



JOHN CABOT UNIVERSITY
COURSE CODE: "EN 399-B"
COURSE NAME: "Special Topics in English Literature: Literature and the Environment"
SEMESTER & YEAR: Fall 2023
SYLLABUS
INSTRUCTOR: Lew is Samuel Klausner

EMAIL: lklausner@johncabot.edu

HOURS: MW 3:00 PM -4:15 PM

TOTAL NO. OF CONTACT HOURS: 45

CREDITS: 3

PREREQUISITES: Prerequisite: EN 110 with a grade of C or above. In addition, students must have completed one other English literature class or have Junior standing.

OFFICE HOURS:

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

An in-depth treatment of a current area of special concern within the field of English Literature. Courses offered previously include: Dickens and Englishness; Race, Class, Gender, Culture: The American Dream in Literature; The Innocents Abroad: Perceptions of Italy in American, European and British Writing; Topics in World Literature: Masterpieces in Western Fiction. This is a reading and writing intensive course. Students in 300-level literature classes are required to produce 5-6,000 words of critical writing. *May be taken more than once for credit with different topics.*

SUMMARY OF COURSE CONTENT:

This course explores the relationship between humanity and the natural world through a variety of literary texts. Students will read works of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction that address themes such as environmentalism, conservation, and sustainability. The course will also introduce students to ecocritical methods and perspectives which examine the intersections of gender, race, and class with environmental issues. Through close readings and critical analysis, students will appreciate the ways in which literature reflects and shapes our understanding of nature and the environment.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Being a 300-level course in English, this course requires that you produce at least 5,000 to 6,000 words of critical prose. You will have to do this over three papers each of approximately 1,500 words and two exams each of approximately 750 words. Another requirement of a 300-level course is that you do research for your three papers which you will cite according to MLA rules. This means both in-text citations and a bibliography. We will not spend class time going over MLA formatting and citation rules, so anyone who has any questions about this should make an appointment with a librarian who works with format and citation.

The course does not pretend to cover all traditions and cultures of environmentalism. Though we will touch upon non-European traditions, such as Native American views of nature and environmentalism, this course will not cover them comprehensively.

The focus here is literary rather than political or scientific. We will certainly talk about political environmentalism, about kinds of environmental activism, about the current state of climate change, the predictions of meteorologists, the actions governments are presently taking to slow the rate of global warming. However, we will talk about these as a way to put the literary texts we read into context. They will not be our main focus.

Our main focus will be literature since the romantic period (1780 to the present) which conditions our ways of understanding and talking about the environment. For example, the romantic idea of "natural religion", that God or Spirit is immanent in nature, still shapes how we talk about nature. The ways in which we talk about pollution, wilderness, disaster, conservationism, environmentalism, sustainability, nature (as opposed to man-made), will all be addressed in works we read. We will read literature as works of imagination and language, but always with an eye on the environmental implications of what we are reading.

We will read works of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. There will be poems, memoirs, essays, and works of fiction, and our reading will always be mindful of these as distinct genres with particular ways of expressing ideas.

TEXTBOOK:

Book Title	Author	Publisher	ISBN number	Library Call Number	Comments	Format	Local Bookstore	Online Purchase

Ecocriticism	Greg Garrard	Routledge	978-0-415-66786-9			Hard Copy		
Desert Solitaire	Edward Abbey	Ballantine	978-0345326492					
Parable of the Sower	Octavia Butler	Grand Central Publishing	978-1538732182					
Oryx and Crake	Margaret Atwood	Virago	978-1844080281					
The Road	Cormac McCarthy	Knopf	978-0307387899					

REQUIRED RESERVED READING:

Book Title	Author	Publisher	ISBN number	Library Call Number	Comments
The Ecopoetry Anthology	Fisher-Wirth and Street, eds.	Trinity University Press	9781595349293		

RECOMMENDED RESERVED READING:

NONE

GRADING POLICY**-ASSESSMENT METHODS:**

Assignment	Guidelines	Weight
Paper one	The first paper for the course will be approximately 1,500 words long, will be about the readings we have done for class up to that point, will require research which must be documented and cited. It should be submitted on Turnitin on Moodle and conform to MLA formatting rules. All sources used to write the paper must be cited. Since this is a 300-level English course, you will write 5,000 to 6,000 words of critical prose for this course.	20
Paper Two		20
Paper three	This course explores the relationship between humanity and the natural world through a variety of literary texts. Students will read works of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction that address themes such as environmentalism, conservation, and sustainability. The course will also introduce students to ecocritical methods and perspectives which examine the intersections of gender, race, and class with environmental issues. Through close readings and critical analysis, students will appreciate the ways in which literature reflects and shapes our understanding of nature and the environment.	20
Midterm Exam	The Midterm will be an in-class exam that will ask you to explain concepts of ecocriticism as well as identify and comments on passages from works of literature we have read.	20
Final Exam	The Final Exam will be an in-class exam that will ask you to explain concepts of ecocriticism as well as identify and comments on passages from works of literature we have read.	20

-ASSESSMENT CRITERIA:

A Work of this quality directly addresses the question or problem raised and provides a coherent argument displaying an extensive knowledge of relevant information or content. This type of work demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate concepts and theory and has an element of novelty and originality. There is clear evidence of a significant amount of reading beyond that required for the course.

B This is highly competent level of performance and directly addresses the question or problem raised. There is a demonstration of some ability to critically evaluate theory and concepts and relate them to practice. Discussions reflect the student's own arguments and are not simply a repetition of standard lecture and reference material. The work does not suffer from any major errors or omissions and provides evidence of reading beyond the required assignments.

C This is an acceptable level of performance and provides answers that are clear but limited, reflecting the information offered in the lectures and reference readings.

D This level of performance demonstrates that the student lacks a coherent grasp of the material. Important information is omitted and irrelevant points included. In effect, the student has barely done enough to persuade the instructor that s/he should not fail.

F This work fails to show any knowledge or understanding of the issues raised in the question. Most of the material in the answer is irrelevant.

-ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS:

This course explores the relationship between humanity and the natural world through a variety of literary texts. Students will read works of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction that address themes such as environmentalism, conservation, and sustainability. The course will also introduce students to ecocritical methods and perspectives which examine the intersections of gender, race, and class with environmental issues. Through close readings and critical analysis, students will appreciate the ways in which literature reflects and shapes our understanding of nature and the environment.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

As stated in the university catalog, any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade on the work in which the dishonesty occurred. In addition, acts of academic dishonesty, irrespective of the weight of the assignment, may result in the student receiving a failing grade in the course. Instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Academic Affairs. A student who is reported twice for academic dishonesty is subject to summary dismissal from the University. In such a case, the Academic Council will then make a recommendation to the President, who will make the final decision.

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING OR OTHER DISABILITIES

John Cabot University does not discriminate on the basis of disability or handicap. Students with approved accommodations

must inform their professors at the beginning of the term. Please see the website for the complete policy.

SCHEDULE

This is a provisional schedule and will change before the course begins in September.

Week One

An introduction to the concepts of ecocriticism and environmental writing. (These will include nature versus the artificial, pollution, and environmentalism.) The aim will be to think about how these concepts often taken for obvious and for granted are in fact complicated constructions that merit questioning.

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*. (We will not read this entire book. Page assignments will be posted.)

Week Two

British romanticism and natural religion. This week will look at ways in which English poets imagined God as immanent in nature, and nature to be a means by which to commune with God spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley (prose and poetry in a packet).

Week Three

American romanticism and transcendentalism. This week will look at Emerson's idea of human interaction with nature and Thoreau's famous retreat to Walden Pond.

Emerson, Packet ("Nature," "Self-Reliance," poems)

Thoreau *Walden*

Week Four

Thoreau, *Walden*

Week Five

The basic principle here is that the first step toward environmental consciousness is observation, attention to the environment. Further, that romantic, post-romantic, modern, and contemporary poetry in English offers a particularly rich variety of brilliant and sensitive approaches to looking at and experiencing nature, animals, and landscapes.

Poetry of nature: Lawrence, Dickinson, Whitman, Bishop, Frost, Ammons, Moore, Jeffers, Ted Hughes etc.

Week Six

A continuation of week five: Snyder, Erdrich, Gluck, Berry, Dickey, and others.

Week Seven

Like Thoreau, Edward Abbey retreated to relative isolation in nature and wrote about the experience. His memoir, *Desert Solitaire*, is often thought of as an updated version of Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond. Like *Walden*, it is a polemical work that criticizes the American, capitalist culture that threatens to deface the natural landscape.

Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*.

Week Eight

There is an already large and growing body of dystopian and science fiction writing about environmental disaster. Among these is Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* which brings together issues of pollution, global warming, and environmental mismanagement with issues of race and racism, gender inequality, social injustice, and economic inequality.

Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*.

Week Nine

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is also set in a post-catastrophic future dystopia in which genetic engineering has gone awry and created dangerous hybrid creatures. The novel also deals with the gender construction, the oppression of women and human trafficking.

Margret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*.

Week Ten

Margret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

Week Eleven

Yet another novel set in a post-catastrophic world. Here the catastrophe is not named or explained, but a father and son fight to survive in a bleak landscape of scarcity. The novel explores human relationships under the stress of scarcity, the ethics of survival, human relationships with the environment.

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Week Twelve

This novel published in 1896, if included in this course, is likely to come before week twelve. It is set in Maine and deals with the characters of a small town whose community and values are set in the context of their relationship with the natural landscape which is dominated by fir trees.

Sarah Orne Jewett, **The Country of the Pointed Firs**.

Week Thirteen

This recent novel by Turkish novelist Elif Shafak is a tentative addition to the course. It is not a novel that deals primarily or directly with environmentalist issues, but it does deal with spirituality in terms of relationships not only among humans, but also with nature. What recommends the novel for a course such as this one is the part of the novel which is written from the point of view of a fig tree, a narrative maneuver that asks us to consider sentient nature and non-human points of view.

Elif Shafak, *The Forty Rules of Love*

Week Fourteen

A return to poetry in which there are human encounters with nature, mostly from the 20th Century: Niedeker, Williams, Arigo, Berry, Snyder, Frost, Moore, and others we have already looked at.

Final Exam will be held in class at the time scheduled by the registrar