

Gender, Race, and Nature in American Environmental Literature

ENGL 4321.00: *Studies in Literary Topics* Spring 2011
TR 12:30-1:50 p.m. Education Building Room 351

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Office: English Building 206 Office hours: Tu 10:00-11:00 Fr 12:30-2:00
Course Webpage: <http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/spurgeon/>

Course Overview:

This course will help students think critically about the ways “nature” and concepts of the natural are reflected, constructed, and deployed in American literature and culture, and how ideas about the natural differ historically and across ethnicities, gender and class boundaries. We will read some “classics” of nature writing as it has been traditionally defined, as well as novels, journals, a film, and critical texts that challenge commonly held notions about this genre. Some questions that will guide our inquiries: How is the idea of the “natural” used to construct categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality? What are the origins for various American myths about nature, and what might the consequences be for the environment? How have notions about frontiers and empire impacted the way contemporary cultures view nature? Where, in fact, does nature begin and where does it end?

Classroom Policies and Procedures:

- Check the course web page (address above) every day for discussion questions, information, updates, notices, etc.
- You will be expected to have completed the assigned readings each day before class. I will spend some time lecturing, but much of our class time will involve discussion of the texts so please be prepared to question, analyze, and engage our readings. Wildly differing opinions are welcome.
- Regular attendance is vital. After two absences, you will lose five points per absence.
- Assignments are due on the dates listed below, plagiarism of any sort will not be tolerated, and you may expect graded assignments to be returned to you in a timely manner. If you speak with me in advance, you may receive a one week extension without penalty on one Outline. If you do not speak with me in advance, grades will drop by 1 point for each weekday past the due date.
- **ADA:** I am happy to accommodate any disability, but according to university policies I must receive appropriate documentation from the Office of Disability Services before I can determine or provide accommodations.

Required texts:

- Austin, Mary Hunter. *The Land of Little Rain*. (1903)
- Graves, John. *Goodbye to a River* (1959)
- Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire*. (1968)
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. (1977)
- Lopez, Barry. *Of Wolves and Men*. Scribner; Revised edition (1979)
- Ehrlich, Gretel. *The Solace of Open Spaces* (1986)
- “Into the Wild” (Paramount, 2007, dir. Sean Penn)
- *Reading Packet* available at CopyMail

Semester Outline

UNIT ONE—A History of American Nature: Sex, Race, and the Porno-tropics

Noël Sturgeon’s “Advertising Nature”

Anne McClintock’s “The Lay of the Land: Geneologies of Imperialism”

Carolyn Merchant’s “Colonizing Eden”

UNIT TWO—The Nature of Nature in 19th century American Literature

Henry David Thoreau’s “Walden,” selections (on-line)

William Cronon’s “The View from Walden”

John Muir’s “My First Summer in the Sierra,” selections (on-line)

William Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness”

Noël Sturgeon’s “Frontiers of Nature: The Ecological Indian in US Film”

UNIT THREE—Gender, Race, and the Ethics of History: 1900-1970

Mary Hunter Austin’s *The Land of Little Rain*

Michelle Campbell Toohey’s “Mary Hunter Austin’s *The Land of Little Rain*:
Remembering the Coyote”

Aldo Leopold’s “The Land Ethic” from *A Sand Country Almanac*

Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire*

David Oates’ “Some Questions About Sexless Nature Writing”

UNIT FOUR—Sex and the Sacred in Nature: 1970-today

Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*

Barry Lopez’s *Of Wolves and Men*

Lynn Ross-Bryant’s “Of Nature and Texts: Nature and Religion in American Ecological
Literature”

Gretel Ehrlich’s *The Solace of Open Spaces*

Bonnie MacDonald’s “Desire of the Middle Ground: Opposition, Dialectics, and
Dialogic Context in Gretel Ehrlich’s *The Solace of Open Spaces*

“Into the Wild” (Paramount Pictures, 2007, dir. Sean Penn)

Martin Drenthen’s “Fatal Attraction: Wildness in Contemporary Film”

Learning Outcomes and Methods of Assessment:

1. Students successfully completing this course will be able to identify leading authors, important texts, historical developments in the field of American environmental literature, and be able to construct an original argument about a text from the class. The primary methods of assessment for this learning outcome is a *formal Analysis Essay*, 12-15 pages not counting the bibliography (60 points). Check [Research Links](#) on the course webpage for links to appropriate journals to begin your research.
2. Students successfully completing this course will be able to perform careful and detailed analysis of a work of literature and develop a clear and well-supported thesis. The primary method of assessment for this learning outcome will be *three Essay outlines/close readings* (10 points each).
3. Students successfully completing this course will be able to discuss current trends and controversies within the field of American environmental literature. The primary method of assessment for this learning outcome will be an *Oral Presentation* (10 points)

- Total possible points: **100**
 - 90-100 = A**
 - 80-89 = B**
 - 70-79 = C**
 - 60-69 = D**
 - < 59 = F**

SEMESTER CALENDAR

UNIT ONE—A History of American Nature: Sex, Race, and the Porno-tropics
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| Th 1/13 | Intro to class, intro to American nature writing and environmental literature. For Tu write 3-5 pages (typed, double-spaced, not for a grade) on the relationship you see between your life and your understanding of the environment. Specifically, what environmental values or ways of thinking about nature do you have because of your social class, the place(s) you grew up, your racial/ethnic identity (yes, white is a race), your gender, and/or your sexuality? Then, read Noël Sturgeon’s “Advertising Natures” from the Reading Packet. |
| Tu 1/18 | Class discussion of your writing, definitions of Nature, and Sturgeon’s essay. For Th read Carolyn Merchant’s “Colonizing Eden” and Anne McClintock’s “The Lay of the Land: Geneologies of Imperialism” from the Reading Packet. |
| Th 1/20 | Class discussion Merchant and McClintock. For Tu read selections on line From Thoreau's Walden - an annotated edition (“Where I lived and what I lived for,” “Solitude,” “The Beanfield,” “Former Inhabitants,” and William Cronon’s “The View from Walden” from the Reading Packet. |

UNIT TWO—The Nature of Nature in 19th century American Literature

- Tu 1/25 Class discussion Thoreau, transcendentalism, the Hudson River School, and Cronon. For Th read on-line selections from [John Muir Writings - Books and Articles by John Muir](#) (Chapt. 2 “In Camp on the North Fork of the Merced,” Chapt. 5 “The Yosemite,” and William Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness.”)
- Th 1/27 Class discussion Thoreau, Muir and Cronon, and your Outline/close reading (see sample close reading at this link.) For Tu read on-line Muir’s “Chapt. 9 “Bloody Canon and Mono Lake,” Sturgeon’s “Frontiers of Nature: The Ecological Indian in US Film” from the Reading Packet and browse this link: [PowWows.com](#). Questions to ask yourself: judging from the info on the site, who are the site’s primary users? How do they see themselves? What sorts of information to they have about Native American people, history, traditions, current lives, etc.? do you see any of the images discussed in Sturgeon’s chapter reflected on this site?
- Tu 2/1 Class discussion PowWows.com, Muir, and Sturgeon. For Th come with Outline/close reading of Thoreau or Muir.
- Th 2/3 **Outline/close reading 1 due today.** Class discussion of your work. For Tu read up through “My Neighbor’s Field” in Mary Hunter Austin’s *The Land of Little Rain*

UNIT THREE—Gender, Race, and the Ethics of History: 1900-1970

- Tu 2/8 Class discussion of first half of Austin. For Th finish Austin and Michelle Campbell Toohey’s “Mary Hunter Austin’s *The Land of Little Rain*: Remembering the Coyote” from the Reading Packet.
- Th 2/10 Class discussion Austin and Toohey. For Tu read [Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic](#) on line at this link, and begin reading *Desert Solitaire*.
- Tu 2/15 Class discussion Leopold. For Th read _____ of John Graves’ *Goodbye to a River*.
- Th 2/17 Guest lecturer, Brandon Schuler. For Tu read _____ in *Goodbye*.
- Tu 2/22 Class discussion *Goodbye to a River*. For Th read up through “Cowboys and Indians: Part II” in Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire*.
- Th 2/2 Listen to radio documentary/interview with Abbey. Class discussion first half of Abbey. For Tu read “Water,” “Down the River,” and “Bedrock and Paradox” from Abbey and David Oates’ “Some Questions About Sexless Nature Writing”.
- Tu 3/1 Class discussion second half of Abbey and Oates. For Tu come with outline/close reading of a scene from Austin, Leopold, Graves, or Abbey.
- Th 2/4 **Outline/close reading 2 due today.** Class discussion of your work. For Th read up to pg. 153 (after Tayo’s talk with Betonie, and before “The truck driver stopped at San Fidel to dump a load of diesel fuel”) from

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*.

UNIT FOUR—Sex and the Sacred in Nature: 1970-present

- Th 3/3 Class discussion Silko. For Tu finish Silko.
- Tu 3/8 Class discussion Silko.
Th 3/10 Class discussion Silko.
- Tu 3/15 **SPRING BREAK**
Th 3/17 **SPRING BREAK** For Tu 3/22 read Parts I-III (through chapt. 9) in Barry Lopez's *Of Wolves and Men*.
- Tu 3/22 Class discussion Lopez. For Tu 3/22 finish Lopez and Lynn Ross-Bryant's "Of Nature and Texts: Nature and Religion in America Ecological Literature"
- Th 3/24 Class discussion Lopez and Ross-Bryant. For Tu read up through "On Water" in Gretel Ehrlich's *The Solace of Open Spaces*
- Tu 3/29 Class discussion Ehrlich. For Th finish Ehrlich.
Th 3/31 Class discussion Ehrlich. For Tu, watch "Into the Wild" and come with two scenes in mind you'd like to discuss in class.
- Tu 4/5 Class discussion "Into the Wild." For Th, watch it again (no kidding) and read M. Drenthen's "Fatal Attraction: Wildness in Contemporary Film."
- Th 4/7 Class discussion Drenthen and "Into the Wild" For Tu come with Outline/close reading of either Silko, Lopez, Ehrlich, or "Into the Wild."
- Tu 4/12 **Outline/close reading 3 due today** Class discussion of your work, sign up for Oral Presentations, review Essay Guidelines and Sample Essays on line. For Tu read Peer Review Guidelines.
- Th 4/14 Writing Workshop in class today for Analysis Essay
- Tu 4/19 Oral Presentations
Th 4/21 Oral Presentations
- Tu 4/26 Oral Presentations
Th 4/28 Oral Presentations
- Tu 5/3 Oral Presentations **Analysis Essay due today LAST DAY OF CLASS** (Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you want your graded essay mailed to you, or written permission for me to place it in a box outside my office door for you to pick up.)