

Bergen Community College
Department of Composition and Literature

LIT231: Literature and Environmental Issues in Diverse Society

Course Description: This course will trace the evolution of literary responses to our natural environment. Students will engage with a range of literary forms including (but not limited to) pastoral verse, Transcendentalist prose, Romantic lyric, post-industrial parody, postcolonial poetics, and climate fiction (or “cli-fi”). Students will likewise study corresponding critical methodologies, including Postcolonial criticism and Ecocriticism, in addition to a range of global environmental histories—both North and South.

Prerequisite: *Successful completion of WRT101.*

Student Learning Objectives:

As a result of meeting the requirements of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify major movements in environmental writing, including (but not limited to) pastoral, Romantic, and postcolonial.
2. Analyze responses to our natural environment—both fiction and nonfiction—as they shift over time in response to economic and political phenomena.
3. Engage in formal ecocritical responses to literary texts.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the historical, aesthetic, and literary aspects of environmental literature through both oral and written assignments.
5. Produce a properly formatted written evaluation of selected texts; and demonstrate competency in both research methodologies and literary analysis.

Means of Assessments:

1. Students will perform critical analyses of works corresponding to each literary genre and movement in environmental writing. Two formal analyses will be assigned in which students will demonstrate competency through formal syntheses of multiple texts. Informal written assignments will likewise gauge student competency. (SLO #1, SLO# 3, SLO #5)
2. The midterm examination will be composed of a series of essays. Essays will focus on both aesthetic categories—the formal components of works—as well as the economic and political registers of the texts under analysis. (SLO #2, SLO #3)
3. The final project for the course will be a traditional term paper in which students will produce a formal Eco-critique of selected works. (SLO #3, SLO #5)
4. Each student will lead a class discussion of assigned texts for which s/he will produce a series of relevant questions. (SLO #4)

Required Texts:

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* ISBN: 978-0618249060

Laurence Coupe, Ed. *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*

ISBN: 978-0415204071

Ashley Dawson, *Extinction: A Radical History* ISBN: 978-1944869014

Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* ISBN: 978-0312428594

Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People* ISBN: 978-0486406572

*Additional readings will be made available on Moodle

Course Content:

Following Laurence Buell's indictment of environmental writing and "nature poetry" as reducing our global ecosystem to "mere setting," we will consider a diverse set of literatures that seek instead to understand the environment as a working and dynamic ecology. We will thus consider the pastoral as a point of departure as we consider how nature has been *framed* by writers from the Ancient to the Romantic to the Postcolonial era while we attempt to come to grips with our increasing alienation from our natural environment.

While it is useful for students to have some working knowledge of poetics and landscape, this is not necessary.

Grading policy:

Critical Essays: 40%

Midterm Examination: 25%

Final Paper: 25%

Class participation: 5%

Informal written assignments & Quizzes: 5%

Written assignments must be formatted according to MLA standards. You will find citation guides on our library's website (www.bergen.edu/library). BCC's Writing Center is located in L125, and you are encouraged to work on your papers with our faculty and professional writing tutors. Please note that the center is indeed a tutoring center—you are not to drop off your paper for proofreading as this is not a function of the center.

Attendance/Lateness Policy:

BCC Attendance Policy: "All students are expected to attend punctually every scheduled meeting of each course in which they are registered. Attendance and lateness policies and sanctions are to be determined by the instructor for each section of each course. These will be established in writing on the individual course outline. Attendance will be kept by the instructor for administrative and counseling purposes."

*You are allowed *two unexcused* absences. Additional absences will negatively affect your grade. Likewise, *two* instances of missing significant class time (of ten minutes or more) will result in one absence.

ADA Policy: Students with documented disabilities who require accommodations by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) can request support services from the Office of

Specialized Services of Bergen Community College located in room L 115 of the Pitkin Learning Center. <http://www.bergen.edu/pages1/Pages/5175.aspx>

***A note on plagiarism:** Please give credit where credit is due! Honesty is expected of you. It is expected that the work you hand in will always be your own, and that you will never copy sentences, phrases, paragraphs, or whole essays from any other person's work, for that is plagiarism. If you are ever unclear about how to cite another person or author's ideas, come see me or consult your manual. If you do plagiarize, you will receive an F for the assignment under review. If you plagiarize more than once, you will fail the course and may be reported to the college's judiciary committee.*

Class Schedule: (subject to change depending on class progress)

Week 1: Introductions, Ecopoetics & Reading Nature

William Blake, "Nature as Imagination" (Reader)

Laurence Buell, "Representing the Environment" (Reader)

A.R. Ammons "Corson's Inlet"*

**All poems will be available on Moodle. Additionally, all readings appended by an asterisk will be made available on Moodle.*

Week 2: Portraits of Environmentalism, North

Kate Soper, "The Idea of Nature" (Reader)

Rachel Carson, from *Silent Spring*: "A Fable for Tomorrow," "The Obligation to Endure," and "Surface Waters and Underground Seas"

Week 3: Portraits of Environmentalism, North continued

Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*

**An Enemy of the People* will be staged at Bergen Community College later in the term: April 7, 8, 13, 14 & 15 at 7:30 PM & April 8 & 15 at 2 PM. We will attend a performance as a class.

Week 4: Portraits of Environmentalism, South

Pablo Mukherjee, "Introduction" (from *Postcolonial Environments*)*

Ramachandra Guha & Juan Alier, "The Environmentalism of the Poor" (*Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*)*

Ken Saro-Wiwa, from *A Month and a Day**

Amitav Ghosh, from *The Hungry Tide**

***Critical Essay #1 due Thursday 2/9: 2-3 page analysis of A. R. Ammons's "Corson's Inlet" in which you use include the perspectives of Blake, Buell, or Soper.**

Week 5: Pastoralism & Enclosure: North & South

Raymond Williams, "Pastoral and Counter-Pastoral" (*The Country and the City*)*

Virgil, from *Georgics**

Oliver Goldsmith, from *The Deserted Village**

John Clare, from *The Village Minstrel**

Vandana Shiva, "Living Economies" (*Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*)*

Week 6: Pastoralism & Enclosure, Part II: Romanticism and its Discontents

Raymond Williams, "The Green Language" (Reader)

Jonathon Bate, "From Red to Green" (Reader)

William Wordsworth, "The Solitary Reaper"*

John Clare, "A Scene"*

Alan Vardy, from *John Clare: Politics and Poetry**

Week 7: Transcendentalism, or Arcadia Revisited

Ralph Waldo Emerson, from *Nature**

Henry David Thoreau, "Writing the Wilderness" (Reader)

Rebecca Solnit, from *Wanderlust**

Herman Melville, from *Moby Dick**

Week 8: The Machine in the Garden: Landscape Ideology in the Age of Industry

Leo Marx, "The Machine in the Garden" (Reader)

Walt Whitman, "A Locomotive in Winter"*

Emily Dickinson, "I Like to See it Lap the Miles"*

***Midterm Examination: this exam will consist of a series of essays that you will perform at home. Due during week ten.**

Week 9: Spring Break!

Week 10: The New Metropolis, Part I: Post-Industrial America

Frederick Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns"*

Allen Ginsberg, "Sunflower Sutra"*

Jamaal May, "Mechanophobia"*

Rebecca Solnit "Detroit Arcadia"*

Week 11: The New Metropolis, Part II: A Planet of Slums

Raymond Williams, "The New Metropolis"*

Mike Davis, from *Planet of Slums**

Chris Abani, from *Graceland**

Week 12: The Flowers of Empire

Jamaica Kincaid, "The Flowers of Empire"*

Ashley Dawson, "Capitalism and Extinction" (*Extinction: A Radical History*)

*Term paper proposals due!

Week 13: The Flowers of Empire, Part II: Colonial Botany

Pablo Neruda, "United Fruit"*

Thomas De Quincey, "Ceylon"*

Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*

Week 14: Postcolonial Ecologies

Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*

Week 15: (4/25, 4/27)

Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*

***Critical Essay #2: 2-3 page essay in which you consider Ghosh's novel in light of Dawson's commentary on capitalist expansion.**

Week 16: Musings on the Apocalypse

Mary Shelley, from *The Last Man**

Dale Jamieson and Bonnie Nadzam, *Love in the Anthropocene*, selections TBD

Week 17:

Final Projects Due. Proposals must be submitted by Week 12 of the term.

Paper topics will be distributed after midterm, but students are encouraged to propose alternatives. Please note that you may use one of the critical essays as a springboard into this larger project.