

Ecocritical Approaches to Race and Ethnicity

ENGL 660
Wednesdays, 9-11:50am
Winter 2017

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment. Ecocritical inquiry takes many forms and is often interdisciplinary. In one emergent tributary of ecocriticism, scholars have engaged thoughtfully with the intersections between Race and Ethnic Studies and environmental literary criticism. These scholars have sought to understand how racial projects articulate with changing cultural constructions of nature. How have representations of nature, land, or the environment communicated particular ideas about race and racial categories? How have Black, Native American, Latina/o and Asian American writers navigated the mutually-constitutive construction of race and nature in their literary and cultural productions?

This course foregrounds scholarship by environmental literary and cultural critics that engages in an informed and extended manner with insights from U.S. Race and Ethnic Studies, including the fields of Asian American Studies, African American Studies, Latina/o Studies, and Native American Studies. This course will focus primarily on secondary sources. We will not be reading and discussing primary texts together as a class. Rather, we will work on identifying the ways scholarly texts mobilize close readings to participate in larger scholarly conversations. You will still be working on your close reading skills during this course by selecting a cultural or literary text on which you will focus throughout the quarter. You are encouraged to think of “text” broadly in this sense and to select a text that fits with your larger academic trajectory. It is required that you meet with me to discuss your chosen text and possible secondary sources by the end of the third week of the quarter.

Your final project, which we will be working on throughout the course, will be a 10-12 page paper based on your chosen focal text. This paper should either a) contribute to a scholarly conversation/debate within ecocriticism’s consideration of Race and Ethnic Studies through a reading of the text or b) contribute to scholarly understandings of the text through an application of an ecocritical approach to race and ethnicity.

One of the academic professionalization skills we will be working on this quarter is identifying and communicating interventions. We will be paying particular attention to the types of interventions scholars make and the rhetorical moves they make to situate themselves in a larger conversation. This is also a technique students will be working on in their own writing and class presentations.

Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate an introductory understanding of environmental literary criticism
- Engage in and contribute to a scholarly conversation about race and ethnicity within ecocriticism.
- Apply the arguments in scholarly articles to cultural and literary texts.
- Develop and convey arguments about literary criticism and cultural texts clearly and persuasively.
- Undertake original research with assistance from faculty by

- (a) identifying new scholarly problems or fields or building on existing ones; (b) locating and assessing current scholarly work applicable to a chosen topic/text; (c) framing their own arguments clearly, cogently, and logically, offering convincing evidentiary support for their claims; and (d) explaining how their claims build on, refute, or add to existing scholarly debate and knowledge.

Required Texts

- Priscilla Solis Ybarra, *Writing the Good Life: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016).
- Other readings will be posted to Canvas. You are required to bring copies of all readings to class, either as a hard copy or as an electronic copy.

Course Policies

Preferred First Name: The University of Oregon has a preferred first name policy. According to this policy, a student or employee's preferred first name will be used in university communications and reporting except where the use of the legal name is required for university purposes. If you have reasons to believe your preferred first name may not be listed correctly in the roster or you do not feel comfortable taking advantage of UO's preferred first name policy, please communicate to me the name you wish to use. The preferred first name policy can be accessed here: <http://policies.uoregon.edu/node/216>

Accessible Education: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if aspects of the instruction or course design results in barriers to your participation. Students are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (AEC) 541-346-1155; <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>. AEC helps provide services including sign language interpreting, computer-based note-taking, classroom relocation, exam modifications, and alternative text conversion. Please request that the Accessible Education Center send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

Late Work: All work is to be handed in on time. Late work will be penalized one full letter grade per day.

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to adhere to the University of Oregon's standards of academic integrity. All work should be your own, and all sources should be appropriately acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity include plagiarism, duplicate submission, cheating on examinations, and false citations. Please do not hesitate to speak to me if you have any questions about use of sources or citations. It is far better to ask than to unintentionally plagiarize. Please refer to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* as a citation style-guide. Please read the Academic Misconduct Code in full. It can be accessed at: <http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/tabid/248/Default.aspx>

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory and constitutes part of your grade. You may miss one class meeting without penalty. Missing two classes is grounds for failure. Exceptions to this policy may be made for those with adequate excuse and sufficient documentation. Please contact me to discuss. You are responsible for all assigned materials in the class and ensuring that your work is turned in on time.

Participation: This is a discussion-based seminar. Attendance alone is not adequate. You are expected to come to class prepared, having read the material and engaged critically with it. You should print out and bring any materials distributed on Canvas. Attend class ready to share your thoughts about the readings. I expect you to contribute meaningfully during each session.

Title IX Policy and Reporting Responsibilities: The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. Consequently, all UO employees are required to report to appropriate authorities (supervisor or Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity) when they have reasonable cause to believe that discrimination, harassment or abuse of any kind has taken, or is taking, place. Students seeking to discuss a situation without talking to a mandatory reporter may call 541-346-SAFE. This 24/7 hotline is staffed by confidential, trained counselors. For confidential help, students may also contact University Health Services (<http://healthcenter.uoregon.edu/>) or Sexual Assault Support Services (<http://sass-lane.org/>).

Inclement Weather: In the event of inclement weather, the UO home webpage (<http://www.uoregon.edu/>) will include a banner at the top of the page displaying information about delay, cancellation, or closure decisions for the Eugene campus. Additionally, the UO Alerts blog will be updated with the latest updates and bulletins. Local television and radio stations will also broadcast delay and cancellation information. Classes will not be held if cancelled by the university. If inclement weather makes traveling to campus difficult, I will additionally notify you by email about whether we are holding class. If the weather is bad, check your email for a message from me. Additionally, members of the campus community are expected to use their best judgment in assessing the risk of coming to campus and returning home, based on individual circumstances. Those who believe the road conditions from home are dangerous are urged and even expected to stay there to prevent injury.

Class Communication: The primary means of communication outside of class in this course will be through your UO email account. Please check this account regularly. I am also most readily available through email. Generally, you can expect an email response from me within two working days.

Course Assessment

- Attendance and participation, 10%
 - To receive an A, you should attend every class, arrive on time, bring a copy of the article, and contribute thoughtfully to the discussion. Contributing thoughtfully means that you pose questions and provide answers that reflect your careful reading of the material, including directly referencing passages in the reading. In responding to your peers' observations, questions, and interpretations, you engage with the substance of their ideas and model respectful disagreement. In your questions, comments, and critiques, you show a willingness to take intellectual risks. Your contributions develop bridges between different class sessions, contributing to a conversation that spans the quarter.
- Scholarly conversation paper, 15%
 - Explain how two-three different scholarly works by different authors from Week 3-5 are in conversation. **Due to Canvas prior to the class on Wednesday, 2/8.** 4-5 pages.
- Application of academic article paper, 15%
 - Place your chosen text for your final project into conversation with one of the scholarly articles/chapters assigned for the course. Address one of the following two questions: How does the text you have chosen for your final paper help you understand the argument in a chapter or article we read for this class? How does a chapter or article from the class deepen/challenge/change your reading of your focal text? Your paper should have a thesis. It should incorporate a close reading of your focal text. **Due to Canvas before class on Wednesday, 2/22.** 4-5 pages.
- Annotated bibliography of secondary sources, 10%

- Your annotated bibliography must contain at least eight peer-reviewed sources relevant to your project. These eight sources may not include chapters or articles assigned in class. They may include other relevant chapters from books we read only partially. **Due to Canvas before class on Wednesday, 2/15.**
- Final Paper Draft, 10%
 - The goal of the final paper draft is for you to receive feedback from Prof. Wald to improve your final paper. **Due to Canvas before class on 3/1.** 5-7 pages.
- Final Conference Presentation, 10%
 - You will be giving a 10 minute long conference version of your paper during the final day of class. We will discuss effective presentation strategies in class. **Due in class on Wednesday, 3/15.**
- Final Paper, 30%
 - The final paper should be 10-12 pages long. **Due to Canvas by 10:15am on Wednesday, March 22nd**

Class Outline and Schedule

Week One

Wednesday, January 11th: Environmental Justice Ecocriticism

Lawrence Buell, "Toxic Discourses," *Critical Inquiry* 24.3 (1998) 639-665; T.V. Reed, "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism," *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, ed. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 145-162; Julie Sze, "From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice," *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, ed. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 163-180.

Week Two

Wednesday, January 18: Ecocriticism's Third Wave?

Robert T. Hayashi, "Beyond Walden Pond: Asian American Literature and the Limits of Ecocriticism," *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, ed. Annie Merrill Ingram, Ian Marshall, Daniel J. Philippon and Adam W. Sweeting (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 58-79; Mark B. Feldman and Hsuan L. Hsu, "Race, Environment, and Representation," *Discourse* 29.2/3 (2007): 199-219; Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic, "Guest Editors' Introduction the Shoulders We Stand on: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism," *MELUS* 34.2 (2009): 5-24.

Week Three

Wednesday, January 25th: Slavery and Nature

Jeffrey Myers, "Introduction," Chapter Two, and Chapter Four, *Converging Stories: Race, Ecology and Environmental Justice in American Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 1-22, 23-48, 87-110. Ian Frederick Finseth, "Introduction," and Chapter One, "Nature and Antislavery Philosophy," *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery, 1770-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 1-73.

*By the end of this week, meet with Prof. Wald to discuss your ideas for the primary text you will focus on in this class.

Week Four

Wednesday, February 1st: Race and Nature

Paul Outka's *Race and Nature: From Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2008). Read: "Introduction," "White Flight," "Migrations," 1-26, 150-200.

Week Five

Wednesday, February 8: African American Ecoliterary Traditions

Kimberly N. Ruffin, *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010). Introduction, 1-24; "Animal Nature: Finding Ecotheology," 88-110; John Claborn, "W.E.B. Du Bois at the Grand Canyon: Nature, History, and Race in Darkwater," *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, edited by Greg Garrard, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 118-131.

Due Today: Scholarly Conversation Paper due on Canvas prior to class.

Week Six

Wednesday, February 15: Immigration and Ecocriticism

Jeannie Shinozuka, "Deadly Perils: Japanese Beetles and the Pestilential Immigrant, 1920s-1930s," *American Quarterly* 65.4 (2013): 831-852; Sarah Jaquette Ray, "The Poetics of Trash: Immigrant Bodies in the Borderland Wilderness," *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 139-178.

Due Today: Annotated bibliography due to Canvas prior to class.

Week Seven

Wednesday February 22: Reading Racism through Lead

Mel Cheng, "Lead's Racial Matters," *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012), 159-188; Laura Pulido, "Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism," *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 27.3 (2016): 1-16.

Due Today: Application of academic article paper

Week Eight

Wednesday, March 1st: Latina/o Literary Environmentalisms

Priscilla Solis Ybarra, *Writing the Good Life: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016).

Special Event: Wednesday March 1st @ 4pm Public Talk by Priscilla Solis Ybarra @ Knight Library Browsing Room

Special Event: Thursday, March 2nd @ 4pm Book Response Event with Sarah D. Wald and Sarah Jaquette Ray @ Knight Library Browsing Room

Due Today: Final Paper Draft

Week Nine

Wednesday, March 8: Indigenous Perspectives on Environmental Humanities

Kyle Powys Whyte, “Our Ancestors’ Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene,” *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, edited by Ursula Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann (forthcoming); Lee Schweninger, “‘What Can I tell Them That They Will Hear?’: Environmental Sovereignty and American Indian Literature.” *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*, edited by Deborah L. Madsen, (New York: Routledge, 2016): 217-229; Salma Monani, “Science Fiction, Westerns, and the Vital Cosmo-ethics of the 6th World,” *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies*, edited by Salma Monani and Joni Adamson (New York: Routledge, 2017), 44-61; Clint Carroll and Angelica Lawson, “New Media, Activism, and Indigenous Environmental Governance: Politics and the Minnesota-Wisconsin Wolf Hunt,” *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies*, edited by Salma Monani and Joni Adamson (New York: Routledge, 2017), 119-135.

Due Today: 5 page draft of final paper due to Canvas prior to class.

Week Ten

Wednesday, March 15: Final Presentations

Final papers due to Canvas no later than scheduled Final Exam at 10:15am on Wednesday, March 22nd