

Poetry of Environment

English 294:01, Environmental Studies 294:01 • MWF 10:50-11:50 • Carnegie 304 • Professor Theresa Krier • Old Main 204 • Office hours: Mondays 3:30-4:30; Thursdays 3-5pm; also by appt.

In this course we'll read a wide array of poetry, along with selected creation myths, cosmologies, and essays, to consider poets' sense of what Gary Snyder famously called "Earth House Hold." What is an environment in the first place? What environs us? How do we find a dynamic and just principle of dwelling? How do poets evoke the vitality of sensory experience within elemental environments? How does a specific natural environment arouse strong emotions and attachments? How do people in today's environmental movements use poetry? Can poetry about environments teach specific guidelines for living? What are ecopoetry and ecocriticism, and how are they different from nature poetry? What do poets mean when they say that language itself becomes an environment, or when they say that language is wild? Are broad scientific virtues of exactitude of observation, and a contemplative spirit, also virtues in environment poetry? How can studying poetry fuel or refine thinking about environmental justice?

We'll focus on poets and cosmologists from ancient and medieval China, ancient Rome, England, the United States, and Canada/Cree. To focus our thinking we'll draw on prose by Gaston Bachelard, Martin Heidegger, Gary Snyder, David Hinton, Frank Lloyd Wright, Barbara Hurd, and others.

This is a course with multiple goals.

- We'll learn how to read poetry, and discover what questions to ask of poetry of the natural world.
- All class members, including the teacher, will visit sites on Minnehaha Creek, logging hours on walks and sits – various kinds of sojourns – with well-defined goals, given in advance. One of your writing assignments late in the term will be a reflection on your cumulative experiences.
- This course fulfills the College's Writing requirement, so we'll have occasional workshops on writing about poetry, two formal essays, and frequent brief response pieces.
- This is a pilot course; we're the first people doing it. Occasionally we'll step back to see what, if anything, can use tweaking.
- Have you other goals for this course? I'd like to hear about them. They might be particularly interesting in a course with cross-listed membership.

Books and texts

A course pack

Gary Snyder. *No Nature: New and Selected Poems*

Wallace Stevens. *The Palm at the End of the Mind*

David Hinton. *Mountain Home: The Wilderness Poetry of Ancient China*

Walt Whitman. *The Complete Poems*

Alice Oswald, *Spacecraft Voyager 1*

Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth, editors. *The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry* (optional)

Robert Frost. *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems*

28, 30 January, 1 February: Monday, introductory.

♣ Wednesday & Friday, Gary Snyder, Preface to *No Nature*; *Riprap*: Pages 3-23 from *No Nature*. No reading in advance for these days.

4, 6, 8 February: *Shelter and Exposure: Why not live sweetly, as in the green trees?*

♣ Monday: T'an Ch'ien (365-427CE), "Home again among fields and gardens" (from *Mountain Home*)
Meng Hao-Jan, "Climbing Deer-Gate Mountain, thoughts of ancient times" (from *Mountain Home*)
Wang Wei, *Wheel-Rim River Sequence* (18 brief sections) (from *Mountain Home*)
Dylan Thomas, "Fern Hill" (course pack)
Virgil, Eclogue 1 (course pack)

♣ Wednesday: John Clare: "The pettichap's nest," "The field-mouse's nest," "Clock-a-clay," "In hilly wood," "The sand martin," "The bumbarrel's nest," "The fallen elm," "The hollow tree" (course pack).
Note that the Clare selections end with a helpful glossary.

Brian Swann, "The Egg" (course pack)

Prose: Gaston Bachelard, 4 chapters from *The Poetics of Space* (course pack)

Prose: Frank Lloyd Wright, excerpts and illustrations from *An American Architecture: Frank Lloyd Wright* (course pack)

Illustrations from Jacob von Uexküll, "A stroll through the world of animals and men" (course pack)

♣ Friday: Lorine Neidecker, "Paeon to place" (course pack)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Frost at midnight"

Robert Frost, "Desert Places" (Frost book)

11, 13, 15 February: *Shelter & exposure, continued. The green world: bough and bush and scented vine*

♣ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Part I (course pack, under anonymous texts)

Shakespeare, excerpts from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (handouts)

Seamus Heaney, excerpts from *Sweeney Astray* (course pack)

excerpts from *A Celtic Miscellany: #12-24* (course pack, under anonymous texts)

Catching up!

18, 20 22 February: *Complexities of motion: Threading one's way through the world*

♣ Monday: **Guidelines to first essay; writing workshop.**

♣ Wednesday: Elizabeth Bishop, "Brazil, January 1, 1502;" "The Moose" (course pack)

Lorine Neidecker, "Lake Superior"

♣ Friday: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, part II (course pack, under anonymous texts)

Walt Whitman, "There was a child went forth" 386

A.R. Ammons, "Saliences" (course pack)

25, 27, 29 February: *Movement and wayfaring, continued*

☾ Monday: No advance reading. Periodicity: Moon, stars, heavenly bodies; dawn and evening, night and noon, from Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Coleridge (handouts)

♣ Wednesday: Su T'ung-P'o, "The Fa-hui Temple's Pavilion of Horizontal Green", "Evening View from Sea Watch Tower," "On a boat, awake at night", "I only hear a bell beyond the mist" (from *Mountain Home*)

Cold Mountain poems, translated by Gary Snyder (from *No Nature*)

♣ Friday: No advance reading. Gary Snyder, from *Regarding Wave*: "Wave," "Kyoto Born in Spring song," "Burning island," "Rainbow Body," "Everybody lying on their stomachs, head toward the candle, reading, sleeping, drawing," "Regarding wave," "It," "Running Water Music" (*No Nature*).

3, 5, 7 March: *Walt Whitman*

♣ "This compost" 390; "Song of the rolling earth" 248; "On the beach at night" 286; "You tides with ceaseless swell" 523; "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" 189; "Passage to India" 428; "Starting from Paumanock" 50; "Song of myself" 63; "When the full-grown poet came" 561; "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd" 351

Friday, first essay due, 1500+ words.

10, 12, 14 March: *Atmosphere, medium, surface, elemental weathers: Bedding the locale / in the utterance*

♣ Monday, William Shakespeare, excerpts from *Pericles, Richard III* (course pack)

Michael Collier, "Pax geologica" (course pack)

Walt Whitman, "The world below the brim" 287 (Whitman book)

Homer, *Odyssey*, Book V (handouts; no advance reading)

Anon., *The Seafarer* (course pack)

Walt Whitman, "Out of the cradle endlessly rocking" 275 (Whitman book)

Prose: Barbara Hurd, chapter 1 from *Entering the Stone: On Caves and Feeling through the Dark* (course pack)

♣ Wednesday, Wallace Stevens: "Chocorua to its neighbor" 241; "A primitive like an orb" 317 (Stevens book)

A. R. Ammons, "The city limits" (course pack)

Seamus Heaney, "Gifts of Rain" IV (course pack)

♣ Friday, no class.

14 March, Mid-term grades due.

Friday, 14 March, no class.

Saturday 15 March to Sunday 23 March: Spring Break

24, 26, 28 March: *Air, light, motion. "The great interests of man: air and light, the joy of having a body, the voluptuousness of looking" (Mario Rossi)*

♣ Monday, A.R. Ammons, "This Bright Day" (course pack); Robert Frost, "Atmosphere," "Iris by Night" (Frost book); Shakespeare, selections from *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* (Handouts given in class)

Wednesday, guidelines to second essay; writing workshop.

♣ Friday, *Livelihood: the ambivalent ethics of inhabiting the natural world through culture & cultivation*

Virgil, selections from *Georgics* (course pack); William Carlos Williams, "The farmer" (course pack).

No advance reading.

31 March, 2, 4 April: *Livelihood, continued*

♣ Monday, Robert Frost, "Mowing," "Mending wall," "An old man's winter night," "Hyla Brook," "The oven bird," "Putting in the seed," "The need of being versed in country things," "After apple-picking," "Blueberries," "The strong are saying nothing," "Good-by and keep cold" (Frost book)

♣ Wednesday, Gary Snyder, *Logging*, pp. 33-43; *Hunting*, pp. 44-54 (*No Nature*)

Louise Halfe, from *Bear Bones and Feathers*: "Bone Lodge," "Pakahkos," "Nohkom, Medicine Bear;"

"Elder's Waltz;" "Lizard's curse;" "Free from Grandma;" "Eatin' Critters;" "Rainbow Babies;" "Snake;"

"Landscape;" "The way to the heart;" "The heat of my grandmothers;" "Roots and wings;" Afterword:

Being Comfortable in my Bones (course pack; note glossary of Cree terms)

♣ Friday, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, part III (course pack)

Friday, 4 April: Last day to withdraw.

7, 9, 11 April: *Ecotone*

♣ Monday & Wednesday, Alice Oswald, *Dart (Spacecraft Explorer 1)*

Patricia Crane, essay, "Letting the moment go" (course pack)

♣ Wednesday & Friday, Walt Whitman, "As I ebb'd with the ocean of life" 281 (Whitman book)

Lorine Niedecker, "My life by water" (course pack)

William Carlos Williams, "Flowers by the sea," 1935 version (course pack)

Elizabeth Bishop, "At the fishhouses," "Sandpiper," "The map", "Cape Breton" (course pack)

A.R. Ammons, "Gravelly Run," "Corsons Inlet" (course pack)

14, 16, 18 April: *The Tao of Dwelling: Balance in the flux of natural process*

☉ Monday & Wednesday, Lao Tzu, *Tao te Ching*, sections 1-37 (course pack, under “anonymous”)
A.R. Ammons: “Poetics,” “Cascadilla Falls,” “Periphery,” “Peracute Lucidity,” “Doubling the Nerve;”
from *Snow Poems*: “When one is a child one lives,” “Tell what will not tell direct,” “One at one with his
desire,” “Terrain” (course pack)

Gary Snyder, “Sixth-month song in the foothills,” “Burning the small dead” (*No Nature*)
Friday, Minnehaha Creek

21, 23, 25 April: *Flux & balance, continued.*

☉ Monday, Prose: David Hinton, Introduction to *Mountain Home*
Hsieh Ling-Yün (385-433 CE), “On a toward beside the lake,” “Dwelling in the mountains,” “On Stone-
Gate Mountain’s highest peak,” “Following Axe-Bamboo Stream, I cross over a ridge and hike on along
the river” (*Mountain Home*)

T’ao Ch’ien, “Written one morning in the 5th month, after Tai Chu-pen’s poem”

Meng Hao-Jan (689-740 CE), “Gathering firewood”

Meng Chiao (751-814 CE), “Laments of the Gorges,” “Autumn Thoughts”

☉ Wednesday, Shakespeare, songs from *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (handouts; no advance reading)

John Keats, *Ode to Autumn* (read this poem in advance)

Robert Frost, “A prayer in spring,” “October” (read these poems in advance; Frost book)

Friday, catching up

28, 30 April, 2 May: Special events; Catching up!

5 May: Last class day.

7 May: Study day.

8-12 May: Exam period; 15 May: Final grades due; 17 May: Graduation

Work, proceedings, expectations. Your main activities should be these: Read. Think. Write. Walk. Sit. Observe. Open up. Question.

1. Come to class, books and poems and essays in hand, with observations, questions, ideas, energy and focus. Underline passages in your books, scribble in the margins, jot down any page numbers or line numbers where something strikes you, so that you can find it again. I take your signing up for a course as a commitment to the social learning of the whole group, so both attendance and presence of mind are important.

2. Essays: I’ll always give you detailed guides to the writing assignments. There will be two formal essays that we will discuss in detail, in class and in individual meetings as necessary. These will be essays in which you work on developing a strong argument about a question or a problem, and discovering your best, most precise, evocative language for some phenomenon or issue in the plays. There will also be frequent, brief response pieces, to keep your imaginative sympathies and literary skills tuned up. Finally, there will be a reflective, less argumentative essay, in which you reflect creatively on your experiences along the Creek. For this too I’ll give you plenty of guidelines.

3. There will be a final exam, for which you’ll have abundant preparation. We won’t have a mid-term exam, but we will take a day to consider what a mid-term exam for this course would consist of, so that you can track how well you’re absorbing the information and concepts of the course. This is actually a good preparation for the final exam.

Grading

Every facet of the course counts: attendance and participation (20%), first essay (15%), second essay (20%), shorter responses (15%), final exam (15%), reflective essay (15%). Participation includes these things: Having a good attitude. Listening keenly. Discussing when you can. Showing initiative in finding resources from the library. Taking seriously brief written assignments. Keeping me informed if you see yourself sliding into difficulties. Checking your email so that you can catch any general notes sent to all class members. Responding in a substantive way when we work on the arguments of your essays via email, or whenever I email you individually. Coming regularly to class, and coming on time.

Policies

Everyday order:

- * Turn off cell phones and computers before entering classroom.
- * We use not fluorescent lights but incandescents. If you're the first person into the room, please change light source as needful.
- * You're welcome to bring beverages, but don't bring food: too complicated to manage around books and papers and small desks.
- * Come on time. Stay for the whole hour.
- * Immediately be collegial: arrange with a classmate to fill you in on *everything* when you can't be present.
- * Attendance: Show up. I always harbor the hope that a classroom full of random folks will turn into a community, a reliable source of good conversation, a support to everyone in their projects of reading, thinking, and discovering. Besides, I always learn interesting things from students. But you have to be there. Every day I'll send around a notebook for you to sign in. Each class member is allowed three absences with no effect on your final grade, and no need to let me know about it. After 3 absences, your final grade will drop one notch (for instance, from a B to a B-) for each session you miss. If you are hospitalized, institutionalized, or step out of school because of catastrophic home circumstances, we'll arrange something else. – In return, I aim to build variety and festivity into our class sessions, to give you the occasional holiday, and to get sick myself so that class will just have to be cancelled.
- * I accommodate any disabilities in order to create the best possible learning environment for everybody. If you have a disability, please be sure that the Office for Students with Disabilities sends me proper documentation.
- * About late work and extensions, here is the policy on any assignment, large or small. You needn't ask me for an extension; you decide if you cannot hand it something at the time it's due. For every 24-hour day that something is late, with the clock beginning immediately after the class session in which something is due, the grade for that assignment will go down one notch (for example, B+ to B). If you finish something at 1 a.m., then send an electronic copy so as to time-stamp your material. Then bring a paper copy the next day. The passing-days clause ends 48 hours before the day that final grades are due.
- * Incompletes: I give them only when this path is strongly suggested by the Dean of Students, who would contact me to request it. If you have serious grounds for requesting an Incomplete, please see the Dean as soon as possible.

If the day and night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal—that is your success.

Henry David Thoreau, "Higher Laws," *Walden*