

ENGLISH 266

T/Th 11:00 am -12:15 pm / White Gravenor 204

Introduction to the Environmental Humanities

Nathan K. Hensley

Spring 2023 / Georgetown University

Office Hours: T 2-4 pm, Th 2-3, W mornings by appointment

nathan.hensley@georgetown.edu

Office: 316 New North



Controversial image accompanying NY Times article, "Major Climate Report Describes a Strong Risk of Crisis as Early as 2040," October 7, 2018. Original caption: "Harry Taylor, 6, played with the bones of dead livestock in Australia, which has faced severe drought."

How does art help us understand interconnection? Is there a philosophy of climate change? Can poetry, as Percy Shelley thought, remake the world? This course introduces students to key problems and core concepts in the area of hybrid intellectual activity known as the "environmental humanities." Primary texts will include novels, poetry, films, artworks, philosophical texts, and digital media objects ranging from the early fossil fuel era (c. 1780s) to the present day. Secondary readings will draw on research in literary studies, art history, philosophy, anthropology, geography, history, and the environmental sciences. Throughout, our inquiries will be shaped by a concern for environmental justice, keeping in view the uneven and historically-conditioned ways in which vulnerability has been distributed under climate change. Our goal will be to show what humanistic knowledge can *do* at a moment—this one—when the world feels like it's falling apart. No prior exposure to environmental issues is required.

Required Texts:

Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (Oxford World's Classics): 978-0199219223

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (U Chicago Press): 978-0226526812

Richard McGuire, *Here* (Pantheon): 978-0375406508

Juliana Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came* (Commune Editions): 978-1934639177

Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem* (Norton): 9781941040638)

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford World's Classics): 9780198834786

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* PENGUIN: 9780141439976

Additional Readings:

A good portion of our semester's reading will be posted on our Canvas page; these readings are marked on the syllabus with an asterisk (*). You should plan to budget at least \$50 for printing these files in the required hard copy format. For reasons I'll explain on the first day, you are expected **to print the PDFs in hard copy; read everything on printed paper; and (of course) bring all secondary texts to class.** A device with a stylus annotation input mechanism will be an acceptable substitute for printed paper, but laptop reading is to be avoided. Readings marked "supplementary" are just that: not required (formally or informally) but available to you should you desire further guidance on the primary texts.

Assignments:

Formal Course Work:

Close reading assignments (2). (2 pages, single-spaced.) Details for these exercises in minute and sympathetic attention will be provided, but essentially this is an assignment in the hyperbolically slow apprehension of a literary artifact. Your task will be to take time to appreciate this object in all its dynamic and concrete specificity: terms, tips, and helpful suggestions will be provided. You are not meant to argue but to *read*: your job is to notice everything. Details to be announced.

Take-home mid-term. Open book, open notes, no Googling. The mid-term is just that: a temperature-taking of your work so far, assessing your capacity to engage imaginatively and substantively with the material to this point. Less formal than an essay, more structured than a blog post. Here as always, ideas matter most. You have 48 hours to complete them, choosing from among a set of essay questions. Honor system, with enforcement.

Seminar paper or final creative / public humanities project. (10-12 pp.) This final project will take one of two forms (your choice). One option is a sustained academic argument that follows the format of a published scholarly article, if slightly shorter. This should be rigorous, researched, and shined, prosewise, to a glimmering polish. The other option, more amorphous, is up to you. If you take this option, you will devise a creative or public project of some kind in consultation with me. This can take almost any form: a website, an art installation, an exhibit, a happening. The work put into this should be the equivalent of that for a 15-18 pp. paper, or more.

Other Work:

Five posts to our Canvas discussion page. (250-500 words each) Every class member will make five contributions to the class Canvas page. In keeping with the multimedia nature of our course, these posts can take any form: short essays making an argument about the week's reading(s); close readings of single passages with questions appended; or sets of discussion questions in dialogue with other posts. I especially encourage the asking of informed discussion questions. Note that there is a performative aspect of these posts: they should demonstrate to me that you have engaged carefully with the day's readings. *Posts are due the night before class, no later than midnight.* All class members are required to read all posts. Schedule to come.

Postnatural Landscape Presentation. (No more longer than 10 minutes) Groups of students will collaborate to present the class with a "postnatural landscape" of their choosing: the task here is to introduce us to a place, and to explain the forces, actors, and agencies at work there – chemicals, companies, human and nonhuman actors of all scales—and, most important, to explain whether you find the place beautiful and why. Signup sheet to circulate; details to follow.

Policy on Late Work:

Reliability is important, and respect for our shared academic endeavor means that lateness is strongly discouraged. Papers and other assignments will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade for each day beyond their due date, with the first 24 hour period beginning immediately. Please see me in advance if extraordinary circumstances arise. Incompletes are offered only in genuinely exceptional moments of duress. These do come up: when they do, please be in contact with me as early as you can.

Course Grading Policy:

Your final grade for this course will reflect the quality of written work you produce; it will also reflect the quality of your participation in the collaborative labor of the course. Thus, your thoughtful responses to the texts, your active participation in class discussions, and your level of commitment to our shared work will all contribute crucially to your final grade. Breakdown:

Community citizenship ("participation")	20%
Online citizenship (Canvas posts, responses):	20%
Close reading assignment 1:	10%
Close reading assignment 2:	10%
Mid-term exam:	15%
Landscape presentation:	5%
Seminar Paper/Final Project:	20%

Policy on Late Work:

Out of respect for your classmates' and my own time, being late is strongly discouraged:

papers and other assignments will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade for each day beyond their due date, with the first 24 hour period beginning immediately. Late exams will not be accepted. Please see me in advance if extraordinary circumstances arise.

Absence and Tardy Policy:

The seminar-style nature of this course makes your presence in class imperative. Your **first two** absences will not be penalized. Every absence beyond the second without prior authorization or a dean's note will result in a 1 percentage point drop in your final grade, i.e. from 91% to 90%. Six absences will result in failure of the course. If you must miss a class session, it's your responsibility to learn what happened in class and to obtain any of the materials distributed that day. If you know in advance you'll miss a day when an assignment is due, you must arrange with me another, earlier, due date. You are permitted **three late arrivals** over the course of the semester. **Every two late arrivals after the first three** will count as a class absence.

Values in the Classroom:

Our class is guided by the principle of mutual respect and an ethic of care. Our classroom is a space where debate of ideas and substantive disagreement are enabled by the fact that our mutual respect is unquestioned. In keeping with this, I ask that you please inform me of your preferred name and pronouns and I will, of course, use them. Mine are he/him. The Department of English has adopted [a statement of principles](#) that states, in part: "The Department of English at Georgetown University stands united in its commitment to the fundamental equality and inherent dignity of all human beings. These values are the foundation of our work in the humanities and transcend political affiliation. They are also embedded in our University's mission and the Jesuit tradition of seeking social justice. As humanists we are committed to the practices of principled argumentation, free inquiry, careful consideration of evidence and fact, and sustained, contemplative engagement. A prerequisite for those practices is respect."

Plagiarism:

Do not do it, ever. If you do, you will (at the very least) fail the course. See the Georgetown Honor System website for guidelines about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it: <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. Note that, as suggested above, in all matters I expect you to observe the Georgetown honor pledge: *To be honest in every academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.*

Disabilities and Accommodations:

I'm committed to providing whatever it takes to help you be successful in this course. This comes from the Georgetown Academic Resource Center: "Georgetown does not discriminate or deny access to an otherwise qualified student with a disability on the basis of disability, and students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable accommodations and/or special services in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAA) of 2008. However, students are responsible for

communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not requested an accommodation and adequately documented their disabilities. Also, the University need not modify programmatic, course, or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction.” Please consult <http://guarc.georgetown.edu/disability/accommodations/>; and do see me early in the term to discuss how I can help.

Note on Title IX:

University policy requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct or gender-based violence to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University’s response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of *fully confidential* professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence. These resources include: Jen Schweer, MA, LPC / Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention / (202) 687-0323 / jls242@georgetown.edu / And Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist / Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) / (202) 687-6985 / els54@georgetown.edu. More information about campus resources and faculty reporting obligations can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

Guides for Further Study and Research:

Thinking in interdisciplinary ways across boundaries of science and culture is difficult. For reliable scientific information, please see the NOAA website, the International Panel on Climate Change site, and the climate coverage of, especially the *Guardian* (UK) and the *Washington Post*. The GU Library has compiled a hub for accessing interdisciplinary information about climate change: <http://guides.library.georgetown.edu/climate>. For matters of literary and theoretical terminology, your first line of defense is the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*. Second stop is the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available with a Google search. For matters of literary history, consult the *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* or the *Columbia Guide to British Literature*. (Links to these are available the library’s [19th century resources site](#).) Only after exhausting these options should you bother with Wikipedia. Please stay away from online summaries not mentioned here. And as always, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions about this material. We’re in this together. I’m here to help.

Intro to Environmental Humanities / Course Schedule

Please note that the calendar is subject to change; readings will almost certainly alter as our progress dictates. Please look at blog for most up to date schedule. Texts marked with an asterisk () are electronic resources on class Canvas site.*

I. PRESENTS

THURSDAY, January 12: Introduction; *King James Bible*, Genesis 1-2; John Locke, from *Second Treatise of Government*; Karl Marx, from *The Communist Manifesto* (all handouts)

TUESDAY, January 17: Jeremy Davies, from *The Birth of the Anthropocene**; Petrocultures Collective, “The Arts, Humanities, and Energy (or, What Can Art tell us about Oil?)”*; Chris Jordan, *Midway: Messages from the Gyre** (review artworks online; short film optional); spend twenty minutes browsing studythehumanities.org

THURSDAY, January 19: Rebecca Solnit, “Are We Missing the Big Picture on Climate Change?”*; Steve Lerner, from *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States**; Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, from *Petrochemical America* (selected spreads)*

Optional: Tristan Baurick et al, “Welcome to ‘Cancer Alley,’ Where Toxic Air Is About to Get Worse”*

TUESDAY, January 24: Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, Part I, “Stories”

THURSDAY, January 26: Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, Parts II and III, “History” and “Politics”

TUESDAY, January 31: Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Chapters 1 & 2. “A Fable for Tomorrow” and “The Obligation to Endure”*; Rob Nixon, from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor**; “Miles of Ice Collapsing Into the Sea,” *New York Times**

II. PASTS

THURSDAY, February 2: Andreas Malm, from *Fossil Capital*: “In the Heat of the Past”*; Fredric Jameson, from “On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act”*; William Wordsworth, “Old Cumberland Beggar” and “Nutting”*; handout on poetic reading*

TUESDAY, February 7: Spend twenty minutes browsing the online edition of Charles Lyell, from *Principles of Geology**; Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 5-129.

THURSDAY, February 9: Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 129-206; “The Insect Apocalypse is Here: What Does it Mean for the Rest of Life on Earth?” *New York Times**

TUESDAY, February 14: Charles Darwin, From *The Origin of Species*, 230-338; Elizabeth Grosz, from *The Nick of Time**

Optional: Allen MacDuffie, “Darwin and the Anthropocene”*

THURSDAY, February 16: Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* 1-150

TUESDAY, February 21: NO CLASS; PRESIDENT’S DAY; Keep reading Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Watch Prof. Hensley’s lecture, “A Poetics of Action: Althusser, Bronte, Rossetti.”*

THURSDAY, February 23: Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, cont’d

TUESDAY, February 28: *Wuthering Heights*, cont’d.

THURSDAY, March 2: Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, wrapup, and selected poems by Emily Brontë;* John Ruskin, “Of the Pathetic Fallacy,” from *Modern Painters**
[CLOSE READING 1 DUE]

TUESDAY, March 7: NO CLASS; SPRING BREAK

THURSDAY, March 9: NO CLASS; SPRING BREAK

TUESDAY, March 14: Bruce Holsinger, “Of Pigs and Parchment: Medieval Studies and the Coming of the Animal”*

THURSDAY, March 16: The material of texts. Class meets in Booth Center for Special Collections, 5th Floor, Lauinger Library

MIDTERM EXAMS DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 17, by midnight
--

<i>MONDAY, MARCH 20: EXTRA CREDIT LECTURE:</i> BRUCE HOLSINGER, “On Parchment: Animals, Archives, and the Making of Culture from Herodotus to the Digital Age”
--

TUESDAY, March 21: Possible class visit by Bruce Holsinger. From Bruce Holsinger, *The Displacements**.

THURSDAY, March 23: Percy Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry”*; “To a Skylark,” “Ode to the West Wind”; “The Triumph of Life,” and other poems TBD*

TUESDAY, March 28: Jerome McGann, from *Romantic Ideology**; Jonathan Culler, from *Theory of the Lyric**; Juliana Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came*

THURSDAY, March 30: Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came*, cont'd. Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem*. Christina Sharpe, "The Weather," from *In the Wake**

TUESDAY, April 4: Richard McGuire, *Here*

THURSDAY, April 6: Richard McGuire, *Here*, cont'd; supplementary articles on McGuire TBD.

III. FUTURES

TUESDAY, April 11: Donna Haraway, from *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene**; Peter Godfrey-Smith, from *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness** [POSTNATURAL LANDSCAPE PRESENTATIONS]

THURSDAY, April 13: Jonathan Crary, from *Scorched Earth: Beyond the Digital Age to a Post-Capitalist World**; Nick Estes, from *Our History is the Future** [POSTNATURAL LANDSCAPE PRESENTATIONS]

TUESDAY, April 18: H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* [POSTNATURAL LANDSCAPE PRESENTATIONS]

THURSDAY, April 20: H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, cont'd [POSTNATURAL LANDSCAPE PRESENTATIONS] **[CLOSE READING 2 DUE]**

TUESDAY, April 25: Open class, material selected by class vote. [POSTNATURAL LANDSCAPE PRESENTATIONS]

THURSDAY, April 27: Off campus: visit multimedia sites, installation artworks, or protest scenes TBD by class vote.

TUESDAY, May 2: Last day of class. Pope Francis, from *Laudato Si* (EH); Archival Exxon/BP documents and Georgetown syllabi TBD*. On livable futures.

TUESDAY, May 9: Seminar Papers / Final Projects due by email, no later than midnight.
