

English 2141 A: Literature and the Environment

Dr. Tim Clarke

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Class

Term: Winter 2020
Time: Tues & Thurs, 5:30pm-6:50pm
Location: VNR 1095 (Vanier Hall)

Course description and learning outcomes:

This course will introduce students to core concepts and analytical approaches in the study of literature and the environment (or ecocriticism). We will study a wide range of genres, including poetry, short stories, novels, essays, and memoirs, focusing on primary texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Course requirements will include engaged participation in discussion, regular attendance, and a significant amount of reading and writing. As this will not be a lecture-heavy class, we will generate most of our critical insights through open dialogue, group work, and collaborative close reading of the assigned texts.

By the end of this course, students will be able to analyze literature's influence in the evolution of contemporary understandings of nature and will be conversant in the key issues that have defined ecocriticism, from critiques of anthropocentrism, technological modernity, and modern capitalism to debates about nonhuman animals, the Anthropocene, and the social construction of nature. By cultivating critical inquiry, close reading, and argumentation skills, students will be able to evaluate literature's potential for reimagining human relationships with the natural world in an age of ecological crisis.

Course texts:

Available at Benjamin Books (122 Osgoode Street). All other required readings are available on Brightspace. I strongly suggest bringing printed copies of the Brightspace readings so that you can take margin notes and interact with the readings directly.

- M.P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud* (Penguin)
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Amistad)
- Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge)

Online resources:

- Purdue OWL: MLA style guide (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/>)
- University of Ottawa Library Web Page (<http://www.biblio.uottawa.ca/index-e.php>)

Grading and assignments:

Attendance, preparation, and participation	10%
Essay #1 (1000-1200 words)	20%
Essay #2 (1500-2000 words)	40%
Final exam	30%

(Word counts apply only to the body of your essay, i.e., from first to last paragraph.)

Essay 1 (1000-1200 words, due Feb. 13): A short interpretative essay using ecocritical ideas and concepts derived from the course readings to develop an argument, supported by specific textual

references and evidence. You are welcome to choose any two texts from the first 5 weeks except Clark and Cronon. You are welcome to use these two in support of your arguments, just not as your primary texts.

Essay 2 (1500-2000 words, due Apr. 2): A lengthier essay using ecocritical ideas and concepts derived from the course readings and independently-researched secondary sources to develop an argument, supported by specific textual references and evidence, about one of the two novels studied in the second half of the course (Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* or Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*).

Submission guidelines:

All assignments must be submitted in hard copy unless we have agreed upon an electronic submission or you are submitting late (see next section). Assignments cannot be accepted at the English Department Secretariat or slipped under my office door. All assignments should be formatted according to MLA style conventions (8th edition). Essays should be double-spaced and in 12-pt Times New Roman or Arial font.

Late policy and extensions:

All assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late assignments will be penalized up to 5% per business day and will not be graded if not received within a week of the deadline (barring extensions or other arrangements).

There is a specific procedure for submitting late assignments. Please first submit an electronic copy so that I can record the date of submission. An identical hard copy must then be submitted at the beginning of the next class. (Please note that late assignments may not receive feedback and will not be graded without the accompanying hard copy.)

Extensions will be granted in emergency situations (e.g., personal illness or a death in the family). Non-emergency extensions can be negotiated if you get in touch with me ahead of time. If you know in advance that other obligations will make it difficult to meet the assignment deadlines, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can arrange something.

Attendance:

Regular attendance is essential to your success in ENG 2141. The most important insights in this course will be developed through class discussions that cannot be replicated by reading assigned material in your own time. To benefit from these discussions, you must attend class regularly and take an active interest in the subject matter. If you cannot avoid missing a class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from a classmate.

Participation:

What it is possible to gain from this course will depend on what we collectively contribute to it. I do not view the classroom as a place for students to gather and be told what to think; on the contrary, I view the class as a *community of inquirers* engaged in a collective, dialogical process of knowledge production.

In this sense, “participation” does not mean just showing up. It means 1) carefully reading the assigned texts and taking notes on passages that are important, intriguing, or difficult, 2) listening attentively to your classmates’ ideas and constructively engaging with their comments, and 3) coming to class prepared to take positions, make comments, and ask questions about the day’s material. Please ensure that you bring the readings to class.

Conduct:

As readers, we are all attempting the same task: to discover new ways of making sense of difficult ideas about which there are no simple answers. This is not an easy activity! Please be respectful and generous to all who share it with you. I encourage you to address one another and to pick up on previous commenters’ points during our class discussion. Remember that the professor is only one member of your audience, and try to articulate your points in a way that will be accessible to everyone listening.

Children in class:

Parents who encounter unforeseen disruptions in their childcare arrangements are welcome to bring their children to class to avoid having to choose between caregiving and their own academic pursuits. I ask only that parents who do so sit near the door so that they can attend to their child’s (or children’s) needs outside if necessary, and to minimize disruption to other students. If you have long-term attendance concerns related to childcare, please get in touch with me so that we can come to an arrangement that works for you.

Electronics policy:

Unless you have an access-related reason, please do not rely on laptops or other electronic devices to access course materials in class. Do not use cellphones in class. If you must take a call or answer a text message, please respect your neighbours and leave the classroom to do so. Unless you have a valid reason and have obtained consent beforehand, permission is not granted for students to record lectures.

Sexual violence policy:

The University of Ottawa does not tolerate any form of sexual violence. Sexual violence refers to any act of a sexual nature committed without legal consent, such as rape, sexual harassment or online harassment. The University, as well as student and employee associations, offers a full range of resources and services allowing members of our community to receive information and confidential assistance and providing for a procedure to report an incident or make a complaint. For more information, visit www.uottawa.ca/sexual-violence-support-and-prevention.

Plagiarism and academic integrity:

You are responsible for understanding the definition of plagiarism and for reviewing the University of Ottawa’s academic fraud policy (<https://www.uottawa.ca/vice-president-academic/academic-regulations-explained/academic-fraud>). Any act of presenting someone else’s words or ideas as your own (whether intentionally or unintentionally) constitutes plagiarism. Any time that you use or refer to another person’s original words or ideas, you must cite the original source according to MLA style conventions. Please get in touch with me if you have any questions about the policy.

Academic assistance:

There are resources on campus that offer writing assistance to undergraduates, including the Arts Writing Centre (<https://arts.uottawa.ca/writingcentre/en>) and the Academic Writing Help Centre (<https://sass.uottawa.ca/en/writing>). I encourage you to make use of these resources if you encounter difficulties in the writing component of this course. The University of Ottawa's Student Academic Success Service (SASS) also provides student mentoring, counselling, and academic accommodations (<https://sass.uottawa.ca/en>).

If you are affected by a physical or mental disability or have access needs that will affect your ability to participate in class or to complete assignments, please feel free to get in touch with me, at your discretion, so that I can make the course as accessible to you as possible.

Class schedule (may be subject to change):

Week	Date	Theme or Concept	Readings	Due
1	Tues, Jan 7	Introduction to the course	---	---
	Thurs, Jan 9	Nature writing and ecocriticism	Timothy Clark , "Introduction: The Challenge"; William Carlos Williams , "The Red Wheelbarrow"; H.D. [Hilda Doolittle] , "Sea Poppies"	---
2	Tues, Jan 14	Romanticism and technological modernity	John Clare , "The Yellowhammer's Nest"; Gerard Manley Hopkins , "Binsey Poplars"; Clark , Chapter 1 ("Old world romanticism")	
	Thurs, Jan 16	The pastoral ideal and "new world" romanticism	Leo Marx , <i>The Machine in the Garden</i> , Chapter 1 ("Sleepy Hollow, 1844"); Clark , Chapter 2 ("New world romanticism")	---
3	Tues, Jan 21	Nature vs. culture?	Walt Whitman , "Song of the Redwood-Tree"	---
	Thurs, Jan 23	Wilderness and "the wild"	Henry David Thoreau , "Walking"; Clark , Chapter 3 ("Genre and the question of non-fiction")	---
4	Tues, Jan 28	Wilderness and "the wild"	Henry David Thoreau , <i>Walden</i> (Chapter 2, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For"); Cronon , "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature"	---
	Thurs, Jan 30	Human and non-human animals	Sarah Orne Jewett , "A White Heron"; Clark , Chapter 18 ("Ethics and the non-human animal")	---
5	Tues, Feb 4	Ecological thinking and bioregionalism	Aldo Leopold , <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> selections ("Foreword," "Good Oak," "Marshland Elegy," "Thinking Like a Mountain");	---

			Clark , Chapter 13 (“Questions of scale: the local, the national and the global”)	
	Thurs, Feb 6	Apocalypse and the Anthropocene	M.P. Shiel , <i>The Purple Cloud</i>	Essay 1 preliminary thesis (by email)
6	Tues, Feb 11	Apocalypse and the Anthropocene	M.P. Shiel , <i>The Purple Cloud</i> ; Kent Linthicum , “Dancing on a Volcano: Subverting Catastrophe in M.P. Shiel’s <i>The Purple Cloud</i> ”	---
	Thurs, Feb 13	Apocalypse and the Anthropocene	M.P. Shiel , <i>The Purple Cloud</i> ; Timothy Morton , “Victorian Hyperobjects”	Essay 1 (in class)
7	Tues, Feb 18	N/A	READING WEEK: NO CLASS	---
	Thurs, Feb 20	N/A	READING WEEK: NO CLASS	---
8	Tues, Feb 25	Indigenous vs. settler visions of nature	Zitkala-Sa , <i>Impressions of an Indian Childhood</i> ; Clark , Chapter 12 (“‘Post-colonial’ ecojustice”)	---
	Thurs, Feb 27	Nature as process	Alfred North Whitehead , “Nature Alive” (Part II of <i>Nature and Life</i>)	---
9	Tues, Mar 3	Poetics of process	Gertrude Stein , <i>Tender Buttons</i> (“Objects” section); Clark , Chapter 4 (“Language beyond the human?”)	---
	Thurs, Mar 5	Toward an ecopoetics?	Charles Olson , “The Kingfishers” and “Projective Verse”	---
10	Tues, Mar 10	Race, place, and nature	Zora Neale Hurston , <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	---
	Thurs, Mar 12	Race, place, and nature	Zora Neale Hurston , <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	---
11	Tues, Mar 17	Race, place, and nature	Zora Neale Hurston , <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> ; Paul Outka , <i>Race and Nature</i> , Introduction	---
	Thurs Mar 19	Beyond nature?	H.P. Lovecraft , “The Colour Out of Space”; Clark , Chapter 6 (“Post-humanism and the ‘end of nature’?”)	Essay 2 proposal (by email)
12	Tues, Mar 24	Non-human agencies	Marianne Moore , “The Fish” and “A Grave”; Clark , Chapter 15 (“Science studies”)	---
	Thurs, Mar 26	Reimagining creation	Joy Harjo , “She Had Some Horses”	---
13	Tues, Mar 31	Reimagining creation	Joy Harjo , “A Map to the Next World”	---
	Thurs, Apr 2	Exam Review	Revisiting previous texts, discussing exam format	Essay 2 (in class)