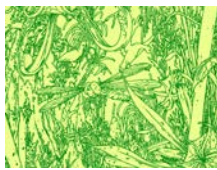




Instructor: **Jolene Mathieson**
Title: **Fiction from the Fringes: A Brief History of the Weird, the Dark and the Discomfiting in American Literature**
Course: **Seminar II [ENG-7, ENG-7a, ENG-13, AA7, AA11, LAA10, LAA13, AA-MA3, AA-MA4, AA-WB]**
Number: **53–566**
Time: **Mondays, 10–12h**
Room: **Ü35 – 01054**
Starts: **15.10.2018**

Course Description:



From Jeff VanderMeer's
Annihilation



From original frontispiece to
Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*



From Joanna Russ' *Hidden Side of the Moon*



From Samuel R. Delany's
Driftglass

This year marks the 200-year anniversary of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* – the monstrous and wildly successful urtext of science fiction, horror, the gothic and the weird. In honor of this novel, our course will trace the literary history of the weird, the dark and discomfiting as it migrated from the UK/Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century and mutated into an uncanny American hybrid. Exactly what generic mechanisms are at work to make literature 'weird,' 'dark' or 'discomfiting' has long been under theorization, and while this course may not offer any definitive answers to what China Miéville has called "the trauma of genre," it will provide extensive readings of difficult and disconcerting texts that have often been labelled 'science fiction,' 'horror,' 'fantasy,' 'surrealism' and/or 'the new weird.' Regardless of classification, however, the texts on our reading list all share a number of important features – 1) a pervasive sense of unease; 2) a prominent political dimension in which race, gender and/or class is disturbingly represented and/or dissected; 3) a desire to unrationalize narrative through the fuzzy logic of dissonance, rupture, death and violence; 4) a metaphysical estrangement and distortion of our tacit sense of reality; and 5) a hybridization and subversion of generic conventions that, as Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy argue, reveal the ways in which "those conventions are poor and desperate attempts to ward off" (2016), what Robert Aickman calls, "the shivering void" (2014). The task of this seminar, then, is to closely examine these five features and to determine and evaluate the status of the "shivering void" as represented in a chronological arc of seminal texts. These texts will include two short novels (Edgar Allan Poe's silly, defective 'lost-world' novella, *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, and the first installment of Jeff VanderMeer's eco-horror "Southern Reach" trilogy, *Annihilation*), plenty of short stories (such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Octavia Butler's "The Bloodchild," Carmen Maria Machado's "The Husband Stitch," and many more) as well as works of philosophy/critical theory (including excerpts from Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* and Thomas Ligotti's *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror*). **While none of these texts are particularly long, they are all very demanding, in terms of both their metaphysics and their politics, and will hence require a serious and professional investment of your time.**

Requirements: The *Studienleistung* will consist of thorough preparation of all reading material, completion of weekly homework assignments, and active participation. The *Prüfungsleistung* consists of a research paper, the length of which is determined by your module. Each of you must purchase the 'Seminar 53–566' Reader at Cobra Copy (Von-Melle-Park 5, 20146 HH) as well as Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (please buy the Oxford World's Classics edition with its very helpful explanatory notes) and Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation*.