



HL2003

*Syllabus subject to modification

THE ECOLOGICAL THOUGHT

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN LITERATURE AND BEYOND

(Counts toward Category A requirement as “Introduction to Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature”)

Spring 2018

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Location: S3-SR4

“...environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity’s relation to it.”

Lawrence Buell

This course introduces you to artistic strategies used across historical periods and regions, ranging from the eighteenth century to the present, to relay environmental consciousness and highlight our role as agents contributing to ecological processes. We examine literary texts, films, art, graphic novels, and nonfiction alongside work in other fields, including environmental history, climate change communication, and public science writing. You will apply your knowledge in written assignments, active learning exercises, a class visit to an interactive exhibition in Singapore, and a final examination. Guest speakers working on sustainability across divisions at NTU will contribute to our discussion.

Aims & Outcomes

You will be exposed to past and current global environmental concerns through literary genres, art, film, and other media; learn how to close read and comparatively analyze primary and secondary sources across fields; and apply your knowledge of how art-makers cultivate environmental consciousness in assessments that build on one another.

As a result of taking this course, you should be able to:

- Interpret the formal and thematic aspects of literary texts, art, and film across historical periods in relation to environmental concerns including climate change, water, energy, and biodiversity

- Identify the historical and cultural context in which these sources were produced, and pinpoint factors that influenced their style, content, interpretation, and reception
- Recognize the role of factors such as race, gender, and class in the construction of environmental messages
- Apply knowledge of the strategies used to communicate environmental consciousness across genres, regions, and historical periods in written assessments and a final examination
- Contribute to sustainability by taking part in interactive exhibitions in Singapore

Course Materials:

***All readings and viewings listed in the schedule (except *The Water Knife* and *Oil and Water*) will be made available online**

Texts (poetry, fiction, nonfiction, essays, and criticism)

- Poetry: William Blake, “The Chimney Sweeper”; Anne Finch, “A Nocturnal Reverie” (1713); John Clare, “The Fallen Elm”; William Cowper, “The Yardley Oak”; Susan Stewart, *The Forest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Jonathan Swift, “A Description of a City Shower” (1710); Lee Tzu Pheng, “Singapore River”; Roger Vaughan Jenkins, *From the Belly of the Carp* (Singapore: EPB Publishers, 1996); Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Man” (1733-34)
- Essays: Joseph Addison, “On the Scale of Being,” *The Spectator* 519 (1712)
- Novel: Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015)
- Laurie Shannon et al, “Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources,” *PMLA* 126:2 (2011)
- Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010)
- Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)
- Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1995)
- Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015)
- Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011)
- Ashley Dawson, *Extinction: A Radical History* (New York: OR Books, 2016)
- Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009)
- Interview: “Deforestation in a Civilized World,” Robert Pogue Harrison (*LARB*, 2012)

Graphic Novel

- Steve Duin & Shannon Wheeler, *Oil and Water* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2011)

Art & Cinema

- William Blake, illuminated prints from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*
- James Balog, wildlife photography
- Jason deCaires Taylor, underwater exhibitions
- Jeff Orlowski, *Chasing Coral* (2017)
- Shalini Kantayya, *A Drop of Life* (2007)

Assessment:

Midterm Project: 15%

Final Research Paper: 20%

Participation & Literature Review: 15%

Final Examination: 50%

Midterm Project

A critical essay (1500 words +) in MLA format analyzing at least one primary source from our syllabus studied to date, drawing insight from at least two secondary sources. One of these secondary sources must be scholarly; the other may be a contemporary commentary from a local newspaper or blog. Place one of your chosen texts into conversation with an ecocritically significant art object or architectural site in Singapore, addressing how they both engage questions, concerns, or themes relating to ecological consciousness and sustainability.

Final Research Paper

A research paper (2500 words +) in MLA format analyzing two primary sources from our syllabus executed in different mediums (ex: literary source and film), drawing insight from at least three scholarly sources. Select sources you have not yet written about.

Literature Review: a two-page review of Paolo Bacigalupi's novel *The Water Knife* that takes a stance on this source's ethical and political message.

Final Exam: a series of essay questions targeting key topics covered throughout the term.

Course Policies:

Assignments & Participation: you are expected to complete assigned readings and viewings, attend all seminar sessions, actively participate in discussions and activities (including our field trip), and turn in assessments on time.

*Absence from class without a valid reason will affect your overall grade. Valid reasons include falling sick, supported by a medical certificate, and participation in NTU's approved activities supported by an excuse letter from the relevant bodies. There will be no make-up

opportunities for in-class activities. If you must miss a seminar session, please inform us via email ahead of time.

Academic Integrity: good academic work depends on honesty and ethical behaviour. The quality of your work as a student relies on adhering to the principles of academic integrity and to the NTU Honour Code, a set of values shared by the whole university community. Truth, Trust and Justice are at the core of NTU's shared values.

* If you are unsure of how to cite a source, please review the university's academic integrity resources or ask us directly.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Environmental Consciousness, Then & Now (Jan 16)

*Introductory lecture and interactive activities

Week 2: The Ecological Thought (Jan 23)

- Timothy Morton, "Introduction," *The Ecological Thought*, pp. 1-19
- Lawrence Buell, "Introduction" and "Toxic Discourse," *Writing for an Endangered World*, pp. 1-54; Buell, "Introduction," *The Environmental Imagination*, pp. 1-30

Week 3: The Climate Change Debate (Jan 30)

- Mike Hulme, "The Social Meanings of Climate," "The Things We Believe," and "The Things We Fear," *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*, pp. 1-34; 142-177
- Naomi Klein, selections, *This Changes Everything*

Week 4: Energy (Feb 6)

- Laurie Shannon et al, "Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources," pp. 305-326
- Rob Nixon, "Pipedreams: Ken Saro-Wiwa, Environmental Justice, and Micro-Minority Rights," pp. 103-127
- Steve Duin & Shannon Wheeler, *Oil and Water* – part 1

Week 5: Energy II (Feb 13)

- William Blake, "The Chimney Sweeper"
- Blake, illuminated prints
- Duin & Wheeler, *Oil and Water* – part 2

Week 6: Biodiversity (Feb 20)

- Joseph Addison, "On the Scale of Being"
- Ashley Dawson, "Introduction" and "An Etiology of the Present Catastrophe," *Extinction: A Radical History*, pp. 1-37
- James Balog, wildlife photography

*Visiting speaker: Miles Powell (History)

Week 7: Biodiversity II (Feb 27)

- Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Man”
- Jeff Orlowski, *Chasing Coral*
- Jason deCaires Taylor, underwater exhibitions

*Visiting speaker: Ben Alvin Shedd (ADM)

Midterm Projects due via email by 5pm on Friday, March 2

Recess Week

Week 8: Forests (March 13)

- Anne Finch, “A Nocturnal Reverie”; John Clare, “The Fallen Elm”; William Cowper, “The Yardley Oak”
- Susan Stewart, selections, *The Forest*
- Robert Pogue Harrison, selections, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*
- “Deforestation in a Civilized World,” interview with Harrison (*LARB*)

Week 9: Sustainability in Action (March 20)

- Class Trip: *Into the Wild: An Immersive Virtual Adventure*, ArtScience Museum
*transportation provided by NTU

Week 10: Water (March 27)

- Jonathan Swift, “A Description of a City Shower”; Lee Tzu Pheng, “Singapore River”
- Roger Vaughan Jenkins, selected poems, *From the Belly of the Carp*
- Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife* – part 1

*Visiting speaker: Meridel Rubenstein

Week 11: Resource Politics & Ethics (April 3 – No Class)

- Assignment: compose a two-page review of *The Water Knife* that takes a stance on this source’s ethical and political message; due via email by **Friday, April 6**

Week 12: Water II (April 10)

- Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife* – part 2
- Shalini Kantayya, *A Drop of Life*

Week 13: Conclusion & Review (April 17)

Final Research Papers due via email by 5pm on Friday, April 20