

“A History of Nature Writing”

<u>Course hours:</u>	Monday & Thursday, 11:30–12:50	<u>Classroom:</u>	Clearihue D126
<u>Instructor:</u>	Richard Pickard	<u>Office:</u>	Clearihue D331
<u>Office hours:</u>	Mon. 1:00-2:00, Wed. 1:30-2:20, Thurs. 10:30-11:20, and by appointment	<u>Email:</u>	rpickard@uvic.ca
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Calendar descriptions:

General: A study of topics in the field of ecocriticism, including how human relationships to natural landscapes and animals are mediated through literature; literature in relation to imperial, colonial and capitalist ecologies; literary production as shaping and shaped by global agencies and events of nature; the role of literature in an era of globalization and ecological crisis.

Specific: A study in the development of nature writing in North America, through the lenses of environmental crisis and recovery, that connects nature writing to autobiography and science writing; develops a historical perspective on nature writing in order to sharpen students' approach to contemporary issues and texts; introduces the discourse of ecocriticism; and links and contrasts the seminal American works of Thoreau and Leopold with contemporary Canadian writings.

Course description:

UVic's English 478, as a local example of the international environmental humanities project, questions how we think about the world and attempts to imagine a new way of thinking. In this course, we'll read nature writing as a way of developing a historically informed, materially grounded, and textually sensitive perspective on contemporary environmental issues and texts. We'll be looking at questions of style and form, content and perception: the course is therefore a dual exercise in poetics and in politics.

We begin this course with Sean Penn's film version of Jon Krakauer's nonfiction novel *Into the Wild*. Chris McCandless, the young man whose story this is, remains a polarizing but tremendously attractive figure. Importantly for our purposes, McCandless's quest was inspired in part by the work of Henry David Thoreau. Beginning with McCandless, we will ask what roles nature writing has played within the environmental movement and within what might be described as an environmentally minded counterculture.

Required texts:

Blanchet, M. Wylie. *The Curve of Time*. XXXXX: Whitecap, 2002.
Finch, Robert, and John Elder, eds. *Nature Writing: The Tradition in English*. New York: Norton, 2002.
Leopold, Aldo. *The Sand County Almanac*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989.
Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden00.html>
Vaillant, John. *The Golden Spruce*. Toronto: Vintage, 2006.

See the schedule online for dates and details of all readings.

Additional suggested readings will be available online or in hard copy in the library's Reserve Reading area.

Assignments:

Description	Length	Due	Value
Response paper: Thoreau	700 words	September 30	15%
Short ecocritical paper	1000 words	October 25	20%
Proposal	500 words	November 7	0%
Annotated bibliography	Up to 1000 words	November 20	10%
Final paper	2000 words	December 5	30%
Exam	n/a	TBA	25%

Response paper:

Find a section of Thoreau's *Walden* that speaks to you in some way. Maybe it excites you, pleases you, confuses you, annoys you: take a little time to articulate precisely what effect it has, what it is about the text that participates in this effect, and what it is about you, your past or future life, and your literary or philosophic principles that makes your response explicable. No research required.

Short paper:

While it is impossible to define “ecocriticism” impenetrably, we can at least agree that it represents a way of reading texts informed in some way by our material being in/of the natural world. (There are a half-dozen debatable terms in that definition, but never mind that for now.) Your task in this assignment is to offer an ecocritical reading of either a pre-1950 essay from *Nature Writing*, or a section from Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. We will talk in detail, well before this essay is due, about how one might go about reading and writing ecocritically, and you will receive a number of sample topics to work from in developing your own topic.

Proposal:

You will have to write a brief proposal, informed by your reading so far in this course, toward your final project. There will be time to change, if need be, but the goal in this assignment is to draw on the first assignment's self-reflection and the second assignment's formality to generate an idea you could imagine spending some serious time on. Please note that while the proposal is ungraded, you will have 20 marks deducted from the score of your final paper if you do not submit a proposal on time.

Annotated bibliography:

Once you've completed a proposal, it's time to start doing some research. You'll need to provide a summary of four separate texts appropriate to your proposal, with an explanation of their relevance. This means there's some flexibility, so you could include texts as diverse as academic articles from *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*; a field guide to grassland plants of southern Saskatchewan; Jacques Derrida's book of deconstruction *The Animal That Therefore I Am*; or Bill Peet's children's book *The Wump World*. You should link each text to your proposal (which may have evolved since it was submitted), but you have a great deal of flexibility.

Final paper (two options):

We will discuss this assignment in some detail during class time, but either of the two options will see you writing a 2000-word paper drawing on a minimum of four texts. More detail will be provided on Moodle, but basically you have two options, one of which is itself a capacious category:

1. a relatively traditional research paper, focused on one of the semester's texts, writers, or theoretical concerns, or
2. a piece of nature writing, targeted toward a specific publication (such as *Orion* or *Terrain.org*). This could be a memoir; an exploration of place; a focused examination of an issue, concept, or object; or some other example of [narrative scholarship](#).

University grading principles:

Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	%	Description (from the University of Victoria Undergraduate Calendar)
A+	9	90-100	Exceptional (A+), outstanding (A), and excellent (A-) performance. Normally achieved by a minority of students, these grades indicate a student who is self-initiating, exceeds expectations, and has an insightful grasp of the subject matter.
A	8	85-89	
A-	7	80-84	
B+	6	75-79	Very good (B+), good (B), and solid (B-) performance. Normally achieved by the largest number of students, these grades indicate a good grasp of the subject matter or an excellent grasp in one area balanced with a satisfactory grasp in the other area(s).
B	5	70-74	
B-	4	65-69	
C+	3	60-64	Satisfactory (C+) or minimally satisfactory (C) performance. These grades indicate a satisfactory (only) performance and knowledge of the subject matter.
C	2	55-59	
D	1	50-54	Marginal performance. This grade indicates a superficial grasp of the subject matter.
F	0	0-49	Unsatisfactory performance.

Submitting assignments, and lateness:

Assignments must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the date due, through the course Moodle page in .doc, .docx, or .rtf format. Ten percent will be deducted from the score of assignments handed in after the date due. Extensions are rarely – but occasionally – granted.

Plagiarism:

The minimum penalty for plagiarism is a grade of 49 on the relevant assignment, but this grade is reserved only for clear cases of inadequate documentation, such as mishandling well-intentioned paraphrases; most cases will result in a grade of 0. In addition, incidents of plagiarism are reported in accordance with university policies.

Reading Schedule:

A more detailed schedule will be posted on the course Moodle page, but the following describes the sequence of our readings.

Week	Readings
Sept. 7-13	None
Sept. 14-20	<i>Into the Wild</i> (movie in class)

Week	Readings
Sept. 21-27	Henry David Thoreau, <i>Walden</i> (online)
Sept. 28-Oct. 4	Essays, 1875-1950
Oct. 5-11	Essays, 1875-1950
Oct. 12-18	Aldo Leopold, <i>Sand County Almanac</i>
Oct. 19-25	Aldo Leopold, <i>Sand County Almanac</i>
Oct. 26-Nov. 1	Essays, 1950-1975
Nov. 2-8	M. Wylie Blanchet, <i>The Curve of Time</i>
Nov. 9-15	M. Wylie Blanchet, <i>The Curve of Time</i> (including Reading Break)
Nov. 16-22	Essays, 1975-2000
Nov. 23-29	John Vaillant, <i>The Golden Spruce</i>
Nov. 30-Dec. 4	John Vaillant, <i>The Golden Spruce</i>

Some Entirely Optional Readings

- Berger, John. "Why Look at Animals?" *About Looking*. New York: Pantheon, 1980. 1-26.
- Buell, Lawrence. "The Ethics and Politics of Environmental Criticism." *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. New York: Blackwell, 2005. 97-127.
- Cohen, Michael P. "[Blues in the Green](#): Ecocriticism under Critique." *Environmental History* 9.1 (2004): 9-36. <In unpaginated form at <http://www.asle.umn.edu/archive/intro/cohen.html>>
- Cronin, Keri. "'The Bears are Plentiful and Frequently Good Camera Subjects': Postcards and the Framing of Interspecies Encounters in the Canadian Rockies." *Mosaic* 39.4 (2006): 77-92.
- Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Ed. Cronon. New York: Norton, 1996. 69-90.
- Estok, Simon C. "Bridging the Great Divide: Ecocritical Theory and the Great Unwashed." *English Studies in Canada* 31.4 (2005): 197-209.
- Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism*. Ed. Rachel Stein. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004. 21-44.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll. "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis." Glotfelty & Fromm, xv-xxxvii. ---, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1996.
- Ingram, Annie Merrill, Ian Marshall, Daniel J. Philippon, and Adam W. Sweeting, eds. *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2007.
- Johnson, Rochelle L. "Passion for Nature beyond Metaphor: From *Walden* to Henry David Thoreau's Late Natural History Projects." Chapter 5 of *Passions for Nature: Nineteenth-Century America's Aesthetics of Alienation*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2009. 181-218.
- Kheel, Marti. "License to Kill: An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunters' Discourse." *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan. Durham, NC: Duke U P, 1995. 85-125.
- Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona. "A Genealogy of Ecofeminism." *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999. 3-27.
- Nash, Roderick. "Henry David Thoreau: Philosopher" and "Aldo Leopold: Prophet." *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Rev. edn. New Haven: Yale UP, 1977. 84-95 and 182-99.
- Philippon, Daniel J. "Introduction: The Ecology of Influence" and "The Call of the Wild: Aldo Leopold and the Wilderness Society." *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2004. 1-30 and 159-218.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination." Glotfelty & Fromm 264-75.
- Slovic, Scott. "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology: The Interiority of Outdoor Experience." Glotfelty & Fromm 351-70.
- Sturgeon, Noël. "The Nature of Race: Indigenous Women and White Goddesses." Chapter 4 of *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action*. New York: Routledge, 1997. 113-34.
- Waldie, Angela. "Challenging the Confines: Haiku from the Prison Camps." *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*. Ed. Annie Merrill Ingram, Ian Marshall, Daniel J. Philippon, and Adam W. Sweeting. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2007. 39-57.
- White, Lynn, Jr. "The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." Glotfelty & Fromm 3-14.
- White, Richard. "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Ed. William Cronon. New York: Norton, 1996. 171-85.