

WGS 334S: SPECIAL TOPICS IN WOMEN AND GENDER:
FEMINISM, ZOMBIES, AND SURVIVALISM

Dr. S. Trimble | January – April 2015 | Wednesdays, 1-3PM | WI 523

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION: S. TRIMBLE

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Mainstream visions of apocalypse tend to valorize a survivalist ethos; they present the claiming and fortifying of territory, the hoarding of resources, the destruction of threatening “others,” and the securing of potentially reproductive bodies as “common sense” actions in the aftermath of disaster. Such visions demand both sustained critique and creative counter-readings. In this course, we’ll interrogate the gender, racial, and generational politics of survivalist fantasies while simultaneously (re-)reading them for the alternative ethical frameworks and possible futures that they suppress. What kinds of violence inhere in visions of empty—or emptied—landscapes, as well as in the new beginnings projected onto them? How do survivalists suppress, deflect, or otherwise respond to conditions of general precariousness? What might anti-racist, queer, feminist, and/or anti-colonial responses to a post-apocalyptic world look like? Drawing on both fiction and theory, we’ll explore the contested re-beginnings at stake in contemporary visions of The End.

REQUIRED TEXTS can be accessed through Blackboard with the exception of the novels listed below, which are available either for purchase at [Bakka Phoenix Books](#) (84 Harbord Street | 416.963.9993) or for short-term loan at New College’s D.G. Ivey Library.

- Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (1954)
- Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998)

REQUIRED VIEWING

Both films are to be screened on your own time and are available on course reserve at the Robarts Media Commons.

- *28 Days Later* (dir. Boyle, 2002)
- *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (dir. Zeitlin, 2012)

GRADING SCHEME

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Value (%)</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Response Paper	20	February 4, 2015
Scenario Analysis	30	March 4, 2015
Final Essay	35	April 1, 2015
Participation	15	Ongoing

ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and I'm committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible. Accessibility Services works with students confidentially and does not disclose any disability-related information without their permission. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services, including your college's Writing Centre, are available to all students.

Accessibility Services can be reached by phone at 416-978-8060, by email at accessibility.services@utoronto.ca, or online: <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/Home.htm>.

New College's Writing Centre can be reached by phone at 416-978-8283, by email at newcollege.writingcentre@utoronto.ca, or online: <http://www.newcollege.utoronto.ca/academics/writing-centre/>.

Your success in this class is important to me. Whether you're registered with Accessibility Services, working with a writing tutor, or accessing other kinds of support, I'm happy to work together with you to develop strategies that will allow you to meet both your own learning needs and the requirements of the course.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Extended instructions and rubrics for each of these assignments will be posted on Blackboard.

Response Paper (20%) – due February 4, 2015

Write a 2- to 3-page analytical response to one of: Lauro & Embry's "Zombie Manifesto," the Comaroffs' "Alien-Nation," Boyle's *28 Days Later*, or Matheson's *I Am Legend*. The idea here is to be focused, not exhaustive. If you're working with one of the theoretical pieces, select a particular line of inquiry or key concept and talk about how the authors develop it, why it's significant, and what you, in turn, can do with it. If you're working with *28 Days* or *Legend*, select a specific scene to read closely. What visual or textual details do you want to interpret? How and why is the scene significant in relation to the text as a whole? What argument do you want to make about your text, using this scene as support? No matter which of the four texts you choose, close engagement with quotations and details is essential to this assignment.

Scenario Analysis (30%) – due March 4, 2015

There are two components to this assignment. The first asks you to imagine yourself in a post-disaster scenario and write a 1- to 2-page news bulletin, manifesto, or journal entry reporting on a particular problem, trend, or event that exemplifies the ethical and political dilemmas that might arise. For instance, if you're imagining yourself in the aftermath of a disease outbreak, you might report on vaccine shortages or the introduction of new laws around quarantine procedures or mandatory blood tests. The second component of this assignment is a 2- to 3-page analysis of the scenario and report that you've generated. Drawing on concepts and insights from our course readings, critically analyze some aspect of the gender, racial, and/or generational politics of the scenario you've projected. What modalities of violence—new and old—shape this future? What radical possibilities for agency, relationality, and social organization can you imagine?

Final Essay (35%) – due April 1, 2015

Your final piece of writing for the course is a 6- to 8-page essay. Putting a minimum of two theorists that we've read in this course into conversation, write a critical analysis of some aspect of Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* or Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. The aim is to synthesize the work you've done this term by developing a thoughtful, critical argument about the significance of, for example, Vodou in *Brown Girl* or animality in *Beasts*. A strong, argument-oriented thesis, careful organization, proper citations, and grammatical correctness are essential to a successful essay.

Participation (15%) – Ongoing

Your participation mark will be based both on your record of attendance (10%) and on **two Blackboard posts** that you'll develop for **two separate weeks** this term (5%). You'll sign up for one of these weeks during our first class together; the other is yours to choose as the term unfolds.

The post for which you'll sign up involves selecting a short passage/scene from one of the week's assigned readings/viewings and performing a **close reading** of that passage or scene. After directing your peers to the appropriate section of text, you'll write a short paragraph that: explains your selection's main point or significance as precisely as possible; identifies and, if necessary, defines its key terms; and reflects on its significance in relation to the broader text in which it appears. (How is this a "piece" of the author's overall argument? Or, if you've signed up for one of our novels or films, why is this moment important in terms of the writer's/filmmaker's overall project?) Your close reading must be posted on Blackboard by no later than **noon on the Tuesday before the class for which you've signed up**.

Your other post constitutes a **response** to a colleague's close reading. You can either: link us to a website, video, etc. that relates in some way to the ideas raised in your classmate's post and briefly offer some commentary on why it's relevant; OR you can direct us to another passage/scene—which can be from the same reading as the one to which you're responding or from a different reading—and explain why/how it relates to your colleague's selection. (Does your passage build on, undermine, complicate, and/or redirect the first passage? How? And to what end?) You're free to complete this second post on a week of your choosing.

ASSIGNMENT REGULATIONS

Submission and Return Procedures

All written assignments are due **in class at the start of class** on the due date. My policy is that after receiving your graded work, you must **wait at least 24 hours** before contacting me if you have questions or concerns about your grade. This policy is in place to ensure that you have adequate time to carefully review and digest the feedback—both the grade itself and the written comments—that you've received. After this 24-hour period, if you have questions, concerns, or would simply like clarification on any aspect of your marked assignment, please don't hesitate to send me an email outlining your questions so that we can set up a meeting to discuss your work.

Penalty for Late Work and Late Submission Instructions

Late assignments will be penalized **3% per day**, and I may choose not to accept work submitted more than 10 days late. If your assignment is late, you must do two things:

1. Please email it to me as soon as it's finished so that I can record an accurate submission date; and
2. Submit a hard copy of your work to Jo, the WGS office assistant, in WI 2035.

If there are extenuating circumstances, including and especially absence due to illness, I'll be happy to waive the late penalty if you provide appropriate documentation (a medical note or letter from your college registrar). ****Please approach me if there are other life circumstances that may affect your ability to meet deadlines or otherwise participate in this class. The sooner I know about these, the more flexibility I'll have when it comes to making possible adjustments or alternate arrangements concerning your assignments and participation.**

Academic Integrity

The university maintains a strict policy on academic integrity, and this course will abide by that policy. The University of Toronto's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are familiar with and understand the different forms of academic misconduct. Potential offences include but are not limited to:

- Plagiarism: presenting other people's published or unpublished work, in part or in whole, as your own
- Submitting the same work in more than one course
- Cheating: copying another person's answer on a test; communicating with another person during a test or exam; purchasing assignments and submitting the work as your own
- Improper academic/research practices: making up sources; fabricating or falsifying results; using other people's research findings without permission
- Falsifying institutional documents, including tests, transcripts, and letters of permission

If you have any questions about how to cite sources properly or what constitutes plagiarism, please consult Margaret Proctor's "How Not to Plagiarize": <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.

Of course, you can also feel free to bring your questions about plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct to me. I'm happy to help!

Grade Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage	Definition
A+	90-100	EXCEPTIONAL. Exceptional knowledge of concepts and/or techniques and exceptional skill and/or great originality in their use in satisfying the requirements of an assignment or course.
A	85-89	EXCELLENT. Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques with a high degree of skill in their use; strong evidence of original thinking.
A-	80-84	
B+	77-79	GOOD – VERY GOOD. High to very high level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with reasonable to considerable skill in using them; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability.
B	73-76	
B-	70-72	

C+	67-69	FAIRLY SATISFACTORY – SATISFACTORY. Acceptable level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with some ability in using them.
C	63-66	
C-	60-62	
D+	57-59	PASSING. Minimal knowledge of required concepts and/or techniques; minimal evidence of critical and analytic skills.
D	53-56	
D-	50-52	
F	0-49	FAILING. Does not meet university standards.

CLASS CANCELLATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

In the event of class cancellations, you will be notified on Blackboard:

<https://portal.utoronto.ca/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>.

Please check our course site regularly for announcements, updates, and links.

CONSULTATION POLICY

I'm happy to handle brief logistical questions via email. Please remember to include the **course code in the subject line** of your message. However, if you wish to discuss your work in detail, please drop by during my office hours or email me to make an appointment. In general, I'll make every effort to respond to emails within **48 hours**, but please note that I may not reply to assignment-related emails that are sent less than 24 hours before the assignment deadline.

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CLASS SCHEDULE

- January 7 **Introductions**
- January 14 **I. Zompocalypses**
Lauro & Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism” (*Boundary 2* 35.1 [2008]: 85-108)
- Comaroff & Comaroff, “Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism” (*South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 [2002]: 779-805)
- January 21 *28 Days Later* (2002)
- January 28 Matheson, *I Am Legend* (1954)
- February 4 **II. Imagining Disasters, Projecting Futures**
Response papers due
Cazdyn, “Disaster, Crisis, Revolution” (*South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.4 [Fall 2007]: 647-62)
- Szeman, “System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster” (*South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.4 [Fall 2007]: 805-23)
- **Recommended reading: Urstadt, “Imagine There’s No Oil: Scenes from a Liberal Apocalypse” (*Harper’s Magazine* [August 2006]: 31-40)
- February 11 Masco, “‘Survival is Your Business’: Engineering Ruins and Affect in Nuclear America” (*Cultural Anthropology* 23.2 [2008]: 361-98)
- Petryna, “Chapter One: Life Politics After Chernobyl” (from *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens After Chernobyl*. Princeton UP, 2002.)
- February 18 READING WEEK – NO CLASS
- February 25 Deleuze, “Desert Islands” (*Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2004. 9-14.)
- Attewell, “An Island Solution” (from *Better Britons: Reproduction, National Identity, and the Afterlife of Empire*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2014. 35-68.)

**Recommended reading: McKittrick, “Introduction” (from *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. U of Minnesota P, 2006. ix-xxxii.)

March 4
*Scenario analysis
due*

III. Resistant Speculations
Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998)

March 11
Hopkinson, *Brown Girl*, cont.

March 18
Beasts of the Southern Wild (2012)

hooks, “No Love in the Wild” (*NewBlackMan (In Exile)*, Sept. 5, 2012):
<http://newblackman.blogspot.ca/2012/09/bell-hooks-no-love-in-wild.html>

Sharpe, “*Beasts of the Southern Wild* – the Romance of Precarity I” (*SocialText*, Sept. 27, 2013): <http://socialtextjournal.org/beasts-of-the-southern-wild-the-romance-of-precarity-i/>

**Recommended reading: Stabile, “No Shelter From the Storm” (*South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.4 [Fall 2007]: 683-708)

March 25
Beasts, cont.

Nixon, “Introduction” (from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011)

April 1
Final Essay due

Conclusions