animal*
Kate Huber, "Failures to Signify: Poe's Uncanny Animal Others"
Michael Ziser, "Animal Mirrors"
- 2/8 Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*
Dominic Mastroianni, "Hospitality and the Thresholds of the Human"
- 2/15 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter"
Algernon Blackwood, "The Willows," "The Man the Trees Loved," "The Wendigo"
Dawn Keetley, from *Plant-Horror*
Matthew Wynn Sivils, "Vegetal Haunting"
- 2/22 *Little Otik* (film)
Jeffrey Nealon, from *Plant Theory*

- 3/1 H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*
 Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Dunwich Horror"
 Eugene Thacker, excerpt from *In the Dust of This Planet*
 Jed Mayer, "Race, Species, and Others: H.P. Lovecraft and the Animal"
 Sederholm and Weinstock: "Introduction: Lovecraft Rising" (to *The Age of Lovecraft*)
- 3/8 Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space"
Upstream Color (film)
 Caleb Crain, "The Thoreau Poison" (<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-thoreau-poison>)
 Dylan Trigg, from *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*
- 3/15 **Spring Break!!**
- 3/22 J.G. Ballard, "The Drowned Giant"
 Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild"
 China Mieville, "Polynia," "Coveheth," "The Tain," "Sacken," "The Limits of Utopia"
 Timothy Morton, "Thinking Big"
- 3/29 Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*
 Donna Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene"
- 4/5 *Oryx and Crake*
 Nicole Shukin, "Telemobility: Telecommunication's Animal Currencies"
- 4/12 Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation*
 Timothy Morton, "Dark Thoughts"
- 4/19 *Okja*
 Critical readings TBA
- 4/26 *The Shape of Water*
- 5/3 Presentations

Final paper due Monday, May 10 (submitted to Blackboard)