

CL 309, Contemporary Trends in Literature

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Office hours: WF57 or by appointment

Syllabus**Course description:**

Undoubtedly, environmental degradation and the related climate change and biodiversity loss, that emerge as the main destructive effects of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene – as especially manifested in the colonialization and marginalization of indigenous lands and societies – constitute the main concerns of contemporary world literature, as well as a variety of other disciplines, be it in humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences. Contemporary literature also concerns itself with human and animal migrations forced by the above-mentioned effects of the Anthropocene, and related issues of identity and community, which also preoccupied a great many postcolonial authors and critics across the globe, especially in the last decades of the 20th century, the age of the so-called advanced global capitalism, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. The rapid digitalization of almost all aspects of life, as well as rampant neoliberal policies that started to take their toll on human and nonhuman lives with unprecedented force in the 21st century has also caused anxiety about the future, which finds expression in the ever more abundant works of speculative fiction, science fiction, climate fiction, dystopian or post-apocalyptic, which often include common elements. At the same time, however, authors feel the need to retrieve elements of the past, be it stories, myths, cosmologies, philosophies, ecologies or lifestyles, drawing on both traumatic or affirmative aspects of history, to offer various perspectives from which current issues could be rethought and resolved.

One thing that appears to be acknowledged and exposed by most of the 21st century authors is the fact that what underlies the intersecting race, class, gender and species issues is anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. Hence their emphasis on the fluid boundaries of human and nonhuman, mind and body, history and story, culture and nature, self and other. The novels that we will read and discuss in this class highlight this relational understanding of life. They compel the readers to think about who and why they otherize, monsterize, and instrumentalize, what role the dominant power structures play in that, and what possibilities exist to unearth and/or forge new social and cultural bonds to resist poverty, discrimination and injustice. As we scrutinize these novels, we will also consult and draw on several critical texts

from a variety of academic fields with post-humanist underpinnings, such as (Material) Ecocriticism, Critical Animal Studies, Affect Theory, Monster Theory, as well as Gender Studies, Memory Studies and Disability Studies.

Course requirements:

Preparation:

You must come to class having read the particular material assigned for each particular day of class, as indicated in the schedule. You are also advised to consult academic books and articles available online or in print to gain a critical perspective from which you can discuss the related issues that constitute the focus of the novels under consideration.

In-class performance:

Regular participation in class (discussions; quizzes) is required. Not to attend classes will automatically lower your participation grade.

Exams:

All students **must take the midterm exam** and **the final exam** (comprehensive).

Assessment:

Participation (attendance, in-class discussions, quizzes)	30 %
Midterm exam	30 %
Final exam	40 %

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Schedule of Readings

- Week 1: Introduction
Giorgio Agamben “What is the Contemporary?”
- Week 2: T.C. Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain* (Part I) (Migration, Affect, Alterity)

The article to be discussed along with the novel in the next two weeks:

Sara Ahmed, “Introduction: Feel Your Way” (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh UP, 2014)
- Week 3: T.C. Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain* (Part II) (Migration, Affect, Alterity)
- Week 4: T.C. Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain* (Part III) (Migration, Affect, Alterity)
- Week 5: Wu Ming-Yi, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (Parts I-III) (Climate Fiction)

The articles to be discussed along with the novel in the next two weeks:

Pieter Vermeulen, “Forms, Lives, Forms of Life” (*Literature and the Anthropocene*, Routledge 2020)

Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin” (*Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, 2015, pp. 159-165)
- Week 6: Wu Ming-Yi, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (Parts IV-VII) (Climate Fiction)
- Week 7: Wu Ming-Yi, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (Parts VIII-XI) (Climate Fiction)
- Week 8: Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl* (NU WA The Bifurcation – MIRANDA The Memory Disease, 3. *Dr. Rudy Flowers*) (Posthumanism)

The article to be discussed along with the novel in the next two weeks:

Rosi Braidotti, “Posthuman, All Too Human: Towards a New Process Ontology”

- Week 9: Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl* (NU WA The Island of Mist and Forgetfulness,
1. *Crossroads* – MIRANDA A Song for Clara Cruise)
(Posthumanism)
- Week 10: Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl* (NU WA Drowning)
- Week 11: Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (through Chapter 13)
(Affect)
- Week 12: Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (to the end)
- Week 13: Review