

SYLLABUS: ECOPOETRY

HC 222H Literature CRN 22735
Winter 2016 W&F4:00-5:20 203 Chapman
Instructor: John Witte (rhymes with city) 346-5935 jwitte@uoregon.edu
Office: 206 PLC Office hours: T&Th 2:00-3:00, W 3:30-4:30, and by appointment

REQUIRED TEXTS: *Wild Reckoning*, John Burnside & Maurice Riordan, eds.
Xerox Packet: ten essays on ecopoetry.
A book of poems of your choice, by one of the poets studied this term.
A brief glossary of poetic terms (provided at the end of syllabus).

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Nature poetry in English has in recent years been revitalized by a widespread ecological awakening. Our class will investigate the links between poetry and environmentalism, and explore the various ways that nature has been represented in English and American verse. Our close reading of poems – from Chaucer to Hopkins to Mary Oliver – will be framed by ten seminal essays on ecopoetry. We will address the pressing issues of specie extinction, environmental degradation, and climate change, finding in the dynamic equilibrium of wilderness clues for our own survival. We will acquire from this course a keen sense of the poem as an instrument for quickening ecological awareness.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT. Each week we will focus on one essay from the packet. Read and be prepared to discuss the question posed.

DAILY ASSIGNMENT. For each class you will select a poem from the day's reading assignment and prepare a one page (typed, double-spaced) paper of two paragraphs. In the first paragraph, briefly summarizing the poem. Address the following questions: What is the author's **intent**? What is the **form** of the poem, and why was this form chosen? What is the **sound** of the poem? How do form and sound converge to amplify the **sense** of the poem? **Pay particular attention to how nature is described in the poem, and the relationship of the speaker to the natural world.** A sample summary will be found at the end of the syllabus. In the second paragraph, compare your poem to a previous poem in the text, focusing on one shared quality (such as subject, imagery, tone or form).

FINAL PAPER. A final paper, of four pages, assessing a full-length collection of poems of your choice *by one of the poets studied this term*, will be due on **March 11**.

Think about your topic and reread important passages several times, taking notes and exploring possibilities. Question yourself, and the text. Decide on a title and a main argument or thesis; then compose a detailed outline of your paper. Begin by writing an introduction that explains your thesis in one paragraph. The body of your paper should develop the thesis logically, with each paragraph enlarging on an important point with specific evidence (such as quotations) and clear explanation. Pay as much attention to the end of the essay as to its beginning. You should leave the reader with a clear sense of what you have demonstrated and why it matters. *Carefully proofread your paper*, rewriting as necessary, and correcting all grammatical errors. Papers must be typed and double-spaced, with one-inch margins.

Words or ideas not your own must be clearly identified by quotation, and, where necessary, a citation. Plagiarism is a serious academic crime that will result in disciplinary action up to expulsion. If you are uncertain how to properly acknowledge other people's words and ideas, I'll be glad to discuss this with you.

GRADING. Your grade will be determined by your preparedness for and participation in class discussions (10%), by your nineteen daily written assignments (70%), and by your final paper (20%).

ATTENDANCE. Attendance is crucial. If you need to miss a class, an explanation will be required. You will be allowed **one unexcused absence**. Each additional unexcused absence will lower your grade one step (for example, from a B to a B-).

ASSESSMENT:

The English Department's assessment procedure evaluates six learning outcomes:

1. The ability to read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension;
2. to draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. to perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts;
4. to write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
5. to employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. to employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation.

CLASS SCHEDULE (all assignments from Xerox packet and *Wild Reckoning*)

Week 1 Genesis (packet). *There seem to be two different versions of creation here?*

Jan. 6: Orientation and review of syllabus

Jan. 8: *Wild Reckoning*, pp. 13-30.

Week 2 'Laudato Si' (packet). *In what ways does Pope Francis connect the plight of the world's poor and the state of the environment?*

Jan. 13: pp.31-43.

Jan. 15: pp. 44-55.

Week 3 "The Wilderness Poetry of Ancient China" (packet). *Does the ancient Chinese cosmology offer an alternative to the Judeo-Christian cosmology of Genesis?*

Jan. 20 Handout: Poetry of the Tang Dynasty

Jan. 22: pp. 56-67.

Week 4 "Sustainable Poetry," Leonard Scigaj (packet). *What is the role and responsibility of ecopoets and environmental writers?*

Jan. 27: pp. 68-80.

Jan.29: pp. 81-95.

Week 5 "What Are People For?," Wendell Berry (packet). *In what ways does Berry distinguish between domination over and stewardship of our environment?*

Feb. 3: pp. 96-111.

Feb. 5: pp. 112-122.

Week 6 "Why Look at Animals," John Berger (packet). *Berger claims that animals were once at the center of our lives. Why were they important to us?*

Feb. 10: pp. 123-134.

Feb. 12: pp. 135-146.

Week 7 "The Spell of the Sensuous," David Abrams (packet). *What does Abrams mean when he writes that the meaning of language is "rooted in the sensory life of the body"?*

Feb. 17: pp. 147-158.

Feb. 19: pp. 159-172.

Week 8 "The Pragmatic Mysticism of Mary Oliver," Laird Christensen (packet). *In what ways does Mary Oliver spiritualize our encounters with nature?*

Feb. 24: pp. 173-184.

Feb. 26: pp. 185-198.

Week 9 "The Etiquette of Freedom," Gary Snyder (packet). *How does language (indeed, poetry) emerge out of wilderness?*

Mar. 2: pp. 199-211.

Mar. 4: pp. 212-223.

Week 10 "Wilderness Letter," Wallace Stegner (packet). *What does Stegner mean when he describes wilderness as "the geography of hope"?*

Mar. 9: pp. 224-235.

Mar. 11: pp. 236-243.

FINAL PAPER DUE

Here is a sample summary of the poem, "Maximus," by D.H. Lawrence.

MAXIMUS

God is older than the sun and moon
and the eye cannot behold him
nor the voice describe him.

But a naked man, a stranger, leaned on the gate
with his cloak over his arm, waiting to be asked in.
So I called to him, Come in, if you will! –
He came in slowly, and sat down by the hearth.
I said to him: And what is your name? –
He looked at me without answer, but such a loveliness
entered me, I smiled to myself, saying: He is God!
So he said: *Hermes!*

God is older than the sun and moon
and the eye cannot behold him
nor the voice describe him:
and still, this is the God Hermes, sitting by my hearth.

Summary:

"Maximus," by D.H. Lawrence, is a three-stanza poem in free-verse, taking the form of a contrast between the Christian God, who is invisible and indescribable, and the pagan god Hermes, who is shockingly present ("naked") to the speaker. The dull regularity of the three-line refrain emphasizes the physical remoteness of the God of the Bible, while the urgent and excited language of the second stanza – full of curiosity and exclamation ("such a loveliness/ entered me") – conveys the immediacy and power of the pagan Hermes, god of messages, eloquence, and the fertility of nature.

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF POETIC TERMS

Accent (synonym for Stress):

The emphasis given to certain syllables of words. If a word (usually longer than three syllables) has more than one accented syllable, the heavier accent is called the *primary stress*, the lighter one in the *secondary stress*, and the other syllables are *unstressed*.

Alliteration (initial rhyme):

Repetition of sounds, usually at the beginning of words.

Allusion:

A reference, usually brief, to something outside the literary text itself.

Ambiguity (multiple meaning):

The use of language so that more than one interpretation of a word or passage is relevant to the meaning.

Assonance:

Repetition of vowel sounds preceded and followed by different consonant sounds, as in "time" and "mind."

Cacophony:

A combination of sounds that is harsh, discordant, or hard to articulate, usually because of clusters of consonants.

Cadence:

The rising and falling rhythm of spoken language, resulting from the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Caesura:

A pause within a line of verse, dictated by speech rhythm rather than meter.

Consonance:

Repetition of consonant sounds where the vowels before the consonants differ, as in "struts" and "frets."

Dissonance:

A discord of sounds. Dissonance may be cacophony, harsh and unpleasing, or it may be an interesting variation of sounds.

Elegy:

Meditation, usually in the context of sorrow over the dead.

End-stopped line:

One in which the end of a syntactical unit (a phrase, clause or sentence) coincides with the end of the line.

Enjambéd line (enjambment):

A line that completes its grammatical unity and meaning by going on into the next line without a pause.

Epistle:

A poem in the form of a letter to a specific person.

Figurative language:

Language that means something more than or other than what it literally says.

Foot:

A metric unit consisting of one stressed and one or more unstressed syllables.

Found poetry:

A piece of discovered writing (it may be a news item, advertisement, travel book, catalogue, etc.) That is read as poetry though it was not intended to be.

Free Verse:

Poetry in which rhythm is based not on strict meter but on a highly organized pattern of cadences.

Iamb:

A metrical foot of two syllables, with a weak stress followed by a strong.

Image:

A word or cluster of words that evoke sense-perception: sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch. Poets embody their thought in images, for we can hardly grasp an idea unless we conceive it in physical terms.

Intensity:

Concentration of meaning; to charge language with meaning to the utmost degree.

Light verse:

Verse written mainly to entertain or amuse (nonsense verse, limericks, nursery rhymes).

Line:

A row of words. In prose the lines run on; in poetry each line ends or breaks where the rhythm dictates. Prose-writers think in sentences. Poets think in lines.

Lyric:

Any poem with a musical cadence expressing emotion rather than describing events.

Meaning:

The meaning of a poem is in the form, images, rhythm, and tone, as well as in those ideas which could equally well be expressed in prose.

Meter:

The regular recurrence of patterns of accented and unaccented syllables. The basic metrical unit is the foot, which can be iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic or spondaic.

Metaphor:

An implied comparison, omitting explicit words of comparison such as like, or as. A metaphor is more compressed than a simile, because it identifies two things with each other, rather than simply comparing them.

Narrative:

A poem that tells a story.

Objective Correlative:

A set of objects, or situation, or chain of events which is the formula for a particular emotion, reliably triggering that emotion in the reader.

Occasional poem:

A poem written to commemorate a specific event or occasion.

Parable:

A short, simple story intended to illustrate a moral lesson.

Pathetic fallacy:

The attribution of human characteristics to inanimate objects, in a way that is less complete than personification.

Persona:

The fictitious narrator imagined by the poet to speak the words of a poem.

Personification:

A figurative use of language in which human qualities or feelings are attributed to nonhuman organisms, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas.

Prose poem:

Writing that has all the qualities of a poem, but is written as prose and not in lines of verse.

Refrain:

A line or lines repeated at regular intervals in a poem.

Rhyme:

The identity or similarity of sound patterns. Rhyme at the end of a line is called *end* rhyme. Rhyme occurring within a line is called *internal* rhyme. A *true* rhyme repeats a sound exactly. A rhyme that is not perfect may be called a *slant*, *approximate*, or *off* rhyme. The *rhyme scheme* is the pattern formed by the end rhymes of all the lines in a stanza.

Simile:

An expressed comparison, using the words *like*, or *as*.

Stanza:

A group of lines considered as a unit, forming a division of a poem, and recurring in the same pattern or variations of the pattern.

Stream of consciousness:

Referring to the continuous flow of inner experiences, and the replication of that flow in words.

Surrealism:

Going beyond realism, deep into the inner world of the unconscious mind.

Texture:

The surface detail of a text, especially the phonetic patterns, the sensory quality of the images, and the additional richness of meaning suggested by the connotations of the words.

Theme:

A central idea or major point of a literary work. Theme can mean the subject of a work, such as time, love, death, beauty, and so on.

Tone:

The attitude of the writer toward his or her audience. The tone may be serious or light, formal or intimate, scornful or sympathetic, straightforward or ironic.

Unity:

The coherent relationship of all the parts of a work to the whole.

Voice:

The voice identifies the speaker, as either the poet talking to himself (or to nobody), the poet addressing an audience, or perhaps the poet speaking through a dramatic character.