

Weeks 9-10: Victor LaValle, *The Ballad of Black Tom*

Jennings: Hi everyone, just waiting a few minutes for late log-ins. How was your spring break?

Kayla: It was alright, I had a lot of studying to do unfor

Cassie: Good, always seems to go by too quick!

Brayden: Got some much needed rest.

Bethany: A much needed break from school haha

Kayla: Oh no, i meant to type unfortunately! How was your spring break?

Evalynn: Still had lots of assignments to do but I was able to rest!

Cassie: What is the significance of adding mystery and the macabre to this story?

Oberon: How did Malone become interested in the paranormal/supernatural??? How did he come to find out about the odd things happening in Red Hook?

Evalynn: My dad told me that "Black Tom" is what people would call a black man who was subservient towhee people. Do you think this is why LaValle decided to use this name for Tommy after he decided to work for Robert Suydam?

Taylor: Is the magical elements in this story the authors portrayal of voodoo magic?

Haylee: I found it interesting that the novel closes with Tommy reflecting on his actions and regretting them. Why do you think he committed these acts in the first place and why do you think the author decided to close the story this way?

Evalynn: *to white people, sorry

Bethany: Tommy seemed amazed at what Suydam could do and almost seemed to look up to him in the first half of the book, only to end up killing him in the end. What changed inside Tommy and around him for him to get to this point?

Brayden: There was an ongoing theme of segregation between the neighborhoods that Tom traveled through. Was this meant to parallel the real world and the "other world"?

Kat: What happened after Tommy went into the portal at the end of Part 1?

Eliza: How significant was this stone to Tester and why did he hold on to it? I thought it was just a regular stone Suydam used to prove a point but he decided to keep it in the end, was it to remind Tester of what he said or is it deeper than that?

Kayla: While this book addresses and critiques Lovecraft's racist tones, do you think it was inspired by a modern lens of current social issues? The segregation within the city is still prominent today, the book addresses police brutality, immigration, etc.

Sadie: not really a question but this whole story makes me think of Skid Row in Los Angeles, how the police basically quarantined all the homeless, criminals, and immigrants inside the several blocks to keep away from "higher society" and this was happening when the original short story was first published

Kayla: <https://www.npr.org/2016/02/29/468558238/the-ballad-of-black-tom-offers-a-tribute-and-critique-of-lovecraft>

Kayla: Here is the interview if anyone is interested in checking it out!

Cassie: Thank you Kayla!

Bree: He's been fascinated by Tom from the beginning... and I think it because Tom is never debilitated by his race ... it's not his complete identity and that almost confuses Malone

Cassie: Even after they killed his dad in cold blood and then in a sense bragged to him about it, Tommy holds his head high and does not let them see him upset thereby not giving them any power over him. This was a very powerful scene, at least, in my opinion.

Evalynn: It mentions this on pg 83 [Malone's interest in the occult]

Cassie: Because its dark magic? But, beyond that it's all being done by those who are considered "outsiders".

Bree: Has anyone seen Lovecraft County? It gives me a bit of the same vibes

Cassie: See you next week!

Weeks 11-12: Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation*

Cassie: Why don't we learn the names of the characters?

Sadie: what is the affect of the audience not knowing certain things, like the names of the characters or anybackground to area x?

Eliza: This book is giving me a bunch of governmental stimulation vibes. Like Are they being put into this world to learn about it so that the government can gain control over it? I only ask this because they're being told to not bring any personal feelings or information into this world with them and it just has me wondering if the government is trying to create a new world or that they've discovered a new world where they will have more control over these people. And it make sense that they would have scientist explore the area because they're the best ones to actually say if this place is livable or not. And i feel like they're super determined since they're the 12th expedition.

Evalynn: How are people chosen to be on the expeditions?

Felix: I was really interested if anyone has any thoughts about what happened to her husband to possibly make him act the way he does upon his reappearance.

Kayla: What is the meaning of the quote on pg. 6" Desolation tries to colonize you"? What are the connotations associated with these words?

Bethany: Why would the psychologist send the biologist and the surveyor back down into the tower knowing they would discover what really happened to the anthropologist?

Taylor: Throughout we see how they try to convince the women that they are safe, but contradict it in other ways. Why do they not tell them exactly what they are going into?

Kat: Why do expeditions keep being sent, even though they end badly for the people involved almost every time?

Bree: Do you think it is intentional for nature to be in the forefront and for humans and every detail about them to be in the background?

Oberon: Do you think there's any significance in writing that the group is all women?

Bethany: This book reminds me a lot of The Maze Runner series and The 5th Wave series

Cassie: Yes! I got some major Maze Runner vibes too Bethany!

Bethany: Also is the psychologist linked with the government in a different way than the others?

Cassie: What was the point of keeping the journals in Area X? Were they not for Southern Reach?

Brayden: Does the crawler ignore the narrator because she has given in to her own annihilation?

Bethany: Could all or most of the mysterious creatures who live in Area X be a product of those who have died there?

Kat: Why does Southern Reach keep giving them journals to fill out if they never get the journals back?

Sadie: it is interesting the times that the biologist refers to the reader as if the reader is the next volunteer. why was this done and what effect does it have on the reader?

Kayla: The biologist notes how it didn't matter what they knew or didn't know because the members of the expedition weren't really expected to come back. Why not just tell them more? Or why tell them anything at all?

Katelyn: What did "flimsy gravestone" mean exactly? Were the journals basically used as their gravestone for people to know who they were and what they did in their life?

Bree: Do you guys think that even though they never get the journals back ... It could be their way of letting them hold on to the parts of them that have seemed to be stripped away during this journey ?

Evalynn: Since the lighthouse keeper seems to be trapped inside the Crawler, do you think all of the people the Crawler has "taken over" are within it?

Haylee: I found the contrast between the beauty and danger in Area X as really interesting. How does this contrast function in the novel and why do you think the author included this?

Bree: Maybe we should be looking at the journals through a psychological perspective ... do the journals give them purpose...? Make them feel like they are making Important discoveries...

Cassie: It makes me think that these volunteers are more sacrifices, not there for an expedition

Brayden: I kept waiting for a twist revealing that Southern Reach was just experimenting on these people.

Bethany: Yeah I noticed that [dolphin may have been her husband transformed]. It was as she was walking to the lighthouse I know. Page 97 and 98

Cassie: Yes! However, her husband came back right? Like from the expedition, but he was "off". Which makes me think about who really comes back, are those the actual people or clones? Maybe I'm getting to sci-fi about it LOL

Sadie: I agree with that

Brayden: Is she accepting the inevitable transformation, instead of fighting against it?

Kat: Maybe it kind of connects with her realizing that just because Area X is unknown and is taking over, it's not necessarily a bad thing

Cassie: And as a biologist, who has a deep appreciation for nature, I think she accepts this more willingly than most might.

Weeks 13-14: Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*

Jennings: How would you define apocalyptic fiction?

Oberon: A group of teens fighting for their lives to try and find the promised land, which is a place where it's almost like it was before collapse of society.

Sadie: when I think of apocalyptic lit, im usually reading books that take place after the Big Event. Like the Hunger Games, which isn't necessarily apocalyptic but they live very similarly to how the people in this book live

Kat: literature describing an imagining of the end of the world

Bethany: Stories about a futuristic society that is a product of some sort of disaster that occurred in the past.

Felix: Usually it's literature that takes place during a catastrophic and life changing event. Though mostly it takes place after the event has occurred and the novel focuses sometimes more on the event and how it had transpired than the characters in it.

Jody: A story that takes place in a world where modern civilization has ended.

Eliza: Everything goes wrong in the world so people are trying to fight to stay alive. Usually some type of mutation or disease. If it's not that, it's a type of "terrorist" attack or something

Bree: Literature that depicts the end of a modern world

Haylee: literature that occurs in a dystopian world where society has collapsed. Oftentimes contains flashbacks to the society we know

Kayla: This literature usually takes place after the destruction of life as we know it. Its often about the rebuilding of the world after.

Bethany: Those were always my favorite books to read

Taylor: Usually depicts the world after a life changing catastrophic event. We see this in a lot of books like The Testing and Divergent

Oberon: While it's not literature, my favorite of post apocalypse is the Fallout video game series

Jennings: prolepsis—literary term for flashforwards that only the reader is given

Oberon: Do you think that the prophet is Tyler? The son of Arthur and Elizabeth?

Evalynn: The paperweight seems to show up a lot throughout the story. Does it represent the characters' connectedness or something more?

Felix: I think what you brought up about connections and what would become of the world that could/would be built after an event like this. I think it's interesting to see the duality in some sense that the activities that a lot of the characters were doing before the Georgia Flu could still be seen as escapism while the afterward of these activities is even more community building and impactful and to dive into what these two ideas could mean for the rest of the story.

Kayla: Why do you think the author choose to begin this novel with a production of King Lear? What is the importance of King Lear to the context of this novel?

Bethany: Does the traveling symphony have a long term goal or do they just intend to keep traveling and performing for different towns? I was very interested in the dynamic of all the members of the group.

Kat: How did Arthur end up with copies of Miranda's comics?

Oberon: I've read Hamlet and Midsummer Night's Dream, hence my name

Sadie: im currently in a Shakespeare class and King Lear was not included

Oberon: Midsummer Night's Dream is my favorite Shakespeare play

Sadie: even if you look at our own pandemic, we also made more art during the shutdown, at least I did

Evalynn: At the end we see that there is a town that has electricity. Do you think that civilization will be able to build itself up again?

Cassandra: What is the significance of teaching children, and all of those others who don't remember much of the old world, about the old world?

Kayla: What are your thoughts about the use of foreshadowing in this novel? Do you think Mandel is too heavy-handed with her foreshadowing? Does this take away or add to the novel for you?

Bethany: During the survivors' first year at the airport, why was Elizabeth so insistent that someone would come and save them and life would return back to normal even after everyone else had accepted that this was the way things were now?

Brayden: After the prophet met his end, I wondered if there could have been any redemption for him? He was a victim of the world around him, but that does not change what he did. I am curious on your thoughts about this.

Eliza: My question was similar to Evalynn's, I was wondering do you think that they would have the strength to build up civilization again since they've got a taste of it with the electricity or do you think they'll only make it so far? Like do you think it'll be the same?

Taylor: The prophet somewhat reminded me of a cult leader, especially when the young girl spoke about his dream that god wanted him to repopulate the world. Do you think this was supposed to be seen as a cult like group, or was it supposed to just be seen as a group that was trying to be in control and take power?

Sadie: what is the importance/significance of all the main characters (Kirsten, the Prophet, Clark, etc) all being connected in some way, even though there is not as many people even left in the country?

Eliza: It just gets me excited to see the reactions of those characters and how things will go. It's like knowing some drama that's not technically your business but then it comes out and now you get to see how everything plays out.

Cassandra: Yes, Eliza! And seeing how everything and everyone is connected somehow, it's really awesome.

Bethany: I wonder if Clark ever told Kirsten that the prophet was Arthurs son. We never really got to hear them talk about their connection

Evalynn: How old is Tyler supposed to be again? Just when he's the Prophet

Cassandra: Evalynn, I think he's like late 20's, 28 or so maybe since he was 8 when the flu took over and 20 years had passed.

Evalynn: Ok thanks, I was just wondering.

Bethany: Maybe she's just naïve [Elizabeth]

Brayden: Part of me just wished that the prophet would've been held more accountable.

Cassandra: When I compare him and Kirsten, they both kind of grew up in the same world and had bad things happen, so I'm not sure if I forgive him. However, I understand that he had separate circumstances from Kirsten, like being raised somewhat more religiously and with ideals about needing to "bring the light".

Evalynn: I agree Brayden. I wish that he had been able to understand the severity of his actions.

Brayden: Good question...[Would he be able to understand?]

Sadie: I agree with Evalynn. I think he may have been too far gone

Cassandra: I guess this really brings up the nature vs nurture perspective.

Cassandra: I think it's neat [Museum of Civilization] because they're letting go of the old civilization but at the same time not.

Kat: I think as terrible as an apocalypse would be, it would at least provide an opportunity to remake some things in a better way