

English 492/592: Topics: Literature and Film of the Environment, 3 semester hours

Black Hills State University

Fall 2009, T-Th 2:00-3:15 p.m., Jonas 105

Instructor: Dr. David Cremean

Office: Meier 317

Office Hours: MWF 1:00-1:50 p.m.; Tue. 3:30-4:45 p.m.; Thur. 12:30-1:45. Other times available by appointment

Office Phone: 642-6713 (see office hours above—best to call only during those times if you want)

Email: davidcremean@bhsu.edu (Remember, replies can be delayed; unless gone, I check my email at least once a day, but depending on my schedule, at different times.)

Course Description (for both 492 and 592): “Includes current topics, advanced topics and special topics. A course devoted to a particular issue in a specified field. Course content is not wholly included in the regular curriculum. Guest artists or experts may serve as instructors. Enrollments are usually of 10 or fewer students with significant one-on-one student/teacher involvement.” (Catalogue).

Course Prerequisites: None in catalogue.

Description of Instructional Methods: This semester we will utilize a wide range of classroom experiences, ranging from lectures to discussions to varied types of group work.

Course Requirements:

Required Textbooks (available from the University Bookstore):

Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire*. 978-0671695880.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. 978-0307472120.

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. 978-0061233326.

Simpson, Sherry. *The Accidental Explorer*, ISBN 978-1570615375.

Ferguson, Gary. *The Great Divide*. 978-0393050721.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac*. 978-0195007770.

Glotfelty, Cheryl. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Paperback). 978-0820317816.

Murray, Robin L., and Joseph K. Heumann. *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge*. 978-0791476789.

Supplementary Materials/Library Resources: You will receive a number of varied materials from me during the semester, ranging from assignments to information concerned with writing.

Class Attendance Policy: Since this class meets 2 days a week, the attendance policy is based on that fact—and on the fact that this class is highly participatory and thus demands regular attendance for the student to be successful parts of it. Up to 2 absences—one full week of class—results in no penalty. From 3 to 4 absences, you can earn no higher than a B in the course. For 5 to 6 absences, you can earn no higher than a C in the class. For 7 to 8 absences, you cannot earn higher than a D. Nine or more absences mean you cannot pass the class.

Other than extenuating circumstances approved by the instructor (and at my discretion), only absences due to school-sponsored activities will be exceptions to this policy, and then only to the degree that other absences do not raise them above any of the grade reduction markers cited above (in other words, it is wisest not to skip classes beyond the school-sanctioned ones). You are free to choose to attend or not attend any classes; just remember that this policy is in place. The absence graces are in place to cover normal illness and the like.

It is also expected that you be on time for class to begin. I will note lates; 2 lates will equal one absence. If you are more than 10 minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent for half a class (it equals half an absence); if you are more than 25 minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent for a full class.

Cheating and Plagiarism Policy: Cheating of any type, from copying or consulting “cheat” notes while taking a quiz or test to representing someone else’s work as your own (plagiarism, which can occur in several ways), is a serious ethical violation. If any cases of it happen in this class, penalty decisions are at my discretion. Depending on the severity of the plagiarism, ultimate penalties can include anything from a stern warning up to a zero for an assignment or failure for the course—or even expulsion from the university (by university powers that be) if you are guilty of “the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic material” (BHSU Student Code 65). Please, however, feel free to use ideas we kick around in class (but if quoting a reading or other source, be sure to document it).

Make-Up Policy: I rarely grant incompletes, and by policy of the College of Arts and Sciences can only grant them in cases where students have completed 75 % of the required class work. All incompletes are at my discretion.

With the exception of the final, regular class meeting (the meeting for our final), at which time any applicable work is absolutely due (except of course in cases of approved incompletes), you will have one full week to make up any missed assignments or turn in late work. Ten percent (a letter grade) is deducted for late essays unless you obtain special clearance from me. The one week overdue deadline also holds for any late essays. Any exceptions to this policy—such as an extension without penalty or extra time beyond the week—are solely at my discretion.

Course Goals:

Student Learning Outcomes: As a result of taking this course, students will become:

1. More informed, developed, and reflective critical thinkers and writers as measured by their performance on the essays;
2. Closer, more comprehending and critical readers, as measured by their performance on the reading notebook and essays of materials from their readings and research;
3. More highly skilled in producing upper level “academic” essays at or approaching graduate school levels, as measured by performance on the essays;
4. Capable of complete, accurate, and necessary documentation of appropriate sources for all borrowings.

Evaluation Procedures:

Assessments:

- A. Reading Journal = 20 %
- B. Essay # 1 (6-8 pages) = 20 %
- C. Essay # 2 (6-8 pages) = 20 %
- D. Essay # 3 (10-15 pages), out of class final exam = 40 %
- E. **592 students only:** Essay # 4, 6-8 pages on film and book outside of class films/readings = 20% (so grade based on percentage of 120 points)
- F. Note # 1: See Attendance Override Standards above under “Class Attendance Policy.”

*You will receive separate assignments giving specific instructions for each essay.

Performance Standards/Grading Policy:

A. Scale—I work with an 10-point break, 100 point system, as follows:

- A--90.0-100 = Excellent work for college level (rare)
- B--80.0-89.9 = Good work for college level
- C--70.0-79.9 = Competent work for college level
- D--60.0-69.9 = Below Competent work for college level
- F--59.9 and below = Failing work for college level

B. Essay/Exam Grades

A++= 100

A+ = 99

A =95

A- =91

B+ =89

B =85

B-=81

C+ =79

C =75

C-=71

D+ =69

D =65

D-=61

F=55

0 = Plagiarized or unsubmitted

**Note: I do not allow for any extra credit assignments, so please do not ask.

Americans With Disabilities Statement:

“Reasonable accommodations, as arranged through the Disabilities Services Coordinator, will be provided students with documented disabilities. Contact the BHSU Disabilities Services Coordinator, Mike McNeil, at 605-642-6099, (Jacket Legacy Room in the Student Union) or via email at mikemcneil@bhsu.edu for more information. Additional information can also be found at <http://www.bhsu.edu/StudentLife/Learning/DisabilityServices/tabid/162/Default.aspx>.”

Freedom in Learning:

“Under Board of Regents and University policy student academic performance may be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not on opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards. Students should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Students who believe that an academic evaluation reflects prejudiced or capricious consideration of student opinions or conduct unrelated to academic standards should contact the chair of the department in which the course is being taught to initiate a review of the evaluation.”

Tentative Schedule—English 492, Environmental Lit and Film

1. All assignments are due the day they are listed, not the following class.
2. If we have any cancellations for any reasons, be sure to keep up with the assignment for each day missed as well as the one due the day we return to classes.
3. For your reading journals, remember this schedule constitutes your list of required entries except if I announce any exceptions in class.

Tue., 9/1—Introduction to the Course

Unit 1: The Ethereal Groundwork

Thur., 9/3—Read Glotfelty and Fromm ix-x and xv-xxxvii

Response Journal # 1: Year ago, I read an article concerned with the novel *The Big Sky*, by A. B. Guthrie, Jr. Among other things, the essay criticized the book for its lack of dealing with any “Universal” themes because of its focus on the natural world and what we call “ecology.” Famously, in one of its many rejections, Norman Maclean’s *A River Runs through It* was turned down because “These stories have trees in them.” Are environmental concerns the stuff of great literature and film, or not? Why or why not? Are they “Universal” or not, and why or why not? Does “Ecocriticism” have a vital function, and why or why not? Is it a passing fad, and, you guessed it, why or why not? Does it need a strong theoretical basis or not? Why?

Tue., 9/8—Read Glotfelty and Fromm 3-14, 15-29, 30-39 and 40-51

Response Journal # 2: Each of these four chapters raises issues that could be of concern to the ecocritic in interpreting or evaluating writings or films ecocritically. Identify at least one such point from each of these essays, then evaluate why you think it is or isn’t a vital one for ecocriticism.

Thur., 9/10—Read Glotfelty and Fromm 69-87 and 92-103

Response Journal # 3: Which principles of Ecocriticism as discussed by Howarth do you find most intriguing, and why? Which ones do you find most problematic or even disturbing, and why? Concerning Evernden’s thoughts about the “pathetic fallacy,” where do you stand on the issue, and why? How divorced can we humans make ourselves from our humanness regarding our contact with “nature”?

Tue., 9/15— Read Glotfelty and Fromm 105-23, 124-36, and 204-22
Response Journal # 4: In what way or ways do these 3 readings expand your understanding of what ecocriticism is about, or at least can be? A couple of difficult but important connected literary criticism terms come up in Campbell's essay: "structuralism" and "deconstruction." What does each mean, and how do they link (you may well need to look each up). Finally, on 222, Dana Phillips claims, "the symbols and successes of fifty years ago are often today's environmental disasters. . . ." He mentions some examples of this: can you expand on the list, discussing how each past symbol or success you come up with has indeed proven harmful?

Thur., 9/17— Read Glotfelty and Fromm 225-40 and 276-81
Response Journal # 5: On 232, Love paraphrases Joseph Wood Krutch, whom Love says
"tells of his growing sense that mankind's ingenuity has outpaced its wisdom."
Do you agree or disagree, and why? He then quotes novelist Jack Schaefer: "I had become ashamed of my species and myself. I understood at last that . . . I was part of the deadly conquest called civilization" (233). How do you respond to that quotation, and why? Consequently, can a civilization indeed be "sick" as Love notes that Freud, Eric Fromm, and Paul Shepard all concluded? Why or why not? Is ours, and why or why not?

Tue., 9/22-- Read Murray and Heumann 1-18, 19-36, and 37-56
Response Journal # 6: Film has often been called "the Novel of the 20th Century and Beyond."
What do you think of this concept, and why? How might it impact Ecocriticism of Film, and why?
Finally, what possible reasons can you think of that I elected to require you to read the second and third essays for today, about films we will not be watching?
One aspect you may well wish to discuss here is context(s).

Watch *An Inconvenient Truth*

Thur., 9/24— Read Murray and Heumann 195-205 and Read Glotfelty and Fromm 241-63

Response Journal # 7: How do you see Gore's film so far as fitting with and/or not fitting with

Allen's view of the Sacred Hoop, or Circle, of life? How do you see it as still connected to or with

a Western (as in Western Civilization, not the American West merely) Rationalism? Why?

Watch *An Inconvenient Truth*

Unit 2: History

Tue., 9/29—Read Ferguson Introduction and Chapters 1-3
Assign Essay # 1, due Tuesday, 10/13

Response Journal # 8: Now that you've viewed Gore's entire film, look up at least two pieces of information from the Internet that judge the film and/or its reception of the Oscar (Academy Award) for Gore. Did or didn't it deserve this honor, and in either case (or some "Maybe-ground"), Why?

Thur., 10/1— Dr. Cremean hosting Western Literature Association Conference, but class meets; Guest

Appearances by Jim Stiles, *Canyon Country Zephyr*, and M. John Fayhee, *Mountain Gazette*,

Focusing on "Recreation or Wreckreation?—What Is Happening to Western Towns and Lands?"

Read Ferguson Chapters 4-5

Response Journal # 9: Gary Ferguson's book *The Great Divide* falls within the classification of an Environmental History. Based on these first five chapters, what does it reveal about such history as a literary genre falling under Ecocriticism, that is, what is distinctive about how it lends itself to an ecocritical approach?

Tue., 10/6— Read Ferguson Chapters 6-8 and Murray and Heumann 127-41

Response Journal # 10: How do(es) the Ecocritical line(s) of Ferguson's book, based on his history so far and on what the Murray and Heumann article postulate about *Pale Rider*, reflect on the interconnections between history and fiction, and why? How does fiction use history, including in an Ecocritical sense, to attain a possibly "higher" truth? Is fiction or history better at presenting Ecocritical concerns, and why?

Watch *Pale Rider*

Thur., 10/8— Read Ferguson Chapters 9-10

Response Journal # 11: Having watched the first installment of *Pale Rider* and having read a good bit from both Ecocritical books, what advantages do you see to written literature contrasted with the filmic, and what advantages do you see to film contrasted with written literature? Which do you think most effective, and why?

Watch *Pale Rider*

Tue., 10/13— Essay # 1 due; no reading or journal assignment

Unit 3: Sand in the Shoes: From Two Classics

Thur., 10/15— Read Leopold Foreword and Part II, "Arizona and New Mexico" and "Oregon and Utah"

Response Journal # 12: Leopold, as well as other "early" and even "earlier" Nature and "Environmentalist" writers makes us ask the question, "Why should we still go back to reading early writers on a topic that has advanced so far and changed so much?" Address this issue, being sure to include some references to Leopold's own material in the reading from today that will help you with your answer, whether positive, negative, or mixed.

Tue., 10/20— Read Leopold Part III, First 5 Subchapter, and Part IV, "The Land Ethic"

Response Journal # 13: On page 245, Leopold makes the claim that in his time (the book was first published in 1949) , that “the education actually in progress makes no mention of obligations to land over and above those of self-interest. . . . Land-use ethics are still governed wholly by economic self-interest.” Has this situation changed for the better, the worse, or remained essentially the same? How and why? Who might be more responsible for the way things are today: the private landowner or the corporate systems of land use or abuse? Why?

Thur., 10/22— Read Leopold, Part IV, “Wilderness” and “Conservation Esthetic”
Response Journal # 14: Respond to the following quotations from Leopold:
1.) “[W]e who seek wilderness travel for sport are foiled when we are forced to compete with mechanized substitutes” (270).
2.) “Ability to see the cultural value of wilderness boils down, in the last analysis, to a question of intellectual humility. . . . It is only the scholar who understands why the raw wilderness gives definition and meaning to the human enterprise” (279).

Tue., 10/27— Read “Ecodefense” (handout, on L-Drive), Abbey Introduction and Abbey first 3 chapters
Response Journal # 15: In the essay handout, Abbey states, “We have the right to resist and we have the obligation; not to defend that which we love would be dishonorable” (31). How does this idea link to, find expression in *Pale Rider*? How do you react to it, and why? Abbey soon goes even more controversial: “Eco-defense is risky but sporting; unauthorized but fun; illegal but ethically imperative” (31). What are the implications of these words? Again, how do you react to them, and why? Finally, on the same page but a bit earlier, he has stated probably his main thesis for the piece: “And if the wilderness is our true home, and if it is threatened with invasion, pillage, and destruction—as it certainly is—then we have the right to defend that home, as we would our private quarters, *by whatever means are necessary*” (italics mine).
Again: Implications? Reactions and why?

Watch *A Voice in the Wilderness*

Thur., 10/29—Read Abbey Chapters 5-6
Response Journal # 16: How do you think the Abbey of the film and the Abbey of the readings compare, both in terms of personas and in terms of environmental concerns? How about Abbey as he seems to see himself and how others seem to see him?

Assign Essay # 2

Tue., 11/3—Read Abbey Chapters 7-10 and 12

Response Journal # 17: Do you find Abbey's heavily polemical style or Leopold's more subdued

and academic style more effective in promoting enviro-concerns? Why? How does Abbey

employ humor seriously, and to what effect? Does it bother you that Abbey fictionalizes fairly

large portions of his accounts here, and if so, why, and if not, why not?

Watch *Grizzly Man*

Thur., 11/5—Read Abbey Chapters 13, 16, and 18; Read Glotfelty and Fromm 303-22

Response Journal # 18: Respond to the following quotation from Abbey's "Water": "They [Developers] cannot see that growth for the sake of growth is a cancerous madness. . . .that an

economic system which can only expand or expire must be false to all that is human." How and

why is this statement about a matter of ecological concern? What connections are there between a human "economy" and the environment?

Watch *Grizzly Man*

Unit 4: Herstory

Tue., 11/10— Read Glotfelty and Fromm 170-81 and 323-50

Response Journal # 19: These two readings connect us to the realms of "Ecofeminism." Do you think women are closer to "nature" than men? Why or why not? Would female-led and controlled responses to the "natural" world probably differ from men's, and why or why not?

Thur, 11/12-- Read Dillard Chapters 1, 2, and 10

Response Journal # 20: On a "Nature Book" level—only one of many ways to look at this text—*Pilgrim* presents us with different ways of "seeing" the world around as it's primary vehicle for our understanding, as particularly emphasized in Chapter 2, "Seeing." How and what do you think each of these 3 chapters teaches us that we should learn to see, and why is it important and relevant to ecocriticism itself (based on the text, not just your opinion)?

Tue., 11/17— Essay # 2 due; no reading or journal assignment

Watch *Into the Wild*

Thur., 11/19—Read Dillard Chapters 8, 11, 13

Response Journal # 21: To some degree, both Dillard's book and this film are about some of what pulls different people to "Nature." In a different taxonomy nature writing/film than Lyons's, which we read awhile back, this type of practice could be seen as a genre or sub-genre of ecocriticism. From your point of view, why and how does "Nature" exert such a strong pull on us, and what does it give

us that the world as a whole, at least outside of Nature, offers? (You might want to bend this back also unto Ferguson and Leopold and Abbey and others you are aware of).

Watch *Into the Wild*

Tue., 11/24—Read Simpson 1-31, 59-96, 115-43

Response Journal # 22: One of my personal “life philosophies” is that if we take something, including ourselves, too seriously, we don’t take it seriously enough. Part of what I like about this book and the way Sherry Simpson herself comes across is that she is willing to “pick on” herself and uses a great deal of self-effacing humor. How might the more common types of Nature writing, so deadly serious and so interested in “self-heroism” and their outdoor perfection be viewed as less serious, and why? How and why might this self-effacing and even self-deprecating sense of humor about the outdoors be a healthy and more “natural” element—and perhaps even a safer one--regarding the outdoors?

Thur., 11/26— Thanksgiving Day, No Classes

Unit 5: Endgame?

Tue., 12/1— Read Murray and Heumann 91-107 and McCarthy 1-82 (paperback)

Response Journal # 23: Based on this opening reading, how do you see McCarthy’s novel

lending itself to an Ecocritical reading so far? One key question might well be “What may have caused the massive destruction?” There are several possibilities for this, each which would lead to a rather different take on why and how that destruction plays into environmental themes. For any one or more of those possibilities, what in the novel supports you thinking it could be? Also, how might the novel thus far be viewed as being critical about the way we live now?

Thur., 12/3—Read McCarthy 83-135 (paperback)

Response Journal # 24: How might Consumerism relate to Ecocriticism? What are some other elements of Consumerism you see emerging in the novel, and to what effect(s)? How is the use of Apocalyptic elements vital to the novel so far? Watch *Solyent Green*

Tue., 12/8—Read McCarthy 136-241 (paperback)

Response Journal # 25: How do you see cannibalism functioning as a Metaphor for a Consumerist Society in both McCarthy’s novel and in *Solyent Green*? How and why might a Marxist Criticism work extremely well for understanding both?

Watch *Solyent Green*

Thur., 12/10—No Reading or Response Notebooks; Work on Final Essays
Response Notebooks due

Wed., Dec. 16, 11:30-1:00—Final Exam Meeting: Regular class session.

ALL LATE WORK AND FINAL ESSAY DUE BY NOON ON FRIDAY, DEC. 18,
UNLESS OTHERWISE ARRANGED AHEAD OF TIME