

English 469/569  
Course Time: MWF 2–2:50  
Course Location: 307 Volcanology Building

Prof. Brent Dawson  
Email: bdawson@uoregon.edu  
Office Location: PLC 465  
Office Hours: W 3–6 or by appt.

## Literature, Science, and Nature in the Early Transatlantic

### *Description*

This interdisciplinary course looks at how ideas of nature and the natural world shape early modern understandings of the Americas. Whether imagined as a new world, an earthly paradise, or a state of nature, notions of the Americas as a natural space are formative of colonialism, literature, and science in the period. Following Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas in 1492, new textual genres are invented to explore, make sense of, and shape ideas of American nature. These texts exhibit the desire for order and the wonder of variety through their own hybrid and multimedia forms, which include plant and animal catalogues, fictional utopias, essay collections, and epics. Through their acts of collecting and arranging, these texts give shape to ideas of race, sex, and species, and examine hybridity through their fascination with monsters and aliens. In their authorship and content, they reflect on the difference gender and ethnicity make in how texts about the Americas are written and received. The class will make use of the library and online collections to see the material forms of the texts we read. Students will complete a short writing assignment, a group presentation, and a final project.

### *Required Texts*

Margaret Cavendish. *The Blazing World and Other Writings*. Penguin.  
William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Oxford.

## *Assignments*

### Undergraduate

**Participation and In-Class Writing (15%):** Discussion will be an important component of class. Each week, you should complete the primary reading for Monday's class and the secondary reading for Wednesday's class. Bring all readings to Wednesday and Friday's class. There will be in-class writing assignments based on the reading, and satisfactory completion of these assignments will be included as part of the participation grade. If a student is shy or has other difficulties with participating in class, I'm happy to hear their thoughts in office hours or by email.

**Discussion Leading (20%):** Working in groups of two or three, students will guide discussion on the text we are reading on the day of their choice for about thirty minutes. Discussions should focus on a particular topic and have some structure to follow. Student groups are required to meet at least once before the day of their discussion leading to coordinate roles. Discussion leading should consist of drawing attention to particular passages, making some interpretative arguments, and asking questions to solicit class participation. The group will also turn in an outline on the day of their discussion.

**Short Paper (3-4 pages, 25%):** Students will choose a textual passage or visual image that explains a scientific theory (loosely defined as an explanation of how nature works) in any text we have read. They will find one or two particularly bizarre, incongruous, or unexpected metaphors in that explanation, and analyze how these metaphors shape how the theory is understood and any additional cultural, political, or religious baggage they provide.

**Final Project (10-12 pages, 40%):** Students will write a comparative essay on a topic of interest to them, treating both literary and non-literary texts. Ideas of nature should be an important consideration. Students will complete the paper in four stages:

1) Students will bring to class three "objects" they plan on discussing in their essay. Objects can include a short textual passage, an image, or an excerpt from a secondary source. A group of peers will evaluate the collection and explain to the author how they imagine the objects would fit together in a paper.

2) **Abstract:** Students will submit a one paragraph abstract explaining the main idea for their paper and how they plan to go about demonstrating that idea.

3) **Peer Review:** Students will bring to class a rough draft of their paper for their peers to give feedback on.

4) **Final Submission**

### Graduate

**Participation (10%):** Discussion will be an important component of class. If a student is shy or has other difficulties with participating in class, I'm happy to hear the student's thoughts in office hours or by email.

**Annotated Bibliography (40%):** Graduate students will turn an annotated bibliography of eight to ten scholarly sources on a topic related to their final paper. Each entry should include at least a

paragraph summarizing the argument and explaining how it is relevant to the students' interests.

**Conference Paper (50%):** Graduate students will submit an 8-12 page paper, modeled on a paper to be presented at an academic conference, on a topic related to the course. Students will submit in advance a 250 word abstract. Graduate students are required to come to office hours at least twice to discuss ideas for their bibliography and/or final paper.

## Calendar

\*=optional for undergraduates

### Theories of Nature

Sept. 26-30: Amerigo Vespucci, *A New World*  
Édouard Glissant, from *Poetics of Relation*

Oct. 3-7: Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, book 2  
Lucy Hutchinson, "Letter to Lord Anglesey," transl. of Lucretius 1.1-152, 1.829-1130  
\*Jonathan Goldberg, from *The Seeds of Things* ch. 4, 152-178

Oct. 10-14: John Milton, from *Paradise Lost* books 2, 4  
Ken Hiltner, from *Milton and Ecology*  
\*Gordon Teskey, "Why, This Is Chaos, Nor Am I Out of It"

### Animals and "Natural" Man

Oct. 17-21: Michel de Montaigne, "Of Cannibals," from "Apology for Raymond Sebond"  
Laurie Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal* ch. 3  
\*Michel de Certeau, "The Savage 'I'"

Oct. 24-28: Bartolomé de las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* 1-53  
Anthony Pagden, from *The Fall of Natural Man*  
\*Giorgio Agamben, from *The Use of Bodies*

Oct. 31-Nov. 4: Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *The First New Chronicle* 14-120  
**Short Paper Due Oct. 31**

Nov. 7-11: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*  
Gabriel Egan, from *Shakespeare and Ecocritical Theory*  
**Grad Bibliography due 11/11**

### Natural Science and Classification

Nov. 14-18: Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*  
\*Margaret Cavendish, from *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*  
\*Karen Barad, from *Meeting the Universe Halfway*

Nov. 21-25: Robert Hooke, from *Micrographia*  
Bernardino de Sahagun, from *The Florentine Codex*  
**Thanksgiving Nov. 25**

Nov. 28-Dec. 2: Thomas Hariot, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*  
John White, watercolors from Virginia expeditions  
Theodor de Bry, engravings of White's watercolors, from *America*

## **Final Paper due Dec. 5**

### *Policies*

**Accessibility:** Please let me know me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

**Formatting Papers:** Your written assignments must be in twelve-point font, double-spaced, and have one-inch margins. Submitting assignments electronically is completely acceptable, but you need to use .pdf format (not .doc, .docx, .pages, or .odt). If you're not sure how to do that, ask me in advance. You can follow MLA or Chicago guidelines for citations, but be consistent. A great guide to either format can be found at Purdue's OWL website (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). You are expected to proofread your work; too many errors will result in a small penalty to your grade.

**Late Assignments:** I give out extensions readily, but you need to ask in advance. The farther in advance you ask, the more likely I am to grant the extension. If you don't complete an assignment on time and you don't ask for an extension, I still encourage you to let me know your circumstances. Exceptions may be given for emergencies and other extraordinary circumstances. Late assignments are generally graded down one letter grade per day late. Assignments are due at the beginning of class unless stated otherwise; assignments turned in after that will be considered a day late.

**Attendance:** Coming to class with the day's reading printed is mandatory. If you have a job, a sport, or anything else in your life preventing you from coming to class, you need to let me know as soon as possible. Missing more than three classes unexcused will result in your final grade being lowered by one third a letter grade for each additional absence. For example, if you miss three classes, a B will become a B-, and with five classes it will become a C+. Five or more unexcused absences will mean you fail the course.

**Plagiarism and Cheating:** All work must be your own and be written solely for this class. Plagiarism can be unintentional, so be careful and make sure you understand the rules. If you don't, ask me. When you quote, paraphrase, or borrow ideas from an article, website, editor's note, friend, or any other outside source, you need to provide documentation. I encourage you to look at the library's guides for citing sources and avoiding plagiarism (<https://library.uoregon.edu/citing>). The same link will also allow you to access the university's official policy toward academic misconduct; you should read over the policy if you are unclear about what counts as cheating or plagiarism. If you're struggling with a paper, I encourage you to contact me. It's better to submit a paper late, unfinished, or that's not very good than to risk failing the class by plagiarizing.