

WORLD LITERATURE III: **CONTAGION**

ENGL 2113 (IE) • Fall 2020 • 3 Credits • Department of English • Valdosta State University • Online



Detail from *Bitter Root* #7 by David F. Walker, Chuck Brown, and Sanford Greene (2020).

CONTACT INFORMATION AND STUDENT HOURS

Professor: Dr. Nicholas E. Miller (He/Him/His)
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Mobile: (314) 750-8185
Office: West Hall 2106
Student Hours: *Available By Appointment*

Student hours are opportunities for you to ask questions, to get help with assignments, to review course readings, to talk about connections between our class materials and other work, etc. These conversations are generally student-directed, but I can also help you to articulate your questions and goals. All student hours this semester will be conducted online through your choice of video conferencing platforms.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Contagion has long captured our global literary imagination. Pandemics are not only biological events, but cultural phenomena that affect how we understand ourselves and our communities. In this course, we will examine the intersections between contagious disease and storytelling across a range of cultures, settings, and periods—ranging from eighteenth-century outbreak narratives to the proliferation of zombie fiction today. Together, we will consider questions such as: How do our diseases make us who we are? How does illness participate in the reimagining of community, kinship, and sexuality? How do contagion narratives help to construct or critique societal beliefs about confinement and isolation? And what, exactly, is the relationship between contagion and the stories we tell about it? Some contagion narratives, for example, expose fears of vulnerability and exposure, representing contagion as a threat in the form of a microbe or a “foreign” invader. Other stories explore the consequences of aggressive public health measures and the effects of state power on vulnerable communities. Collectively, we will strive to develop a clearer sense of why, as humans, we often feel compelled to transmit or contain our epidemics through narrative.

PREREQUISITES: You must successfully complete ENGL 1102 or 1102H to enroll in this course.

WHY STUDY WORLD LITERATURE?

World literature is as diverse as we are as humans and can help us to develop strategies and vocabularies that make us empathetic toward (and knowledgeable about) the experiences of other communities and cultures. This combination of empathy and knowledge is often referred to as *multicultural literacy*, and it is essential to your success as you engage with persons and stories that differ from your own. The readings I have selected for class represent a variety of ideological and ethnic groups across geographic boundaries, historical periods, and identity categories. As such, this course will invite you to think critically about *what* kinds of stories exist in the world, *who* gets to tell those stories, *how* those stories get circulated, and *which* stories are most often deemed worthy of literary study. Ideally, these global narratives and the voices they represent will provide you with a compelling glimpse into our large and complex world.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To recognize and articulate the benefits of global literary studies, which include empathy, creativity, sociocultural awareness, and an appreciation for diverse perspectives.
- To understand the role of various contexts in the production, reception, and transmission of literary and cultural texts across historical, geopolitical, and cultural differences.
- To analyze underrepresented experiences and cultural diversity in global literature—with particular attention to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality—through the sustained study of multicultural texts and media from various regions and historical periods.

PANDEMIC OBJECTIVES

- To be patient and kind with ourselves and with one another throughout the semester.
- To embrace the opportunity to learn in new ways and to grow as students and thinkers.
- To communicate openly and clearly with each other about our expectations, concerns, and goals for this course. If you are willing to tell me what you need, I will tell you how I can help.
- To be flexible. This is a strange time, and we are all a bit anxious. Our circumstances will likely change over the course of the semester. With that in mind, let us all work together to make this the best class possible, even as we recognize that it may be a bit of a moving target.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND PLATFORMS

To access the readings and complete the assignments for this course, you must have an active Perusall account. If you do not already have one, you can create a new account at <http://app.perusall.com>. Please use the course code 'MILLER-C4HQT' to enroll in this course. All of the assigned readings for this course can be found as PDFs on Perusall at <http://app.perusall.com>. We will make active use of both BlazeVIEW and Perusall throughout the semester to help you engage with the course assignments and themes.

COURSE GRADING

- **PARTICIPATION** — Video Completion (5%)
- **ENGAGEMENT** — Digital Annotations (50%)
- **SYNTHESIS** — Weekly Reflections (30%)
- **APPLICATION** — VSU Narrative Project (15%)

Please submit all assignments to the appropriate platform by 11:59 PM on the due date *unless otherwise directed*. For each day an assignment is late, I may lower your grade by one grade increment.

Please note that you must complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade for this course.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

VIDEO COMPLETION

Student engagement and a sense of community are both important to the learning experience, and I strive to create environments in which all students feel free to say what they think, ask questions, object, criticize, request clarification, return to a previous subject, and respond to others. In an online course, however, this can be challenging. I will not receive the same verbal and visual feedback from students that I do in a bricks-and-mortar classroom. Therefore, to make sure that you engage with the content and stay abreast of key themes and issues in this class, a small portion of your grade will consider your efforts to watch all of the videos I post to BlazeVIEW. I will keep my videos brief, as each video will focus primarily on the frameworks and feedback that are most essential to your success.

DIGITAL ANNOTATIONS

Your assigned readings, most of which are available as PDFs, need to be completed on Perusall. You are required to annotate these texts by the assigned due dates in Perusall. These digital annotations will be the primary vehicle for engaging in conversations with your peers this semester and will also demonstrate your ability to read literature carefully and critically. For more information on how to annotate your texts or how to use Perusall, please see the supplementary materials on BlazeVIEW.

WEEKLY REFLECTIONS

Beginning with the second week of the semester, you should submit a reflection of 500–750 words to BlazeVIEW in response to my prompt each week. Please be sure to read each prompt carefully before submitting your work, as you will be graded on how effectively you use textual evidence to craft your response and to synthesize our weekly readings. While I will not grade these posts for grammar and style, you should be thoughtful and edit your prose. These are “open-book” assignments; you are free to use the readings and your notes to craft a reflection that best responds to the weekly prompt.

VSU NARRATIVE PROJECT

After spending the semester reflecting on the global circulation of outbreak narratives and the rhetoric of disease, your final assignment will ask you to think about narratives of contagion *locally*. I will provide you with a timeline of COVID-19 communications from VSU to the student body, as well as a link to the university’s “Dear Blazer Nation” video, and I will ask you to reflect on the story of contagion that we have constructed as an institution. This reflection should examine that story within the context of this course and in conversation with the assigned readings from class. You will be asked to submit a 1000-word analysis of this VSU narrative to BlazeVIEW by the end of the semester.

COURSE POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are bound by the university policy on academic integrity. All references to ideas and texts other than your own must be indicated through appropriate citations and footnotes. *You are responsible for being aware of and following the rules regarding the university academic integrity policy.* I reserve the right to give you a failing grade in this course for acts of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty. Please be sure to review VSU’s Academic Integrity Code or consult with me if you have questions.

EMAIL AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Please address all emails to me using your VSU email address. To reach me quickly, it is generally better to send emails outside of BlazeVIEW, if possible—I can be slow to respond in BlazeVIEW. When I need to

communicate with you or send out class announcements, those messages will be addressed primarily to your VSU email address. I generally try to respond to email inquiries within 24-48 hours.

CLASS CONTENT AND DISCOMFORT STATEMENT

In this course, we will address ideas, topics, and theories that may challenge your taken-for-granted and “sacred” beliefs about race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, religion, ability, etc. In discussing how power and injustice operate and how they are experienced as oppression, subjugation, and violence by various persons, it is possible that you may feel some discomfort, guilt, anger, anxiety, or sadness. These feelings are normal responses to exploring such issues and they can be critical to the learning process. These feelings also have the potential to support a deeper understanding of structural inequalities, individual suffering, empathy, and human interconnectedness. *I will do my best this semester to create an online community in which these feelings can be discussed openly and honestly among us.* I encourage you to share your ideas for making our class an inclusive online space in which all students can thrive. You are always welcome to contact me individually to discuss concerns.

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT SUPPORT

As an educator, I fully support the rights of undocumented students to an education and to live free from the fear of deportation. I also recognize that immigration is a complex phenomenon with broad impact—particularly for those who are directly affected by it, as well as those who are indirectly affected by their relationships with family members, friends, and loved ones. I want *all* students, regardless of immigration status or country of origin, to feel a sense of belonging and safety as they pursue their goals. With that in mind, *I commit to not sharing your status with anyone if you reveal it to me.* I would also remind you that, by federal law, faculty and other school officials at VSU *cannot* disclose personal information about students without permission—that includes your immigration status.

TITLE IX STATEMENT

VSU is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive work and learning environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. VSU is dedicated to creating an environment where all campus community members feel valued, respected, and included. As such, VSU prohibits discrimination—on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex (including sexual harassment and sexual violence), sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status—in the University's programs and activities as required by applicable laws and regulations such as Title IX. The individual designated with responsibility for coordination of compliance efforts and receipt of inquiries concerning nondiscrimination policies is the University's Title IX Coordinator. Contact information for the Title IX Coordinator can be found here: titleix@valdosta.edu, 1208 N. Patterson Street, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia, 31698, 229-333-5463.

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT

Those of you with disabilities who experience barriers in this course may contact the VSU Access Office for assistance in determining and implementing accommodations. The Access Office is located in Farbar Hall. The phone numbers are 229-245-2498 (V) and 229-375-5871. For more information, please visit the Access Office or feel free to contact them via email at access@valdosta.edu.

MENTAL HEALTH STATEMENT

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that interfere with learning, such as strained or violent relationships, death and loss, anxiety, substance use, depression, difficulty concentrating, and lack of motivation. These concerns may diminish your performance in class and reduce your ability to participate in school activities. *There are services available to you.* You can learn about these mental health services at: <http://www.valdosta.edu/student/student-services/counseling-center>.

USE OF THE SYLLABUS

A syllabus is a tentative document and may be revised at my discretion. You should check it regularly and update your calendars when deadlines or assignments change. Questions about class can often be answered by consulting the syllabus. A best practice for being successful is to read the syllabus in its entirety. *Once you have read this syllabus, please email me a link to the illness you find most intriguing.*

COURSE CALENDAR

WEEK ONE: AUGUST 17 – AUGUST 22

MODULE I — INTRODUCTION TO WORLD LITERATURE III

- **WATCH** — Introductory Video for “World Literature III” on BlazeVIEW
- **ANNOTATE** — Course Syllabus for “World Literature III” on Perusall
- **COMPLETE** — Create Perusall Account and Familiarize Yourself with the Platform
- **COMPLETE** — Visit BlazeVIEW and Familiarize Yourself with the Course Management System

MODULE II — OUTBREAK NARRATIVES AND COMING TO TERMS WITH CONTAGION

- **ANNOTATE** — Priscilla Wald, Selection from *Contagious* (2008)
- **ANNOTATE** — Kirsten Ostherr, “Humanities as Essential Services” (2020)

WEEK TWO: AUGUST 23 – AUGUST 29

MODULE III — WEALTH, MOBILITY, AND THE POLITICS OF THE PLAGUE

- **ANNOTATE** — Giovanni Boccaccio, Selection from *The Decameron* (1353)
- **ANNOTATE** — Edgar Allan Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842)

MODULE IV — RELIGION AND THE QUESTION OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- **ANNOTATE** — Ibn al-Wardi, Selection from *Risalah* (1349)
- **ANNOTATE** — Martin Luther, “Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague” (1527)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #1 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY AUGUST 29 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK THREE: AUGUST 30 – SEPTEMBER 5

MODULE V — SCIENTIFIC RACISM AND THE INVENTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

- **ANNOTATE** — Alexander Hamilton, “To the College of Physicians” (1793)
- **ANNOTATE** — Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *A Narrative of the Proceedings* (1794)
- **ANNOTATE** — Cristobal Silva, Selection from “Republic of Medicine” (2016)

MODULE VI — COLORISM AND CONFLICT IN THE CARIBBEAN

- **ANNOTATE** — Mary Seacole, Selections from *Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole* (1857)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #2 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY SEPTEMBER 5 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK FOUR: SEPTEMBER 6 – SEPTEMBER 12

MODULE VII — CONSPIRACY AND CONTAGION IN AN AGE OF REVOLUTION

- **ANNOTATE** — Charles Brockden Brown, *Ormond* (1799)

MODULE VIII — IMAGINED IMMUNITIES AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING

- **ANNOTATE** — Charles Brockden Brown, *Ormond* (1799)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #3 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY SEPTEMBER 12 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK FIVE: SEPTEMBER 13 – SEPTEMBER 19

MODULE IX — GENDER POLITICS AND THE VIOLENCE OF MASCULINITY

- **ANNOTATE** — Charles Brockden Brown, *Ormond* (1799)
- **EXTRA CREDIT FILM:** William Wyler, *Jezebel* (1938)

MODULE X — IMMOBILITY AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF QUARANTINE

- **ANNOTATE** — Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #4 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY SEPTEMBER 19 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK SIX: SEPTEMBER 20 – SEPTEMBER 26

MODULE XI — SOCIAL HYGIENE AND THE POLITICS OF SURVIVAL

- **ANNOTATE** — Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947)

MODULE XII — MORAL ANGUISH AND THE PLAGUE OF ABSURDITY

- **ANNOTATE** — Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #5 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY SEPTEMBER 26 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK SEVEN: SEPTEMBER 27 – OCTOBER 3

MODULE XIII — STORYTELLING AND THE DESPERATION OF HOPE

- **ANNOTATE** — Ghassan Kanafi, “The Death of Bed No. 12” (1961)
- **ANNOTATE** — Naguib Mahfouz, “Zaabalawi” (1961)
- **EXTRA CREDIT ANNOTATION:** S.A. Afolabi, “Monday Morning” (2004)

MODULE XIV — METAPHYSICS, SCIENCE FICTION, AND THE POSTHUMAN MIND

- **ANNOTATE** — Julio Cortázar, “Headache” (1951)
- **ANNOTATE** — Sayuri Ueda, “The Street of Fruiting Bodies” (2014)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #6 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY OCTOBER 3 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK EIGHT: OCTOBER 4 – OCTOBER 10

MODULE XV — MASCULINITY, SEX, AND NARRATIVES OF INFECTIOUS VIOLENCE

- **ANNOTATE** — James Tiptree, Jr., “The Screwfly Solution” (1977)
- **ANNOTATE** — Carmen Maria Machado, “Inventory” (2017)
- **EXTRA CREDIT ANNOTATION:** Anna-Marie McLemore, “Roja” (2018)

MODULE XVI — SOCIAL PARANOIA AND THE BORDERS OF THE SELF

- **ANNOTATE** — Rebecca Roanhorse, “Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™” (2017)
- **ANNOTATE** — Ha Seong-nan, “The Woman Next Door” (2019)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #7 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY OCTOBER 10 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK NINE: OCTOBER 11 – OCTOBER 17

MODULE XVII — DISASTER CAPITALISM AND THE PLASMA ECONOMY

- **ANNOTATE** — Yan Lianke, *Dream of Ding Village* (2006)

MODULE XVIII — OF FEVER DREAMS AND BLOODLESS PROSE

- **ANNOTATE** — Yan Lianke, *Dream of Ding Village* (2006)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #8 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY OCTOBER 17 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK TEN: OCTOBER 18 – OCTOBER 24

MODULE XIX — MORAL CONTAMINATION AND POLITICAL CORRUPTION

- **ANNOTATE** — Yan Lianke, *Dream of Ding Village* (2006)

MODULE XX — PROFIT AS CONTAGION AND NECROCAPITALIST NARRATIVES

- **ANNOTATE** — Yan Lianke, *Dream of Ding Village* (2006)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #9 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY OCTOBER 24 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK ELEVEN: OCTOBER 25 – OCTOBER 31

MODULE XXI — PESSIMISM AS PESTILENCE AND THE FAILURES OF EMPATHY

- **ANNOTATE** — Amir Taj al-Sir, *Ebola '76* (2012)

MODULE XXII — THE ANTI-HERO AS A SYMPTOM OF COLONIALISM

- **ANNOTATE** — Amir Taj al-Sir, *Ebola '76* (2012)
- **EXTRA CREDIT FILM:** Steven Soderbergh, *Contagion* (2011)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #10 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY OCTOBER 31 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK TWELVE: NOVEMBER 1 – NOVEMBER 7

MODULE XXIII — 'BETTER TO SCRATCH THE WOUND THAN BANDAGE IT'

- **ANNOTATE** — Yuri Herrera, *The Transmigration of Bodies* (2013)

MODULE XXIV — WORLD-WEARY ALLEGORIES AND POST-APOCALYPTIC NOIR

- **ANNOTATE** — Yuri Herrera, *The Transmigration of Bodies* (2013)
- **EXTRA CREDIT FILM:** David and Àlex Pastor, *The Last Days* (2013)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #11 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY NOVEMBER 7 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK THIRTEEN: NOVEMBER 8 – NOVEMBER 14

MODULE XXV — 'THE PRECAUTIONS OF NERVOUS PEOPLE ARE INFECTIOUS'

- **ANNOTATE** — Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (1872)

MODULE XXVI — TRANSGRESSIVE DESIRES AND BODILY (RE)POSSESSION

- **ANNOTATE** — Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (1872)
- **EXTRA CREDIT FILM:** Spencer Maybee, *The Carmilla Movie* (2017)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #12 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY NOVEMBER 14 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK FOURTEEN: NOVEMBER 15 – NOVEMBER 21

MODULE XXVII — POST-WORK FUTURES AND MILLENNIAL MALAISE

- **ANNOTATE** — Ling Ma, *Severance* (2018)

MODULE XXVIII — ZOMBIE POLITICS AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

- **ANNOTATE** — Ling Ma, *Severance* (2018)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #13 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY NOVEMBER 21 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK FIFTEEN: NOVEMBER 22 – NOVEMBER 28

MODULE XXIX — NOSTALGIA AS ‘A DISEASE OF REMEMBERING’

- **ANNOTATE** — Ling Ma, *Severance* (2018)
- **EXTRA CREDIT FILM**: Yeon Sang-ho, *Train to Busan* (2016)

*** There will be no second module or reflection this week due to the Thanksgiving Recess. ***

WEEK SIXTEEN: NOVEMBER 29 – DECEMBER 5

MODULE XXX — SYSTEMIC RACISM AND THE PATHOLOGIES OF PREJUDICE

- **ANNOTATE** — David Walker, Chuck Brown, Sanford Greene, et al, *Bitter Root* (2019)

MODULE XXXI — SOCIAL PESTILENCE AND THE TREATMENT OF APOCALYPTIC BODIES

- **ANNOTATE** — David Walker, Chuck Brown, Sanford Greene, et al, *Bitter Root* (2019)

WEEKLY REFLECTION #14 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY DECEMBER 5 AT 11:59 PM

WEEK SEVENTEEN: DECEMBER 6 – DECEMBER 11

MODULE XXXII — ALL GOOD THINGS MUST COME TO AN END

- **COMPLETE** — Please fill out course evaluations (SOIs) at <http://valdosta.smartevals.com>.

YSU NARRATIVE PROJECT MUST BE SUBMITTED BY DECEMBER 8 AT 11:59 PM