

Université de Montréal
Département de littératures et de langues du monde
Études anglaises
Fall 2023

Instructor: Prof. Heike Härting
Class: Tuesdays 8:30 to 11:30 am
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ANG 2480 -- Literature and the Planetary Imagination

Course Description:

Planetary cultural and literary studies is a research area that has emerged in critical dialogue with postcolonial and globalization studies. In contrast to the latter two, the former addresses the ways in which literature, drama, art, and film engage with such current political and social issues as climate change, the Anthropocene, planetary time and space, massive refugee movements, global violence and peace movements, and the aftermath of globalization. This new field of studies is highly interdisciplinary while its subjects can be approached from a multi-layered historical perspective. The course introduces students to the various “planetary entanglements” (Achille Mbembe) as they are represented and negotiated in a selection of literary texts. This course does not understand the planet as a fixed and overwhelming entity or given fact. Rather, we will try to learn what it means to read and imagine the planet as a critical and affective practice. The planetary often becomes visible through the global and “decenters the human” (Dipesh Chakrabarty). It invites us to read for the uncanny, that is, for that which escapes computational and instrumental reason. It questions the predominance of the individual in favor of ideas of commoning. This course will therefore engage with philosophies of alterity, metamorphosis, and the human-nonhuman commons. We will study specific narratives of planetary displacement, environmental destruction, war, biogenetics, gender, reproduction, disease, and collective forms of responsibility able to imagine shared decolonial futures.

Course Readings:

Novels (Available at the *Librairie/ UDM Bookstore/ any edition is permissible*)

1. Sophocles’s *Antigone* (Gutenberg Project)
2. Thúy, Kim, and Sheila Fischman. *Em*. Random House Canada, 2021.
3. Lai, Larissa. *The Tiger Flu*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018.
4. Hamid, Mohsin. *Exit West. A Novel*. Riverhead Books, 2017.
5. Mbue, Imbolo. *How Beautiful We Were*. Random House, 2021. (Extraction Economies and Imaginaries, Resistance)
6. Tadjó, Véronique. *In the Company of Men*. Other Press, 2021

Film (if time permits):

7. Ai Wei Wei's *Human Flow* (2017)

Possibly a selection of theoretical texts by Gayatri Spivak, Achille Mbembe, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Donna Haraway, and others (links will be available on StudiUM)

Class Assignments:

4 Short Critical Reflections (In-Class assignments/ 90 min. each/ Reflection on an assigned novel based on its plot, character, narrative form—no formal essay structure required)	40 %
Collective Evidence Research (20-min. in-class group presentation) (Topics: Ebola, conflict diamonds/ oil extraction, data mining and health, Vietnam war/Agent Orange/ American war, climate and refugees)	30 %
Final Essay (In-Class exercise)	20 %
Participation	10 %