

English 338W: Environmental Criticism

Fall Semester 2015

Instructor: Lowell Duckert

Email: Lowell.Duckert@mail.wvu.edu

Meeting Time: 11:30-12:45 PM TR

Meeting Place: Woodburn Hall 105

Office: Colson Hall 131

Office Hours: 1:45-4:45 PM T and by appointment

Office Phone: (304) 293-9700

Ever since Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” the field has never been at rest; instead, it has taken multiple *turns*. Within the word “environment,” after all, is the French word *virer* (“to turn, veer”). Following ecostudies’ impulse to fork, this class will take a specific swerve: into, with, and through water. In their edited collection *Thinking with Water* (2013), Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis “propose that waters enable lively possibility even as they exceed current understandings.” They ponder a “hydrological turn” that “enter[s] into a more collaborative relationship with the aqueous, actively questioning habitual instrumentalizations of water.” Over the course of the semester, we will read medieval to modern literature alongside several prominent ecological theorists (representing ecofeminism, queer ecology, postcolonial ecocriticism, dark ecology, and more). Our goals are (1) to investigate what wet environmental criticism *is* and *does*, and (2) to discover the complications and joys that arrive when we theorize how physical bodies of water – from a drop to an ocean, and their absence – affect the imagination. Overall, you will understand how literature theorizes ecology as much as ecological theory informs literature, thereby revealing literature’s potential to reshape, and even redress, contemporary issues of environmental health and justice.



Kern River
Bakersfield, CA
2/4/14

Learning Objectives:

1. to analyze the fluid relationship between place and the imagination: what is commonly referred to as ecopoetics
2. to forge thematic connections across works of art, investigating (and interrogating) key concepts like nature, ecology, the human, apocalypse, wilderness, and agency
3. to hone your writing through close readings and critical analysis of literature
4. to learn contemporary methods of studying English literature within an ecocritical frame and via hydrological routes
5. to critique anthropocentric (human-centered) modes of our age in order to imagine an ethics that accounts for our enmeshment with all things, one that might offer alternative futures besides catastrophe.

Required Books: (available from the WVU Bookstore)

Caroline Bergvall, *Drift*

Richard Flanagan, *Gould's Book of Fish*

Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.)

Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*

Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon*

William Shakespeare, *Pericles* (Folger Shakespeare Library ed.)

Requirements:

1. *The basics*: attend class; participate in discussions; complete readings and assignments on time. Be prepared for some difficult reading, ranging from ectheory to the texts themselves (early modern drama, experimental poetry, and environmental sickness narratives). The challenge, I assure you, will be mutual: I expect us to grapple with the readings, pose more questions than answers, and engage in spirited conversation.
2. *Bodies of water* are weekly responses (at least one page, double-spaced) in which you will meditate on the relationship between environment and imagination. I would like you to pick a body of water – be it your kitchen sink, the river near your home, a cloud – re-turn to it throughout the semester, and note the weekly changes you observe. How does this fluctuating body of water make you think differently (or not) about your own body? Be creative; feel free to be personal. In general, your responses are meant to ask intelligent questions about that week's reading, generate ideas for your papers, and, I hope, enlarge your own sense of elemental enmeshment.
3. *A short paper* (5 pp.) on Ghosh's *Tide* and environmental justice (and possibly in conjunction with the experiential learning component).
4. *A midterm paper* (5 pp.) that places literature in conversation with one or more ecottheoretical "positions" (Garrard) and a current hydrological issue of your choice.
5. *Peer-editing exercise*: as you draft your final paper, I will assign you a peer-editing partner who will offer constructive criticism. Each person will compose a short write-up for the other (and for me).

6. *A final paper* (10 pp.) that builds on your midterm research. An excellent (A) paper follows these criteria: it demonstrates an advanced level of literary analysis, engages and cites text throughout, puts forth a sophisticated and compellingly innovative argument, and contains few or no grammatical or mechanical errors.

Grading:

Participation and attendance in class	15
Peer-editing exercise	10
Eco-journals (bodies of water)	20
Short paper	15
Final paper (includes midterm)	40
Total	100

Experiential Learning Component:

Because one of the course objectives is thinking about how literature’s ecotheorizations can influence current environmental policy, we will meet with Friends of Decker’s Creek (or a similar organization) during the semester. If you have any reservations about this conversation, or feel unable/unwilling to join for *any* reason, please do not hesitate to tell me. I will gladly assign you a different task.

Attendance Policy and Code of Courtesy:

I define “present” as arriving on time with your cellphone silenced; bringing the appropriate book to class; giving me your full attention; and remaining in the room until the class ends. Laptops are allowed only for note-taking purposes. I will allow **three** absences: after that, your grade drops a letter for each additional absence (for example: an A becomes a B). **Late work will not be accepted.** At six absences, you fail the course. If you foresee a scheduling conflict, please notify me as soon as possible. Incompletes will be considered only if you apply to me before the end of the term; once I agree, we will negotiate the conditions under which the grade of “I” will be changed to a letter grade and sign a contract. Incomplete work will be submitted before the last day of class of the following semester (at the latest).

Academic Integrity:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the West Virginia University Academic Catalog at <http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecredittermsclassification/#academicintegrity> text. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Inclusivity:

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. **Any attempt to disrupt the nondiscriminatory environment of this class will not be tolerated.** If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Contact:

I encourage you to take advantage of my office hours (information above), and feel free to email/call me at any time. Never hesitate to ask a question, express a doubt, or request clarification. Make sure that your MIX email address is operational; I will frequently notify you about what to read for a given day, and I will occasionally post documents online.

Schedule of Readings (subject to change):

Week 1: **Turn**

T 8/18 Introductions

R 8/20 Chen, MacLeod, Neimanis: "Toward a Hydrological Turn?" (online);
Garrard, "Positions"

Week 2: **Sea**

T 8/25 Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (online); Garrard, "Beginnings:
Pollution"

R 8/27 Carson, *Sea*; Alaimo, "Violet-Black" (online)

Week 3: No class

Week 4: **Delta**

T 9/8 Ghosh, *Tide*

R 9/10 Ghosh, *Tide*

Week 5:

T 9/15 Ghosh, *Tide*

R 9/17 Ghosh, *Tide*

Week 6: **Current**

T 9/22 Bergvall, *Drift*; **short paper due**

R 9/24 Bergvall, *Drift*

Week 7:

T 9/29 Bergvall, *Drift*

R 10/1 Bergvall, *Drift*

Week 8: **Aquarium**

T 10/6 Flanagan, *Fish*

R 10/8 Flanagan, *Fish*

Week 9:

T 10/13 No class: Fall Break

R 10/15 Flanagan, *Fish*; **midterm paper due**

Week 10: **Stage**

T 10/20 Shakespeare, *Pericles*

R 10/22 Shakespeare, *Pericles*

Week 11:

T 10/27 Shakespeare, *Pericles*

R 10/29 Shakespeare, *Pericles*

Week 12: TBD

Week 13: **Lagoon**

T 11/10 Okorafor, *Lagoon*

R 11/12 Okorafor, *Lagoon*

Week 14:

T 11/17 Okorafor, *Lagoon*

R 11/19 Okorafor, *Lagoon*

Week 15: No class: Fall Recess

Week 16: Individual conferences

Week 17:

T 12/8 Class conclusion; **final paper due** on scheduled day of exam (W 12/16)