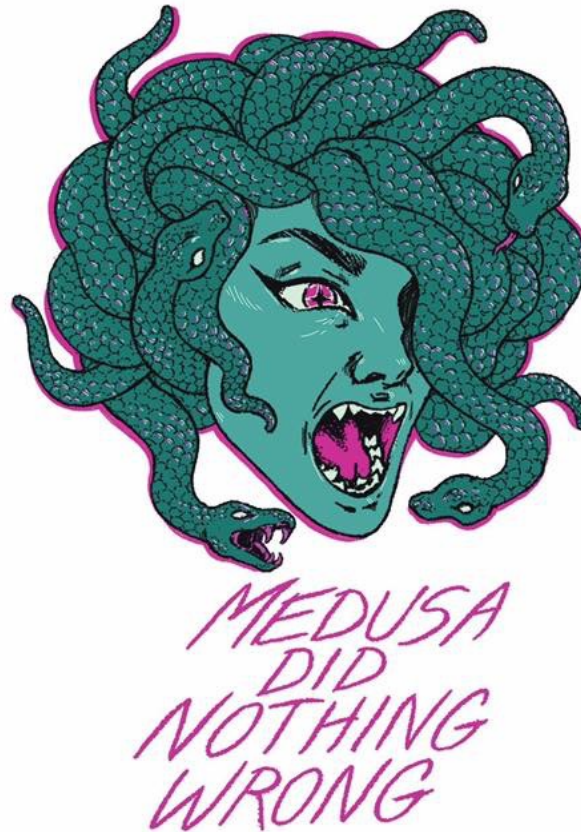


## Other Medusas / Otras Medusas

*Caribbean Abjections*



**Instructor:** Ronald Mendoza-de Jesús

**Email:** ronaldme@usc.edu

**Class Schedule:** T-Th 12:30-1:50 pm

**Course Location:** THH 209

**Office Hours:** T-Th 2:00-4:50 and by appointment

**Office Hours Location:** THH 156R

### I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

In spite of its reputation as a region characterized by unbridled sensuousness and unparalleled natural beauty, the Caribbean is home to some of the most persistent forms of abjection and dispossession that can be seen on the planet today. The root cause of this situation, it is often said, lies in the history of coloniality that is inextricable from Caribbean life today. What usually follows from this irrefutable historical claim is a call for a radical process of decolonization as the only way of putting an end to the enduring abjection that afflicts the Caribbean body politic.

Enter Medusa. From Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Disney's smash hit, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Medusa continues to exert a strange kind of fascination on our phallogocentric culture: at once a figure of immense power and helplessness, the force of her petrifying gaze is the very medium through which her image is time and again paralyzed, confined to signify forms of difference that are both terrifying and yet are already on their way to being subdued. That said, in recent years—largely thanks to the work of feminist writers and thinkers, working primarily in the Global North—Medusa has come to stand as an emblem for the possibility of rethinking our understanding of possession and dispossession, power and debility, ability and disability, beyond their simple oppositions. A similar phenomenon has taken place in the Caribbean, where feminist and queer authors have challenged the drive to sovereignty and mastery that continues to structure political, cultural, and aesthetic struggles in the region.

*Other Medusas/Otras Medusas* traces a genealogy of feminist-queer, Caribbean-diasporic literary and aesthetic production that includes the work of figures such as Julia de Burgos, Suzanne Césaire, María Irene Fornés, Rosario Ferré, Manuel Ramos Otero, Jamaica Kincaid, and Giannina Braschi. The task of this course is to explore the ways in which these Caribbean authors, much like their French-American feminist counterparts, invite us to rethink embodiment and abjection without positing the phantasm of a proper, sovereign body as the *goal* of political life and aesthetic creation.

## II. COURSE GOALS

This course satisfies the requirements of the major and minor in Spanish (SPAN). At a methodological level, the course is designed as a research seminar to help students acquire or consolidate their command of the interdisciplinary methods that inform knowledge-production practices in the critical humanities. At a thematic level, the course will give students the opportunity to become familiar with some of the foundational questions and texts of feminist theory and Caribbean literary and cultural studies.

At the end of the semester, students will have

- gained experience working both *in* and *across* different languages, rhetorical registers, and modes of composition
- developed their Spanish linguistic skills
- acquired a better understanding of Caribbean culture and history, becoming more aware and sensitive to the historical specificities of foreign cultures and to the particular set of political, ethical, and epistemological questions that emerge out of regions marked by post-coloniality.
- become more familiar with the conventions that inform the dissemination of research in the contemporary humanities
- composed pieces that use writing as a tool in different cognitive contexts, ranging from synthesizing and summarizing information, to articulating critical questions, to communicating their views or findings
- developed flexible composing and revising strategies and acquire an appreciation for the repetition that is often required to produce polished and effective written texts
- take advantage of the cultural offerings of the city of Los Angeles and become more acquainted with how Caribbean art has informed the cultural life in North America.

### III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**A. Written Assignments:** By the end of the semester, students will have practiced academic writing in different forms—from one-paragraph abstracts to article-length papers—and will have produced at least 15 pages of polished academic writing.

The writing exercises of our course are the following:

1. **two short responses written in Spanish** (2 pages)
2. **one short critical paper written in Spanish** (4 pages)
3. **rewrite of the critical paper**
4. **a final research paper written in Spanish** (8 pages)

Students are also required to do **two** in-class oral **presentations** based on the texts that we will be discussing in class.

The following shorter writing assignments will complement our main assignments:

1. an **abstract** for the critical paper (1 paragraph)
2. a **proposal** for the final paper (2 pages)

In the **responses**, students are invited to reflect on any dimension of the assigned readings or of our in-class conversations and discussions. These exercises will be scheduled early in the semester and are intended to give the instructor a good idea of student's rhetorical strengths and weaknesses. This exercise must be completed in **Spanish**.

In the case of the **critical paper**, the instructor will provide students with at least three paper topics from which students will select one. These will be distributed in class **two weeks** before the assignments' deadline. Before writing the critical paper, students will write a **one-paragraph abstract**, which will be due **one week** before the assignment's deadline. In their abstracts, students should mention their choice of topic and give a brief outline of the argument that they will make in their papers. Students will also be asked to **rewrite** their critical paper. This exercise must also be completed in **Spanish**.

For the **final paper**, students will be asked to come up with their own paper topics, write a **proposal** that summarizes the argument that they will make in their papers, and then write the paper. This assignment is meant to give students the opportunity to write an original piece of scholarship dealing with primary and secondary sources. By fulfilling this assignment, students will bring together the skills developed throughout the semester and begin to make contributions to scholarly conversations in the field of literary studies and humanistic inquiry broadly construed. The paper proposal is meant to help students clarify their ideas before writing their papers, as well as help the instructor give students feedback on their paper topics and projects before they start working on them.

**Written assignments will be due on the Sunday of the week indicated on the syllabus, by midnight.** Students can either bring a hard copy of their paper to class or email them to me on the day that the assignment is due. **No extensions will be granted.**

Students are required to use Times New Roman font, size twelve, and to double-space all their written assignments. When writing their papers, students must follow the guidelines established by the Modern Language Association (MLA), which will be discussed in class. Hard copies of all written assignments must be stapled.

**B. Presentations:** Students are also required to do an oral presentation once in the semester. Each student will be able to choose the time of their presentation. Presentations should be 10 minutes long (about 500 words typed, if the student chooses to write a short paper and read it aloud).

They should fulfill the following two expectations:

1. provide a brief summary of the assigned reading
2. raise some questions to help initiate a discussion of the material.

**C. Participation:** Students are expected to come to each class prepared to engage in discussion. This requires not only that students read the assigned material, but that they read it actively, posing questions to the text, identifying problems, recognizing patterns, ambiguities, bizarre word usage, strange metaphors, etc.

Students are also expected to meet with the instructor to talk about the written assignments, to discuss the selection of paper topics as well as any other issue pertaining to the course. Students are **required** to meet with the instructor at least **two times** over the course of the semester:

1. to discuss their critical paper before they rewrite it
2. to discuss their final paper proposals

Failure to meet this requirement will be reflected in the participation portion of your grade.

**Note on Attendance Policy:** Active participation requires the student's presence in class. Every student will be allowed three absences—excused or unexcused. Beyond that point, each absence will bring the student's final grade down by a third of a letter grade (from A to A-, from A- to B+, etc.). Also, every three times a student comes late to class an absence will be added to his or her record.

**Note regarding electronic devices:** No laptops or any other electronic devices will be allowed in the classroom. Students are also asked to turn off their cell phones upon entering the classroom.

#### IV. COURSE EVALUATION

<b>Response papers:</b>	10% (5% per paper)
<b>Critical Essay:</b>	30% (5% abstract, 10% first version, 15% rewrite)
<b>Final paper:</b>	40% (10% proposal, 30% final version)
<b>Presentations:</b>	10% (5% per presentation)
<b>Participation:</b>	10% (5% in class participation, 5% compulsory office hours meetings)

**Grades:**

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	less 60%

**Note on Academic Integrity:** Any instance of plagiarism will be subject to the disciplinary process outlined by USC's Student Judicial and Community Standards. Plagiarism is not restricted to copying word by word the writings and thoughts of others. It also includes citing improperly, as well as paraphrasing ideas taken from any source other than your own thoughts without recognizing the author of those ideas. Students should be familiar with the process outlined by USC's Student Judicial and Community Standards, which can be accessed in the link below:

[http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/pages/students/academic\\_integrity.html](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/pages/students/academic_integrity.html)

Students should also consult the *Trojan Integrity: A Guide to Avoid Plagiarism*, which can be accessed in the following website:

[http://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/903/docs/Trojan\\_Integrity\\_-\\_Guide\\_to\\_Avoiding\\_Plagiarism.pdf](http://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/903/docs/Trojan_Integrity_-_Guide_to_Avoiding_Plagiarism.pdf)

**Note on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the **Disability Services and Programs**, to obtain a letter of verification for approved accommodations. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in **3601 Watt Way, GFS 120** and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. Their website is:

<http://dsp.usc.edu/contact/>

**V. COURSE READINGS**

**Literary Texts:**

Julia de Burgos, *Poema en veinte surcos*

---, *El mar y tú*

María Irene Fornés, *Fefu and Her Friends*

Rosario Ferré, *Maldito amor y otros cuentos*

Manuel Ramos Otero, "El cuento de la mujer del mar"

---. Selections from *Invitación al polvo*

Giannina Braschi, *Yo-Yo Boing!*

Rita Indiana, *Nombres y Animales*

Jamila Medina, *Ratas en la alta noche*

Xavier Valcárcel, *El deber del pan*

### Essays, Criticism, and Theory:

Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, Selections from *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*  
Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of Medusa”  
Rosario Ferré, “De la ira a la ironía”  
Julia Kristeva, Selections from *Powers of Horror*  
Elissa Marder, “The Power of Love”  
---. “Force and Translation; Or the Polymorphous Body of Language”  
Mara Negrón, “El Caribe en la época de Babel”  
Édouard Glissant, “The Open Boat”

### Films:

Laurent Cantet, *Heading South*  
Dan Sickles and Antonio Santini, *Mala mala*

## VI. COURSE SCHEDULE

### 1. Introduction: Abject Medusas

01/08/19	Discussion of the Syllabus Introduction to Medusa, with special emphasis on Greek and Roman Sources (Selections from Hesiod, Pindar, Ovid) and early-modern Florentine representations of Medusa (Caravaggio, Cellini)
01/10/19	Freud, “Medusa’s Head” Selections from Ovid’s <i>Metamorphoses</i>
01/15/19	Kristeva, Selections from <i>Powers of Horror</i>
01/17/19	Kristeva, Selections from <i>Powers of Horror</i> <b>1<sup>st</sup> response paper due</b>
01/22/19	Cixous, “The Laugh of Medusa”
01/24/19	Cixous, “The Laugh of Medusa” Marder, “The Force of Love”

### 2. A Caribbean Medusa? Approaching Julia de Burgos

01/29/19	de Burgos, <i>Poema en veinte surcos</i> *
01/31/19	de Burgos, <i>Poema en veinte surcos</i> Ferré, “De la ira a la ironía” * <b>2<sup>nd</sup> response paper due</b>
02/05/19	de Burgos, <i>El mar y tú</i>
02/07/19	de Burgos, <i>El mar y tú</i> Ramos Otero, “El cuento de la mujer del mar”

02/12/19 Ramos Otero, *Invitación al polvo*  
02/14/19 Ramos Otero, *Invitación al polvo*

### 3. Embodied Translations, Transgressive Futures: *Other* Antillean Histories

02/19/19 Glissant, "Open Boat"  
02/21/19 Braschi, "Close-Up" \***Abstract Critical Paper due**  
02/26/19 Butler and Athanasiou, Selections from *Dispossession*  
02/28/19 Butler and Athanasiou, Selections from *Dispossession*  
03/05/19 Fornés, *Fefu and Her Friends*  
03/07/19 Fornés, *Fefu and Her Friends* \***Critical Paper Due**  
03/12/19 **Spring Break**  
03/14/19 **Spring Break**  
03/19/19 Cantet, *Heading South*  
03/21/19 Sickles and Santini, *Mala mala*  
03/26/19 Negrón, "El Caribe en la época de Babel"  
Marder, "Force and Translation"  
03/28/19 Ferré, *Maldito amor y otros cuentos*  
04/02/19 Ferré, *Maldito amor y otros cuentos*  
04/04/19 Ferré, *Maldito amor y otros cuentos* \***Rewrite Critical Paper Due**  
04/09/19 Ferré, *Maldito amor y otros cuentos*  
04/11/19 Jamila Medina, Selections from *Ratas en la alta noche*  
04/16/19 Xavier Valcárcel, *El deber del pan*  
04/18/19 Indiana, *Nombres y animales* \***Final Paper Proposal**  
04/23/19 Indiana, *Nombres y animales*  
04/25/19 Indiana, *Nombres y animales*

**Final paper due: May 9, 2019**