

English 258: Pop Culture—Fall 2009

CRN: 83191, Section #001, MWF 2:30pm-3:20pm, 48 Stansbury Hall

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Superheroes, Super Geeks, the Supernatural, and the Magical as Cultural Critique

This course focuses on particular pop culture phenomena that have become especially prominent in the past ten years. In particular, ideas of people possessing powers, knowledge, or skills that are far beyond a simple human's ability have captured the imagination. Recently, Harry Potter has stormed the world with his magical wizarding skills and vampires have been re-created apart from their history of bloodthirsty killers in shows like *True Blood* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as well as the Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series. At the same time, our culture has been particularly interested in science and technology as a means of gaining superpowers. In reading Alan Morre's graphic novel, *The Watchmen*, we will discuss his critique of science and technology through the superhero. Finally, in the midst of all of these differing discourses surrounding the supernatural, shows like *Bones* combat the supernatural by presenting science and empirical thinking as a way of thinking through the same cultural issues that the supernatural also addresses. Finally, we will look at *The Fringe* as a show that combines the supernatural and the scientific in order to present a science fiction representation of our culture.

In addition to simply watching these shows, we will address the following questions: What is the appeal of rethinking the traditional stereotype of the vampire? How does this reflect our culture? Why have books like *Twilight* and the *Harry Potter* series been so compelling for both young and adult audiences? How do superheroes and the scientific function to combat the supernatural and critique our culture? Most importantly, how do all of these fictional storylines reflect current cultural issues and concerns?

Required Texts

- Meyer, Stephanie. *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown, 2008. (ISBN: 0316038377)
- Moore, Alan and Dave Gibbons. *The Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics, 1995. (ISBN: 0930289234)
- Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic Paperbacks, 1999. (ISBN: 059035342X)
- *True Blood: The Complete First Season*. Dir. Alan Ball. Perf. Anna Paquin and Stephen Moyer. HBO Home Video, 2009. (ASIN: B001FB4W0W; **Not available at bookstore: purchase at Amazon, rent, or view at library**)
- *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Dir. David Yates. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson. Warner Home Video, 2007. (ASIN: B000W7F5SS; **Not available at bookstore: Purchase through Amazon, rent, or view at library**)
- *New Moon*. Dir. Chris Weitz. Perf. Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattison. Summit Entertainment, 2009. (**View over Thanksgiving Break at Movie Theater**)

Texts Accessible via the Web at www.hulu.com or www.fancast.com (unless otherwise noted)

- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Season 1, Episodes 1-12). Dir. Joss Whedon. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Nicholas Brendon, and Alyson Hannigan. Mutant Enemy Productions, 1997.
- *Bones*. (Episodes TBA). Perf. Emily Deschanel and David Boreanaz. Fox Network, 2005.
- *The Fringe*. (Episodes TBA). Prod. J.J. Abrams. Perf. Anna Torv and Joshua Jackson. Fox Network, 2008.

Additional Readings Accessible via Online Databases at Library Webpage (unless otherwise noted)

- Abbott, Stacey. "Embracing the Metropolis: Urban Vampires in American Cinema of the 1980s and 90s." *Vampires: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*. Ed. Peter Day. New York: Rodopi, 2006. 125-142. (E-Reserves)
- Adney, Karley Kristine. "From Books to Battle: Hermione's Quest for Knowledge in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*." *The Washington and Jefferson College Review*. 54 (2004): 103-112. (E-Reserves)
- Aram, Sepideh S., Kristin S. Russel, and Mona P. Potter. "Analysis of *Twilight* Child Psychology." *Journal of American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry*. 48.7 (2009): 771-773. (E-Campus)

- Buttsworth, Sara. “‘Bite Me’: Buffy and the Penetration of the Gendered Warrior-Hero.” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*. 16.2 (2002):185-199. (Database: Film & Television Literature Index)
- Early, Frances H. “Staking Her Claim: Buffy the Vampire Slayer as Transgressive Woman.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 35.3 (2001) : 11-27. (Database: Film & Television Literature Index)
- Fishbaugh, Brent. “Moore and Gibbons’s Watchmen: Exact Personifications of Science.” *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*. 39.3 (1998) : 189-198. (E-Reserves)
- Gever, Martha. “The Spectacle of Crime, Digitized: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation and Social Anatomy*.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. 8.4 (2005): 445-463. (E-Reserves)
- Hughes, Jamie A. “‘Who Watches the Watchmen?’: Ideology and ‘Real World’ Superheroes.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 39.4 (2006) : 546-557. (Database: MLA International Bibliography)
- Kidd, Dustin. “Harry Potter and the Functions of Popular Culture.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 40.1 (2007) : 69-89. (Database: MLA International Bibliography)
- Latham, Rob. “The Cybernetic Vampire of Consumer Youth Culture.” *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002. 1-21. (E-Reserves)
- Mangold, Manuela. “The Body’s Twist: How Does the Body Construct a Story.” *Picturing America: Trauma, Realism, Politics & Identity in American Visual Culture*.” Frankfurt:Peter Lang, 2007.37-48. (E-Reserves)
- Overstreet, Deborah Wilson. “Vampire 101.” *Not Your Mother’s Vampire: Vampires in Young Adult Fiction*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2006. 1-18. (E-Reserves)
- Petersen, Line Nybro. “Understanding Superpowers in Contemporary Television Fiction.” *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*.” 6.1 (2008) : 91-106. (Database: Film & Television Literature Index)
- Picart, Caroline Joan (Kay) and Cecil Greek. “The Compulsions of Real/Reel Serial Killers and Vampires: Toward a Gothic Criminology.” *Draculas, Vampires, and Other Undead Forms: Essays on Gender, Race, and Culture*. Ed. John Edgar Browning and Caroline Joan (Kay) Picart. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2009. 37-62. (E-Reserves)
- Sax, Leonard. “*Twilight* Sinks Its Teeth Into Feminism.” *The Washington Post*. Aug. 17 2008, B07. (E-Campus)
- Schopp, Andrew. “Cruising the Alternatives: Homoeroticism and the Contemporary Vampire.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 30.4 (1997): 231-243. (Database: Film & Television Literature Index)
- Spaise, Terry L. “Necrophilia and SM: The Deviant Side of Buffy the Vampire Slayer.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 38.4 (2005) : 744-762. (Database: Film & Television Literature Index)
- Wilcox, Rhonda V. “‘Who Died and Made Her the Boss?’: Patterns of Mortality in *Buffy*.” *Fighting the Forces: What’s at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002. 3-17. (E-Reserves)

Attendance

Regular attendance is necessary for you to succeed in my class. You may miss up to 3 classes with no penalty. I don’t even need to know why you missed. After 3 absences, each absence will **LOWER** your final grade by a letter. If 6 or more absences occur, you will **FAIL** the course. If you miss a conference, it will count as one absence. Excessive tardiness will result in the lowering of your final grade by a full grade level. For each 3 instances of tardiness, your final grade level will be lowered a full grade level. For example, if you have 3 tardies, then your grade is marked down one grade level lower, and if you have 6 tardies, then your grade is marked down two grade levels, etc...

Also, if you know in advance that you will be missing class, you must contact me beforehand if you would like to turn in your work early. In addition, if you miss a class, you are responsible for the work due during your absence or on the following days after your absence. A missed class will not give you an extension for the work due. Under no circumstances do I accept e-mailed work. If you miss a class for whatever reason, you miss the opportunity to turn in your work.

Cell Phones

There is really no reason to have a cell phone on every second of everyday. Otherwise, turn them off when you enter the classroom. Frequent interruptions by cell phones (either through calls or text messaging) will **lower** your participation grade to an **F** for the semester.

Office Hours and E-Mail

Office hours (listed above) provide a great chance to talk one-on-one. Please stop by to ask questions—or just to say hello. You may drop in during these times or make an appointment with me to talk about any questions or comments you have about your progress in the course. I'd be happy to talk with you via email as well, and you can expect that I will respond to you (in email or in class) from 9am to 5pm on Monday through Friday. So that we can use e-mail and the Internet to extend course conversations in a variety of ways, please activate and check your MIX account. (Note: you can forward MIX to another account.)

In addition, this is a writing class. Improperly formatted e-mails are not allowed. In every e-mail, you must have an opening remark (Dear so and so), the body of the e-mail, a closing remark (Sincerely, etc...), and your full name (first and last) written at the bottom. In addition, e-mails should be properly formatted—meaning using proper sentence structure, capitalization, and the absence of text/IM language (like **u** for **you**). If you do not follow proper e-mail format, then you forfeit the opportunity of receiving a response from me.

Late Work & Missed Deadlines

Under no circumstances do I accept late work. Your work must be organized, collected, and ready to be turned in at the beginning of the class period in which it is due. There are no exceptions to this rule. Please, make sure that you have ink in your printer and that your printer is functioning in advance of the day when a paper is due. Make sure that you have paper. Remember to save and back-up your work often. If you do not have your work, then you receive a 0/F on that assignment. Outside of emergencies, I do not and will not give extensions on work that is due.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the inclusion of another's words or ideas as your own in a paper you submit for this class. This includes having another person write a paper for you, turning in another student's work who has previously had an English 258 class, taking any or all information, writing, or ideas from the internet without proper MLA in-text citations and works cited entries, and pulling any information, writing, or ideas from any other type of source that is not your own work. To avoid plagiarism, you should always use proper MLA in-text citations for all quotations (which are direct word for word quotations in quotation marks) and for all paraphrased information (which is the use of others' ideas and information, which has been converted into your own language). For specific in-text guidelines, reference MLA in-text citation guidelines.

If you do plagiarize, the maximum penalty is an Unforgivable "F" in the course, which means that you have to re-take and pass English 258 during another semester and that the "F" is never removed from your QPA or from your transcript. Your instance of plagiarism will be documented with the proper authorities—including the deans or assistant deans of the college of your chosen major, English department writing coordinators and chairs, and the dean of student relations.

Social Justice

This class fully supports the WVU social justice policy for the classroom. For more information on specific policies and guidelines, see the Social Justice website at: <http://socialjustice.wvu.edu/>.

Grading

Written Components

- ✓ Paper Proposal (5%)/No Revisions
- ✓ Annotated Bibliography (10%)/No Revisions
- ✓ Final Paper (15%)/One Revision Allowed
- ✓ Final Paper Intro & Outline (5%)/No Revisions
- ✓ Popular Culture Paragraphs (15%)/No Revisions

Exams

- ✓ Midterm Exam (20%)
- ✓ Final Exam (20%)

In-Class Component

- ✓ In-Class Participation (10%)

Grading for Written Assignments and Exams

- A: Ideas are well-developed, original, and succeeds in mastering the technical goals for the assignment.
- B: Ideas are written with considerable care and attention. They are developed and detailed. Aspects of the technical goals still need work and/or ideas need development.
- C: Ideas and structure are acceptable. The student needs to make more effort to master the technical goals and/or develop a thoughtful and focused analysis of the text.
- D: Student has made some effort to achieve the assignment goals, but basic fundamentals of writing and analysis need improvement.
- F: Does not achieve the assignment’s technical goals and/or it does not present a focused or thoughtful analysis of the text.

Format (For All Typed Assignments—Follow MLA Guidelines in *Easy Writer*)

- Double Spaced
- 1” Top & Bottom Margins, 1” Left & Right Margins
- 12 pt., Times New Roman
- Do Not Double Space Header
- All Typed Pieces Must Have a Title

Websites for the Class

- MIX (for e-mail): <http://www.mix.wvu.edu>
- E-Campus (for electronic copies of class work): <http://ecampus.wvu.edu>. (Use MIX ID & Password)

Schedule of Work

****Subject to change according to progress****

Week	Date	Topic for Class	Homework (Due Class Listed)
1	8/24	General Introductions; Discuss Syllabus	
	8/26	Intro to Pop Culture; Writing Basics	Read ALL of the syllabus
	8/28	Writing Basics; Discuss Reading	Overstreet Reading
2	8/31	Discuss Reading	Petersen and Abbott Readings
	9/2	Discuss Reading	Latham Reading
	9/4	Discuss Reading	PCP 1; Schopp Reading
3	9/7	NO CLASS-LABOR DAY	
	9/9	True Blood	True Blood Episodes 1-2
	9/11	True Blood	True Blood Episodes 3-4; PCP 2
4	9/14	True Blood	True Blood Episodes 5-7
	9/16	True Blood	True Blood Episodes 8-9
	9/18	Discuss Secondary Reading	PCP 3; Overstreet Reading #2
5	9/21	True Blood Wrap-Up	True Blood Episodes 10-12
	9/23	Buffy Intro	Buffy Episodes 1-3
	9/25	Formal Class Cancelled; Online Discussion of Secondary Reading	PCP 4 Due in my Mailbox, 100 Colson Hall by 4pm; Wilcox Reading
6	9/28	Buffy	Buffy Episodes 4-6
	9/30	Buffy	Buffy Episodes 7-9
	10/2	Discuss Secondary Reading	Paper Proposal Due; Early Reading
7	10/5	Buffy	Buffy Episodes 10-12
	10/7	Review for Midterm Exam	
	10/9	Midterm Exam	Midterm Exam
8	10/12	The Watchmen	Chapters 1-6
	10/14	The Watchmen	Chapters 7-12
	10/16	Discuss Secondary Reading	PCP 5; Fishbaugh and Hughes Readings
9	10/19	Bones	Bones Episodes To Be Announced
	10/21	Bones	Bones Episodes To Be Announced

	10/23	Discuss Secondary Reading	PCP 6; Mangold and Gever Readings
10	10/26	Fringe	Fringe Episodes To Be Announced
	10/28	Fringe	Fringe Episodes To Be Announced
	10/30	Discuss Secondary Reading	PCP 7; Picart Reading
11	11/2	Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone	Harry Potter & Sorcerer's Stone (1-162)
	11/4	Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone	Harry Potter & Sorcerer's Stone (163-309)
	11/6	Discuss Secondary Reading	Adney Reading
12	11/9	Harry Potter & Order of the Phoenix	Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix Movie; Annotated Bib Due
	11/11	Harry Potter & Order of the Phoenix	Final Paper Intro/Outline Due
	11/13	Discuss Secondary Reading	PCP 8; Kidd Reading
13	11/16	Twilight	Twilight Chapters 1-12
	11/18	Twilight	Twilight Chapters 13-End
	11/20	Discuss Secondary Reading	PCP 9; Aram and Sax Readings
14	11/23-11/27	Thanksgiving Break	
15	11/30	New Moon	New Moon Movie; First Draft of Paper Due
	12/2	New Moon	
	12/4	Discuss Secondary Reading	PCP 10; Spaise Reading
16	12/7	Discuss Secondary Reading	Buttsworth Reading
	12/9	End of Semester Wrap-Up	
	12/11	Review for Final Exam	Final Paper Due
17	12/8-12/12	FINAL EXAM	
