

A Zombie's History of Medicine and Technology

HSOC 141 920/STSC 141 920

Tuesdays & Thursdays 5:30-8:40, Williams 28

“The great thing about zombies is that they’re ever changing because they’re basically us. They can be employed to represent any facet of our development.”

- Simon Pegg, co-author and star of *Shaun of the Dead*

Instructor:

Deanna Day

Office: Claudia Cohen Hall 334

Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description:

From *28 Days Later* to the Center for Disease Control’s “Zombie Apocalypse Preparedness Guide,” zombies express our cultural anxieties and how we deal with them. Many of these fears focus on our relationships with our bodies and the systems of knowledge and expertise that we use to know and control them. Using more than a century of “zombie culture” as a lens, this course surveys the history of western medical knowledge and practice from antiquity to the present, with a particular focus on the technologies that have been used to manage bodies. We will examine primary sources (including elite medical texts, patients’ accounts, and device advertisements) to examine the history of medical knowledge and medical tools, as well as read secondary historical accounts. This approach provides historical and anthropological context for zombie media, and it uses entertainment and cultural fears as a way to understand the concerns and experiences of historical figures – including patients, caregivers, and policy-makers – on their own terms.

Organization:

This course will be organized by week, according to six major fears in the history of medicine. Each of these fears will be explored through a collection of “texts:” one or two exemplary pieces of zombie media, primary sources in the history of medicine or technology, and additional historical secondary source material. Each course meeting will be organized as a combination of discussion of course texts, student presentations, and lectures. We will treat

our zombies as primary sources, emblematic of historically-specific fears surrounding bodies and health; secondary sources and lectures will provide the historical context within which we can understand zombies in their own time.

Requirements:

Class Texts: You will be required, first and foremost, to come to class meetings fully prepared, having read or watched all required materials and being ready to discuss them. You will be expected to have read or watched each “text” (either film or secondary source) before the start of the class meeting under which it is assigned - we will be discussing them during that day’s meeting.

You will want to obtain one primary text for the course: Max Brooks’ *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*. Copies are available to purchase at the Penn Book Center (or via your preferred online or local book store); copies can also be obtained via the library. Readings will also be drawn from additional texts; these will be posted on the course site. Required films are available via purchase or rental in all the predictable ways; additional information can be found on the course site. If interest is high, we may also be able to arrange for required films to be screened outside of class group.

Course Site: zombies.deannaday.net

Assignments/Grading: The goal of this course is to use our twentieth-century cultural fascination with zombies as a way to understand the fear and anxiety beget by medicine, science, and technology during this moment in history. We will be accomplishing this in two ways, and your performance in these areas will result in your grade for the course.

First, class participation will make up 40% of your final grade. We will be grappling with complex and diffuse issues during this course, including issues of race, gender, class, military power, scientific authority, bioethical implications, social structures, and what it means to be human and/or alive. Working through these ideas actively via discussion in the classroom is a crucial component to learning in this course.

Second, an original research project will constitute the remaining 60% of your grade. This project will focus on an additional piece of zombie media that we have not discussed in class; you will analyze this “text” (be it film, book, graphic novel, television show, etc.) as a primary source that shows us something valuable about the cultural anxieties surrounding science, medicine, or technology at the time of its production and release. You will be required to

present your research project as a work in progress once during the semester, as well as turn in regular updates (see assignment sheet for schedule) and meet with the instructor at least once to discuss them.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week One: Introductions/Theorizing the Zombie

May 22: Life, Death, and The Pre-Zombie Undead

Reading: Center for Disease Control's "Zombie Apocalypse Preparedness Guide" (to be distributed during the first class meeting)

May 24: Theorizing Zombies, or Where do they come from, what do they want, and why do we fear them?

Reading: *World War Z*: Introduction and Chapter 1: "Warnings"

Week Two: Schisms Between Mind & Body

May 29: Constructing the Body of the Other

Film: *White Zombie*

June 31: Culture Clash - Assimilating the Germ Theory into Public Life

Reading: *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health*, Judith Walzer Leavitt: Prologue, Introduction, and Chapter Five: "'This Human Culture Tube': Media and the Cultural Construction of 'Typhoid Mary'" (pg. xvii-xviii, 126-161)

Week Three: Apocalyptic Big Science and the Cold War

June 5: The Structures of a New Society...

Film: *Night of the Living Dead*

June 7: ...and Who Might Live In It

Reading: *By The Bomb's Early Light*, Paul Boyer. Chapter 12: "Optimistic Forecasts" (pg. 133-50) and Chapter 17: "'Victory for What?' - The Voice of the Minority" (pg. 196-210)

Reading: *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima* M. Susan Lindee: Chapter One: "The Most Important People Living" (pg. 3-16)

Week Four: The Promises and Perils of Nature

June 12: Making Medicines - a History of Pharmaceuticals

Reading: Wade Davis, "The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombi." *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 9 (1983) p. 85-104

Reading: Making Sense of Illness, Robert Aronowitz: Chapter 3: "Lyme Disease" (pg. 57-83)

June 14: Medical Technology and the Fall of the Magic Bullet

Reading: *The Rise and Fall of Modern Medicine*, James Le Fanu: Part 2, Chapter One: "The Revolution Falters," Chapter 2: "The Dearth of New Drugs" and Chapter 3: "Technology's Failings," (pg. 211-229)

Reading: World War Z: Chapter 2, "Blame" and Chapter 3, "The Great Panic"

Week Five: The Modern Pandemics

June 19: The Outbreak Narrative

Film: *28 Days Later*

Reading: *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*, Priscilla Wald: Introduction

June 21: Research, Responsibility, & Response - Bureaucratic Management of the Uncontrollable

Reading: *Aids and its Metaphors*, Susan Sontag: Sections 1-2 and 4-6

Reading: World War Z: Chapter 4, "Turning the Tide" and Chapter 5 "Home Front USA" (pg. 105-186)

Week Six: A Zombie Bioethics

June 26: A Brief History of Bioethics - the Development of a Discipline and the Primacy of the Individual

Television Episode: *Dollhouse*, Unaired Pilot

June 28: Beyond Bioethics, or Learning how to live as part of the horde

Reading: World War Z: Chapter 8, "Total War" and Chapter 9, "Good-byes" (pg. 270-328)

Reading: "Taking the Least of You," Rebecca Skloot. *New York Times* (April 16, 2006)