Revised syllabus: October 12, 2017

THHP 301.1E-01: Vampires and Zombies: Fact and Fiction
Fall 2017       M Th 2:45-4        412 HW

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Course Description

Why zombies? Why vampires? Why zombies and vampires now? While audiences seem unable to resist the onslaught of the undead in fiction, film, television, video, graphic novels, etc., zombies and vampires don’t just live (or not live) in popular culture. There are also important connections to pressing issues in contemporary science. In this course, therefore, we’ll consider vampires and zombies in terms of folklore, history, politics, gender, race, and biology (to name just a few issues that will arise during the semester). Because of the wide range of materials and approaches, students will have opportunities to focus on the areas of their greatest interest.

Course Objectives

• To understand the cultural aspects underlying the historical and contemporary popularity of the undead.
• To understand the biological cognates of the undead found in nature.
• To understand the connections between modern issues in science and biology and the resurgence of popular interest in the undead.

Important Information

Plagiarism
Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The college is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

Academic Accommodation
In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional,
Medical, Physical and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room 1124 East to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call (212-772-4857) /TTY (212-650-3230).

Required Texts

N.B.: Almost all texts – except novels and films – are posted or linked on Blackboard. Exceptions are noted. Novels, but not films, have been ordered at Shakespeare & Co.

Novels
- Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) [only Part I required]
- Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897)

Books*
- Stuart Hill, *Emerging Infectious Diseases*
- Kelly A Hogan, *Stem Cells and Cloning*
- Michael A. Palladino, *Understanding the Human Genome Project*

*Part of the “Benjamin Cummings Special Topics in Biology Series.” These books are 40-50 pages each and written at a senior high school or first year college level.

Articles (plus others listed on schedule)
- Paige Brown, “Zombie Ants and a Cultural Obsession,” *Scientific American*
- Berdoy et al., “Fatal attraction in rats infected with *Toxoplasma gondii*,” *The Royal Society*
- Eric Michael Johnson, “A Natural History of Vampires,” *Scientific American*
- Nick Lane, “Born to the Purple: the Story of Porphyria,” *Scientific American*
- Other articles, as listed

Films (choices noted on schedule)
- *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943)
- *The Last Man on Earth* (1964)
- *Night of the Living Dead* (1964)
- *Nosferatu* (1922; F.W. Murnau, dir.)
- *Omega Man* (1971)
- *Twilight* (2008)
- *Warm Bodies* (2013)
- *White Zombie* (1932)

Requirements
**Participation** (15% total)

**Attendance**
Everyone is expected to come to class regularly, on time, and prepared to participate actively. Anyone missing more than four class sessions (two weeks of the course), for any reason, may be asked to leave the class or earn a failing grade.

Participation takes many forms, some in class, some on line, etc. In class, students should bring the reading or homework printed out (not electronic) and can be expected to answer as well as to ask questions, work in small groups, present and inform. The goal is thoughtful participation from which we all benefit.

Students are expected to check the class Blackboard site regularly for updates (it is your responsibility to be informed), as well as post regularly. Included in this category of participation are:

**Weekly informal responses**
These are due on the website (Blackboard Discussion Board) every week, ideally before the discussion of the text in class. You must respond every week, but you are encouraged to respond more often. Approximately half of your on-line posts should respond to images, texts, questions, class discussions, etc.; approximately half should respond to fellow students’ posts.

Different formats are encouraged (find/draw images, find/create music, etc.), but they must always be appropriate and constructive. All responses should relate specifically to the issues we’ve been discussing. 1-3 paragraphs

**Zombie and vampire “sightings”**
Everyone in the class will be on the look-out for signs of zombie and vampire activity in commercials, films, graphic novels, 5k races, video games, and more: if you see something, say something! Post to our ongoing collection of zombie/vampire texts.

**Presentations** (20% total)

a. Once during the semester, each student will be charge of beginning the class session by connecting the specific readings/viewings to the larger zombie/vampire issues we’ve been discussing. You should come to class with some general statements to begin class discussion plus some relevant resources about the materials under discussion during that hour. The presentation should end with 3-5 questions that the class should be able, by the end of the session, to have answers for (however tentative). Using visual materials is encouraged.

Since we have more students than class meetings, some students will be “doubling up,” in which case you will decide how to divide the time together. (For instance, one person could pose questions of the text; the other could pose questions of the secondary reading.) Each presentation will last *no more than* five minutes.
b. Since we are seeing so many films, what kind of film would you make if you could? Towards the end of the semester, working in small groups (3-5), students will make a “pitch” for the zombie/vampire film you envision. Visual presentations work best. And, of course, creative presentations are encouraged! See information on pitches in Course Materials. 5-minute presentation plus 5 minutes for Q&A

Writing assignments (65% total)

N.B.: Students will submit drafts of the formal writing assignments. More information about this will be added to Blackboard shortly.

a. Cinematic close reading. This is an informal assignment. Although you will receive a grade, responding to the assignment does not require classic essay format. A series of short paragraphs, bullet points or a combination of the two would be appropriate. The important thing is to a) gather information and b) look closely at one scene. Choose one scene from the material we’ve seen so far. For this assignment, you’ll need to pay attention to the particulars noted on “How to Watch a Film” and “How to analyze a scene in a film,” answering the questions in detail. You will need to view the scene a number of times in order to become aware of sound, lighting, camera angles, props, etc., in addition to the usual characters and setting and general background information.

Light secondary research is required for background information about the film of your choice. 2-4 pp. (10%)

b. Comparison and contrast. This is the first formal writing assignment. Choose a character, image, event, situation, or idea that is important in two of the texts we’ve encountered to this point – cinematic, written, or one of each. Write a thesis-driven essay, with plenty of specific details to support your argument.

Some questions to consider (these are prompts; you do not need to address them all): Why is this element particularly important? How does it appear in each of the texts (written and/or cinematic): the same, similarly, different, not at all? What differences do those changes make? What zombie issues are particularly important? Does one text do a better job of presenting or suggesting those issues? In what ways? Are there symbols or images that stand out as particularly important?

No outside sources are needed for this essay, though you’re free to refer to the secondary readings on the syllabus. MLA format is required, including Works Cited page. 4-6 pp. (15%)

c. Historical research. This is the second formal writing assignment. Choose either zombies or vampires to discuss in a thesis-driven essay with plenty of specific details and secondary sources to support your argument.

Pose and address a historical question pertinent to any of the material we’ve read so far. For this assignment, you’ll need to focus on the historical context of a character or situation or issue relating to zombies or vampires. You’ll therefore need to find at least two scholarly sources (articles or book chapters) that can help you address this issue.
(You’ll undoubtedly need to check many more sources in order to find the two or three that work best with your argument.)

Some questions to consider (these are merely prompts): Did anything you read surprise you? What did you learn that you didn’t know? Why is this historical topic important to understanding zombies or vampires as located in and arising from a particular time and place? What text(s) illustrate or reveal the historical topic you’re interested in? How does this topic help you rethink your understanding of zombies or vampires in your chosen text? Of zombies or vampires in general?

Secondary research is required for this essay. MLA format is required, including Works Cited page. 5-7 pp. (20%)

d. Disciplinary issues. This is the third formal writing assignment. Choose a film or written text (preferably one scene or chapter) and consider it in terms of one or two of the biological issues we’ve been considering. Then write a thesis-driven essay, with plenty of specific details and secondary sources to support your argument.

Some questions you might consider: Is the science, as presented in the text (written, visual, or cinematic) plausible? Was it plausible in the past, during the time period of the creation of the text? Is it more or less plausible now? What elements (e.g., social, technological, scientific) would need to be in place for the situation to develop as presented? How, either in fact or fiction, might the biological situation (possibly involving infection, transmission, mutation, vaccination, etc.) be addressed so as to present or contain a pandemic?

Secondary research is required for this essay. MLA format is required, including Works Cited page. 4-6 pp. (20%)

Schedule

N.B.: Some texts may be added or changed; check Blackboard regularly for updates.

Introduction: Zombies? Vampires?

M 8/28          Introductions
• What is a vampire? What is a zombie?
• What cultural work do they do?
• What biological issues are involved?
• What are some issues important to attend to throughout the semester?
• in class:
  Sprint zombie: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOXhtyAi7fU
  Audi vampire: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDV2yp_AjBM

Th 8/31         Monster Theory
• Cohen, “Monster Culture: Seven Theses”
• in class: Jackson, “Thriller”:
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMaA
I. Zombies: Microbiology/Host-Parasite/Epidemiology

M 9/4 NO CLASS

Th 9/7 American Cultural Undead Origins I
- Matheson, *I Am Legend*

M 9/11 American Cultural Undead Origins II
- *Night of the Living Dead*
- secondary reading: TBA
- “How to Watch a Film”
- “How to analyze a scene in a film”

Th 9/14 Zombie Apocalypse
- one (or more) of the films based on Matheson’s novella:
  - *The Last Man on Earth* (1964)
  - *Omega Man* (1971)
- secondary reading: Christie, “A Dead New World”

M 9/18 Primer on Microbiology: Bacteria, Viruses and Fungi
- “Fungus makes zombie ants do all of the work”
- “Fungus that controls zombie ants has own fungal stalker”
- “How to read and understand a scientific paper”

DUE: cinematic close reading exercise

Tu 9/19 CUNY THURSDAY
Host/Parasite Interactions: How microorganisms can hijack behavior
- “Ten parasites that control minds”
- “Toxoplasma gondii brain parasite infection from cats linked to schizophrenia, suicide”
- “Little Mind Benders”
- “Fatal attraction in rats infected with Toxoplasma gondii”

Th 9/20 NO CLASS

M 9/25 Haitian Zombie Origins
- Seabrook, “Dead Men Working” (posted)
- *White Zombie* or *I Walked with A Zombie* (or both)
- secondary reading: Kee, “‘They are not men’”

Th 9/28 Epidemiology: How modern science has impacted zombie mythology
- Hill, “Emerging Infectious Diseases”
- “Zombie ants and a cultural obsession”
• “The fungus that reduced humanity to the last of us”

M 10/2  Case Study: Zombie Attack!

Th 10/5  How to Fight Zombies
• Brooks, World War Z
• secondary reading: Ahmad, “Gray Is the New Black”

M 10/9  NO CLASS

II. Vampires: Blood/Blood Diseases/Anemia

Th 10/12  Primer on Blood: Blood cells and what they do

M 10/16  Diseases of the Blood: Rabies as a source of vampire mythology

DUE: draft of comparison and contrast essay

Th 10/19  Anemia: Porphyria as a source of vampire mythology

M 10/23  Gothic Vampire Origins
• Stoker, Dracula
• secondary reading: Arata, “The Occidental Tourist”

Th 10/26  Case Study: Anemia

DUE: comparison and contrast essay

M 10/30  The Modern Gothic Vampire
• Rice, Interview with the Vampire (Part I is required; the rest is optional)
• secondary reading: Skal, “Rotten Blood”

Th 11/2  Ethics/Politics/Vampires
• Johnson, “A Guide to the Fruits of Hawaii” (posted)
• Murnau (dir.), Nosferatu
• secondary reading: TBA

III. Humanizing the Monstrous (or vice versa): Genes/Genome Project/Cloning

M 11/6  Primer on Genes: Nurture vs. nature

DUE: draft of historical research essay

Th 11/9  Undead Love I: Vampires
• Butler, Fledgling
• secondary reading: Fink, “AIDS Vampire”

M 11/13 Human Genome Project – What makes us human?
  • Palladino, “Understanding the Human Genome Project”

Th 11/16 Undead Love II: Zombies
  • Warm Bodies
  • secondary reading: TBA

DUE: historical research essay

M 11/20 Cloning: Creating life
  • Hogan, “Stem Cells and Cloning”

Th 11/23 NO CLASS

M 11/27 Will We Still Be Human?
  • 28 Days Later
  • secondary reading: Rogers, “Hybridity and Post-Human Anxiety”

Th 11/30 Case Study: Genetically Modified Organisms

M 12/4 Group pitches
DUE: draft of disciplinary issues essay

Th 12/7 Group pitches

M 12/11 Conclusions

F 12/15 DUE: disciplinary issues essay