

ENGL 5321
Dr. Marion Christina Rohrleitner
Fall 2022

ENGL 5321/CRN 19054: Literature of the Americas
"Decolonizing the Anthropocene: Contemporary Climate Fiction in the Americas"
Hudspeth Hall 213, M 6-8.50pm
Fall 2022

Instructor: Dr. Marion Christina Rohrleitner
Office: Hudspeth Hall 321
Office Hours: M 4.30-5.30pm (in person in HUD 321), and by appointment (preferably via zoom)
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Course description: This course introduces graduate students to two theoretical approaches in literary and cultural studies that are becoming increasingly important and intertwined: Hemispheric Studies and Ecocriticism. Hemispheric studies can be understood as a subset of the transnational turn, focused specifically on the Americas; ecocriticism seeks to study, theorize, and understand the relationship between literary/cultural production and the natural environment, specifically in view of climate change. So-called natural catastrophes, such as earthquakes and hurricanes in the Caribbean, are exposed as "unnatural" events symptomatic of climate change and a result of the "afterlife of colonialism." We will explore how environmental injustice is a phenomenon with deep roots in histories of racism, classism, and sexism in the Americas, and how the poor and people, especially women and girls and LGBTQIA+ people of color are disproportionately affected by climate change.

The intimate connection between settler colonialism and environmental (in)justice is central to our inquiries. The conquest of the Americas and the genocide and exploitation of its native and enslaved African peoples are indistinguishable from the ruthless extraction of resources in mountains, forests, rivers, and the ocean. We will, therefore, read the assigned Caribbean, Mexican, and South American texts as climate fiction and as performing a continuum from colonization and the transatlantic slave trade to neocolonial and neoliberal economic practices; we will also think about migration as closely connected to climate change. In a Caribbean context, attention to "archipelagic" thinking and what has been termed the "liquid turn" is garnering significant scholarly interest. We will engage Caribbean theorists like Edouard Glissant, Kamau Brathwaite, and Marisel Moreno, critics of globalization such as Arundhati Roy, ecocritics like Dipesh Chakrabarty and Martin Munro and hemispheric scholars like Anna Brickhouse, Ramon Saldivar, and Ralph Bauer in our conversations on climate fiction from Puerto Rico, Antigua, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guyana, and Argentina.

We will ask compelling questions about the origins and evolution of climate fiction in the Americas:

- Can fiction and poetry be effective forces in raising awareness for climate change and mobilizing readers to combat its origins and outcomes?
- How is the concept of the "hemisphere" the product of environmental and political shifts ?
- What can historical fiction teach us about climate change that we cannot learn from historiographies and scientific books?
- What are the possibilities and limitations of fiction and poetry in critiquing of colonialism and neocolonialism in the region?
- How does the capitalist and racist logic conquest and colonization continue on in neocolonial and neoliberal structures in the Americas?
- What is the impact of climate change on migration as represented in climate fiction?
- Which role does gender play in how characters are affected by climate change?

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Required primary texts (available for purchase at UTEP bookstore; be sure to get the correct edition)

Aimé Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*
Jamaica Kincaid. *A Small Place*
Fred D'Aguiar. *Feeding the Ghosts*
Rosario Ferré. *Sweet Diamond Dust and Other Stories*
Mayra Montero. *In the Palm of Darkness*
Myriam J.A. Chancy. *What Storm, What Thunder*
Raquel Salas Rivera. *while they sleep (under the bed is another country)*
Rita Indiana. Transl. Achy Obejas *Tentacle*
Yuri Herrera. *Signs Preceding the End of the World*
Samantha Schweblin. *Fever Dream*

Films to be watched on your own time (I will provide copies or links).

Beasts of the Southern Wild
Life and Debt
Sleep Dealer
Sueño en Otro Idioma

Note: I ask you to purchase a **hardcopy with the correct ISBN** number rather than ebooks; the online pagination, if it exists, is often out of sync with the pagination I provide on the syllabus, and this makes a focused discussion and shared close reading very difficult if not impossible. In addition, studies have shown that students tend to retain printed work much better. You may of course rent the assigned texts or buy used hardcopies in the bookstore or online. Make sure to **always bring a hardcopy of the book** we are discussing to class so you can actively participate in class discussions. Thanks!

Additional required readings:

Occasionally I will supplement the assigned primary texts with poems, short stories, films or scholarly essays or book chapters marked with an asterisk (*) on the syllabus. Additional primary texts will be made available to you on Blackboard; I will ask you to find the assigned secondary sources (usually scholarly articles) on JSTOR or MLA/EBSCO, so you can practice researching online and we make use of the library's digital subscriptions. Carefully read these additional texts, print them out or bring an electronic version to class, look up terminology and references, and summarize the author's argument so you can recall, reproduce, and engage with the in-class discussion. Reading, preparing, and answering questions on these sources feed into your participation grade.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation

20%

In a graduate course, students are expected to carry and shape conversations in class as much as the instructor. As a result, regular attendance and active participation are essential for your success not only in this course, but in your career as a graduate student in general. Being in attendance alone does not give you any credit—it is a mere basic requirement and expected; only active participation will give you credit. Active participation includes coming to each class on time and prepared with concrete and informed questions and comments about the assigned texts, volunteering questions and comments to both the instructor and your classmates during and after my lectures and your peers' presentations, as well as actively engaging with scholarly debates in class discussions, for example by referring to current scholarship and familiarizing yourselves with critical terminology.

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As part of your participation grade, you are required to **submit 8 (250-400 words) entries** on Blackboard (BB), **4 responses and 4 questions**, over the course of the semester. These responses and questions should engage with one very specific aspect of the readings due every Monday; ideally, you should make concrete references to the primary and/or secondary texts assigned that week and comment on the larger questions that tie the class together in your questions and responses. These questions and response paragraphs are meant to serve as discussion triggers for our class on Monday. The quality of these papers will feed into your participation grade. You are required to share a total of 8 submissions; each can earn a maximum of 25 points for submission. This way, your written contributions to class discussion will add to your oral contributions during class time.

The questions are due by 6pm on Friday - to give your peers enough time to think about the questions to respond by Monday; the responses are due by 3pm on Monday – absolutely no extensions are possible because I will need to read these comments before class. I will provide brief feedback to your questions and responses by Wednesday evening. Please copy and paste these response papers into the provided space rather than attaching a word.docx. Include at least one direct citation from the primary or secondary texts you are discussing via parenthetical documentation. I will not accept, grade, or comment on late papers or on papers that do not meet the basic formal requirements of length, formatting, and proofreading.

Since we meet only once a week and are still in a pandemic, each student may **miss two classes** without repercussions or explanations. A third absence will result in dropping one letter grade. As you know, anything less than an A is not acceptable for graduate work, and even a B poses a potential problem if you wish to be accepted into a Ph.D. program. A fourth absence will result in me dropping you from the class, regardless of the circumstances. You simply cannot get credit for or succeed in a graduate class if you are not fully present throughout the semester. If you anticipate any problems due to extenuating circumstances (such as illness etc.) do contact me at your earliest convenience so we can find a workable solution.

Book Review

20%

One important aspect of academic work consists in staying up to date with recent scholarship and publications in the field. The writing of book reviews is an excellent exercise in displaying one's familiarity with current research and scholarly debates and also offers an opportunity for publication. Each graduate student is therefore required **to research scholarly journals** which publish book reviews in the fields of ecocriticism and literature of the Americas and decide on one publication as a model for your own review. I will provide a list of relevant journals and publications in the second week of the semester and will ask everyone to decide on a book and date of submission **by September 19**.

Next, students will research recently (ideally within the last 5 years) published **scholarly books (monographs or edited collections)** on the texts and/or issues we discuss in this course, read a current scholarly publication on such a subject, and write a book review in the style, length, and format of the selected journal. You will submit a short, one-paragraph proposal (150-200 words) of the book review, which includes a full citation of the text you wish to review, a short rationale why you decided on this specific text, a citation of the journal after whose book reviews you wish to model your own, a reason why you decided on this specific journal format, and the connection you want to make to the primary text assigned for that week. You will submit this information to me via email by 6pm the Friday before we discuss the primary text to which you will connect your review. I will provide you with feedback within two days. This way you have a week to complete your review.

I will then ask you to submit your completed book review as a word.docx attachment via blackboard by noon the following Monday. Length and format of your reviews depend on the journal of your choice. Ideally these book reviews will actually be submitted for publication. Absolutely no extensions will be given.

Individual Conference Presentations

20%

Conference presentations are another important aspect of a scholar's job regardless whether you are tenured, on the tenure track, or a graduate student applying to a PhD program or on the job market. Conferences are an excellent opportunity to network and to present one's most recent research agenda to an informed audience. In this class you will get the opportunity to practice the skills necessary for successful conference presentations. I expect you to look for actual conference calls at the CFP by the UPenn site (<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu>) and choose one to which you would like to submit your abstract and that works with the focus of our class.

The **Friday before your presentation** you will submit your abstract (200 words) to me via blackboard by noon so I can give you feedback and final suggestions. Like at an actual conference, you will have 15-20 minutes (maximum!) to present your argument and will then respond to questions from the plenary. Your presentation should discuss one very concrete and well-defined aspect of the assigned text(s) for that week, and draw on existing scholarship. Ideally identify a conflict in the debate on the text of your choice and add your perspective. Your presentation may be on the same text you work on for your research paper. Be professional, yet creative, in your presentations, and make effective use of technology, such as power point, film clips, music, etc when appropriate. The average conference paper is 6-8 pages (double-spaced) – feel free to read from your paper or speak freely. In either case, be sure to practice and stay focused on your specific argument. Come prepared with a handout (not longer than one page!), concrete questions for the class, and be prepared to answer questions from the audience. Make sure to set up a meeting with me the week before your presentation – note that I reserve Thursdays and Fridays to work on my monograph, and thus prefer to meet on Mondays to Wednesdays only. Failing to set up an appointment and send an abstract will result in deduction of 50 points from this assignment. Your presentation may be on the same primary text as the one to which your book review is connected.

Research Paper

40%

Your final research paper is in many ways the culmination of your work in this course. It should reflect your knowledge of the primary text(s) you discuss, as well as your familiarity with current scholarship and terminology and major debates in the field. Your paper must have an original argument and needs to enter into an already existing scholarly conversation. You will be graded not only on the quality of the end product, but also on your progress during the process of writing from proposal to final paper.

By 6pm on Tuesday, **November 22**, you will submit a **project proposal** (200-300 words) and a one page (double spaced) annotated bibliography as a word.docx attachment on blackboard. This proposal should demonstrate that you have been doing your research and have already begun to formulate your thesis. I will return comments on these proposals to you by Wednesday evening. Your proposal is worth a maximum 50 points. I will then ask you to bring 2 hardcopies of the first 3-5 pages of your final draft to our last class on **November 28**, and we will workshop them again before your final submission in conference panel format.

Your final paper is due by 6pm on Monday, December 5 and needs to be submitted to me via blackboard as a word.docx. The paper must be 15-20 pages long (**excluding** the works cited list), follow MLA format, feature parenthetical documentation, and a proper works cited list (consisting of at least 5 scholarly sources, in addition to primary sources). Be aware that writing in a concise manner is more demanding and important than being verbose and jargony. Absolutely no extensions will be given.

Grade breakdown

Attendance and participation: 200 points	A= 900-100	or 90-100%
Individual presentation: 200 points	B= 800-899	or 80-89.9%
Book review: 200 points	C= 700-799	or 70-79.9%
Research paper: 400 points (50+350)	D= 600-699	or 60-69.6%
TOTAL: 1000 points	F = 0-599	or 0-59.9%

Email: Check your email **daily**. Please contact me on webmail (mrohrleitner@utep.edu) with urgent requests or concerns. Responding to emails sent by your professor in a timely manner (usually within 24 hours during the work week) is good professional practice and will be part of your participation grade.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is an offense against academic honesty and any instance of plagiarism will immediately be handed over to the Dean of Students without exception, who will decide on your penalty. Be aware that I take all instances of plagiarism very seriously. Each plagiarized assignment will automatically receive 0 points. I do not accept revisions or late submissions, or assignments that do not meet the minimum length requirement of original work, therefore you will fail each plagiarized assignment. Every time you use someone else's ideas or words in your papers you must reference the source. This is true for both direct quotes and paraphrasing. The same rules that apply to print sources also apply to web-based sources. You may safely assume that if you find a source on the internet, so will I. If you have any questions or uncertainties, contact me well before your paper is due. I also strongly encourage you to consult the following useful website for further information: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/2/>

Students with special needs: I will gladly make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. Please see me personally before or after class in the first two weeks to discuss any special needs you might have. If you have a documented disability and require specific accommodations, you will need to contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services in the East Union Bldg., Room 106 within the first two weeks of classes. The Center for Accommodations and Support Services can also be reached in the following ways:

Web: <http://www.utep.edu/cass>

Phone: (915) 747-5148 voice or TTY

Fax: (915) 747-8712

E-Mail: cass@utep.edu

Pandemic guidelines

If you experience symptoms or are exposed to someone who tested positive for Covid-19 and cannot get a negative test result before class, please let me know right away, so I can either move class online or find another solution. If you test positive for Covid-19, please immediately report to covidaction@utep.edu. Following the recommendations of the CDC and the overwhelming consensus of the scientific community I encourage you to wear masks that cover your mouth and nose in class (ideally N95 masks which protect both you and your peers the best) unless we can engage in significant social distancing in our classroom. Be aware that regardless of your vaccination status you can still transmit Covid-19; asymptomatic carriers tend to spread the virus the most. Many of your peers (and professors) may be parents of small children who cannot yet be vaccinated, take care of vulnerable elderly family members, or are immunocompromised. If we take the slogan of "Miners Protecting Miners" seriously we will accept this minor inconvenience to protect others and ourselves from harm.

Syllabus¹

Unit I: Theoretical Foundations: Hemispheric Studies and Climate Fiction

- Monday, August 29 Introductions
* Shelley Fisher Fishkin. "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies"
* Ralph Bauer. "Hemispheric Studies"
* Ben Holgate. "Introduction: A Crisis of the Imagination." *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse*.
- Monday, September 5 Labor Day. No Class.
- Monday, September 12 *Amitav Gosh. From *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*
*Arundhati Roy. "Confronting Empire."
*Dipesh Charkabarty. "The Climate of History"

Unit II: Continuums: (De)colonization and Neocolonialism

- Monday, September 19 Aimé Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism* (Martinique)
*Frantz Fanon. from *The Wretched of the Earth*
Presentation 1
- Monday, September 26 Jamaica Kincaid. *A Small Place* (Antigua)
*from *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*
Life and Debt (excerpts will be screened)
Presentation 2

Unit III: Histories: The Transatlantic Slave Trade, and the Plantation Industrial Complex

- Monday, October 3 Fred D'Aguiar. *Feeding the Ghosts* (Guyana)
*Ian Baucom. "Specters of the Atlantic"
Presentation 3
- Monday, October 10 Rosario Ferré. *Sweet Diamond Dust* (Puerto Rico)
*Angela Naimou. "Sugar's Legacies: Romance, Revolution, and Wageless Life in the Fiction of Edwidge Danticat and Rosario Ferré"
Presentation 4

Unit IV: Repercussions: Disaster Capitalism, Extinction, and Environmental Catastrophe

- Monday, October 17 Mayra Montero. *In the Palm of Darkness* (Cuba)
*Ylce Irizarry. "Postcards from the Edges of Haiti: The Latinx Ecocriticism of Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness*"
Presentation 5
- Monday, October 24 Myriam J.A. Chancy. *What Storm, What Thunder* (Haiti)
*Martin Munro. From *Tropical Apocalypse: Haiti and the Caribbean End Times*
*Valerie Kaussen. "Zooming In: Virtual Disaster Tourism in Post-Earthquake Haiti"
Presentation 6

¹ Subject to change. Updates will be announced in class and posted on BB.

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Monday, October 31 Raquel Salas Rivera. *while they sleep (under the bed is another country)* (Puerto Rico)
*TBA
Presentation 7

Unit V: Experimentations: Migration, Gender, and Environmental Dys/Utopias

Monday, November 7 Yuri Herrera. *Signs Preceding the End of the World* (Mexico)
Sleep Dealer
*TBA
Presentation 8

Monday, November 14 Rita Indiana. *Tentacle* (Dominican Republic)
*Kristie Soares. "Dominican Futurism: The Speculative Use of Negative Aesthetics in the Work of Rita Indiana"
*Amy Brady. Interview with Rita Indiana." (*Chicago Review of Books*)
<https://chireviewofbooks.com/2019/01/16/tentacle-is-a-unique-caribbean-spin-on-climate-fiction/>
Presentation 8

Monday, November 21 Samantha Schweblin. *Fever Dream* (Argentina)
*Oscar A. Perez. "Toxic Chemicals in Samantha Schweblin's *Distancia de rescate (Fever Dream)*"
Presentation 10

Tuesday, November 22 Submit Project proposals as a word.docx on BB by 6pm

Monday, November 28 Workshopping first 3-5 pages of your research papers.
Review

Friday, December 2 Dead Day

Monday, December 5 Final projects are due as a word.docx by 6pm on BB.

Wednesday, December 14 Grades are due to be submitted by instructor