

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Voyage: *Spring 2013*

Discipline: *English*

CPLT 3559: *Earth Fictions*

Division: *Upper Division*

Faculty Name: *David B. Morris*

Pre-requisites:

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Earth Fictions is an exploration of how humans have represented their relationship to the earth, across cultures and across time. The environment, for example, is a comparatively recent invention. Before the environment, there was nature. But what exactly *is* nature? More to the point of this course, how have various writers and traditions understood and represented nature?

We will examine how writers describe the earth and varying human relations to the earth. These accounts are “fictions” in the sense of personal, cultural, figurative *constructions*, which may include but also almost always reach beyond the limits of purely factual, scientific accounts. (Eminent conservation biologists Paul and Anne Ehrlich *construct* the earth, figuratively or fictively, as an organism in need of healing, but a purely scientific account might be regarded, for the purposes of this course, as a nonfiction construction—sure to be revised or reconstructed in years to come.) Readings range from ancient creation myths and American transcendentalists to contemporary ecologists. We will explore selected works of Western literature (such as Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) as a model for asking previously ignored questions about environmental themes or implications.

Students will engage in original research seeking to understand—given the limits of first-hand observation, how various non-Western cultures think and imagine their own contemporary “earth fictions.” To what extent is healthy human function related to a “sense of place.” In what crucial ways does *place* differ from *space*?

Readings will focus mainly on Western writers—Emerson, Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard, Martin Heidegger—in order to develop both an understanding of our own continuing history of earth fictions and to establish questions and paradigms useful in testing encounters with Asian, Indian, and African traditions. On shore, students are expected to pursue such questions and paradigms, returning to discuss their findings. There will be regular short (2-page) writing assignments and small group projects to focus explorations of our ports of call.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The overall aim is to develop knowledge, perspectives, and procedures that help you to understand contemporary Western environmental approaches—from deep ecology and the Gaia hypothesis to ecofeminism, animal rights, green politics, and radical activism—and also to apply such knowledge, perspectives, and procedures to our encounter with various non-Western (but often globalized) attitudes toward “nature” and the earth. The course also aims to improve your skills as a writer through short writing assignments and to develop your skills and confidence as a participator in small group discussions and/or projects.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: Basho, Matsuo
TITLE: The Narrow Road to Oku
PUBLISHER: Kodansha International
ISBN #: 477 0020 287
DATE/EDITION: 1996
COST: \$16.50

AUTHOR: Coetzee, J. M.
TITLE: The Lives of Animals
PUBLISHER: Princeton
ISBN #: 0691 070 89X
DATE/EDITION: 2001
COST: \$14.48

AUTHOR: Emerson, Ralph Waldo & Henry David Thoreau
TITLE: Nature / Walking
PUBLISHER: Beacon
ISBN #: 978-0-8070-1419-6
DATE/EDITION: 1994
COST: \$10.26

AUTHOR: Blake, William
TITLE: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell
PUBLISHER: Dover
ISBN #: 048 628 1221
DATE/EDITION: 1994
COST: \$6.95

AUTHOR: Haraway, Donna
TITLE: The Companion Species Manifesto
PUBLISHER: Prickly Paradigm Press
ISBN #: 097 1757 585
DATE/EDITION: 2003
COST: \$7.62

AUTHOR: Kearney, Richard
TITLE: On Stories
PUBLISHER: Routledge
ISBN #: 041 5247 985
DATE/EDITION: 2001
COST: \$21.59

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

- I. Introduction: Leaving Home / Approaching Japan** (A1 – A6)
- A-1 Introduction: Earth Warriors
 - A-2 Kearney, On Stories
 - A-3 Kearney, On Stories
 - A-4 Creation Narratives (pdf)
 - A-5 Basho, The Narrow Road to Oku
 - A-6 Basho, The Narrow Road to Oku
- II. The West: Questions and Paradigms** (A7 - A10)
- A-7 Film: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
 - A-8 Emerson, Nature
 - A-9 Emerson, Nature
 - A-10 Thoreau, "Walking"
- III. Imagination, Stereotypes, and The End of Imagination: India** (A11 – A12)
- A-11 Film: *A Passage to India*
 - A-12 Roy, "The End of Imagination"
Film: *DAM/AGE*
- IV. Post-Colonial Environments: Africa, War, Animals** (A13 – A17)
- A-13 McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term *Post-colonialism*"
 - A-14 Davis, "Slum Ecology"
Latour, *Paris: Invisible City* (online)
 - A-15 DeWeerd, "War and the Environment" (pdf)
Adley & Grant, "The Environmental Consequences of War" (pdf)
 - A-16 Coetzee, Lives of Animals
 - A-17 Coetzee, Lives of Animals
- V. Approaching Home** (A18 – A20)
- A-18 Hardin, "Tragedy of the Commons" (pdf)
Duvall, "Deep Ecology" (pdf)
 - A-19 Leopold, Sand County Almanac
 - A-20 Leopold, Sand County Almanac
- VI. The Future of Nature: Philosophy & the Anthropocene** (A21 – A23)
- A-21 Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell
 - A-22 Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" (pdf)
 - A-23 Haraway, The Companion Species Manifesto
- VII. Final Examination** (A 24)

VIII. Questions and Assignments

The questions for each day grow directly from the assigned texts—and begin with making certain that students have read with full understanding and grasped the main points. Mini-lectures (meaning, instructor discourse punctuated with specific questions for discussion) will provide opportunities for emphasis and elaboration, and the mini-lectures will most often be accompanied by powerpoint slides, which will be posted online after class. Classes devoted entirely to writing will proceed in workshop fashion, with improvisational in-class exercises supplemented by small-group reading and discussion of student work-in-progress.

Major recurrent questions will focus on issues raised in the daily reading, which all concern various ways of constructing or understanding the human relation to the earth. This relation, of course, must be understood with attention to the ways in which nature has been gendered, with attention to cultural and socioeconomic difference, and with attention to recent sociological, anthropological, and theoretical discussions of “place.” Many of the readings reflect a Eurocentric perspective, despite the many different points of view implicit in Euro-American thought, but the aim is not to focus on Western attitudes so much as to prepare students for their own encounters Asian, Indian, and African traditions. Students will write extensively about what they encounter in non-Western cultures. In effect, they will be performing primary research or field work for this course every time they walk off the ship. Moreover, each student will commit—after in-person meetings with the professor—to a personal course project. Classroom questions and assignments will call attention to the specific features of the texts under analysis. The payoff will come as students complete their own course projects—which will ask them, in whatever specific topic they choose to pursue, to include an explicit awareness of their own socioeconomic and cultural and gendered status as writers seeking to understand some aspect of the human relationship to planet earth.

I need to maintain leeway for ad hoc assignments that emerge directly from my own re-reading and preparations immediately preceding each class. I have never taught with a prefabricated list of questions because in my experience questions are most meaningful if students feel that the question links clearly and directly to issues arising within the classroom. These issues are therefore not entirely predictable, but I have prepared many pdf files of readings that I anticipate may prove relevant. My own method of teaching finds a rationale in Stephen Nachmanovitch’s Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art (1991). There is a big difference between an unprepared teacher who is irresponsibly “winging it”—where discussion wanders and wobbles—and a well-prepared and experienced teacher who targets questions to emerging themes and leaves room open for creative, ad hoc assignments that bring a subject to life. The travel narratives that students produce for their final projects—around which the entire course revolves—will be worth reading by other than immediate family members to the extent that students proceed in an improvisational spirit of openness.

FIELD WORK

FIELD LAB (At least 20 percent of the contact hours for each course, to be led by the instructor.)

A guided daylong tour of Sankei-en Garden outside Yokohama.

Sankei-en (*Sankei Garden*) is a traditional Japanese-style garden in Naka Ward, Yokohama. It opened in 1906. Sankei-en was designed and built by Tomitaro Hara (1868–1939), known by the pseudonym Sankei Hara, who was a silk trader. Almost all of its buildings are historically significant structures bought by Hara himself in locations all over the country, among them Tokyo, Kyoto, Kamakura, Gifu Prefecture, and Wakayama prefecture. Ten have been declared Important Cultural Property, and three more are Tangible Cultural Properties of Japan designated by the City of Yokohama. Badly damaged during World War II, the garden was donated in 1953 to the City of Yokohama, which entrusted it to the Sankeien Hoshōkai Foundation . Sankei-en was then restored almost to its pre-war condition.

Sankei-en has a total surface of 175 thousand square meters and features ponds, streams, and undulating paths designed by Sankei Hara himself, plus many historic buildings, such as Tōmyō-ji former three-story pagoda, originally constructed in Kyoto in 1457 and relocated in 1914, and the Former Yanohara House, originally the private residence of the Yanohara family.[Work on the garden started in 1902 and ended in 1908, two years after it was opened to the public. During Hara's own lifetime, the place became an aggregation point for Meiji period artists. World War II caused great damage to the buildings. In 1953 the garden was donated by the Hara family to the City of Yokohama, which created the Sankeien Hoshōkai Foundation for its repair and maintenance. The Foundation started the restoration in 1953 and, five years later, the garden was back almost to its original form and reopened to the public.

The Japanese government has designated ten structures in Sankei-en as Important Cultural Properties, while three more are Tangible Cultural Properties designated by the City of Yokohama. The garden is popular for its cherry blossoms, *ume* blossoms, and the changing leaves in autumn.

FIELD ASSIGNMENTS

Students will, on their return, document their daylong encounter with Sankei-En Garden with specific reference to three components: Japanese attitudes toward nature, the meanings of landscape and the relations between the human and natural realms.

Students will have the choice of submitting a detailed journal or a five-page paper. The evaluation of the journal and/or paper will include the following standards: appropriate length, substantial detail, significant insight, effective writing, and overall understanding of the three specific components (noted above) that the field assignment is designed to address.

METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC

- 25% Final project: Chosen with Consent of the Instructor
- 25% Ad hoc writing & editing assignments
- 25% Class participation*
- 25% Final Examination

*Class attendance and participation: Students must be present in class & on time, demonstrate adequate preparation (including *fully* completed reading and/or viewing assignments), perform well on in-class diagnostic quizzes, and participate *fully* in discussions and small-group projects.

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

Heise, Ursula K. Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment. Ed. Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan. New York: Routledge, 2010.

The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment. Ed. Timothy Clark. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS

William Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Peter Hall, director. 1968. 124 minutes.

A Passage to India. David Lean, director. 1997. Columbia Pictures. 163 minutes.

David, Mike. Planet of Slums. New York: Verso, 2006.

Devall, Bill and George Sessions. Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered. Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985. Pp. 63-77.

Hardin, Garrett. "The Tragedy of the Commons." Science 162 (13 December 1968): 1243-48.

Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. New York: Routledge, 1990.

----- The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.

Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1954). Poetry, Language, Thought. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. Pp. 145-161.

Heine, Ursula K. "Climate Change and Eco-Cosmopolitanism." Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Latour, Bruno. *Paris: Invisible City*. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/virtual/EN/index.html>

McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term *Post-colonialism*". Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994

Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo. "'Green Postcolonialism' and 'Postcolonial Green.'" Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

HONOR CODE

Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University's honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager's Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: "On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment." The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed "[signed]."

Matsuo Basho. In the account which he named "The Narrow Road to Oku," Basho makes a journey lasting 150 days, in which he travels, on foot, a distance of 600 ri. This was three hundred years ago, when the average distance covered by travelers was apparently 9 ri per day, so it is clear that Basho, who was forty years old at the time, possessed a remarkably sturdy pair of walking legs. Nowadays with the development of all sorts of means of transportation, travel is guaranteed to be pleasant and convenient in every respect, so it's almost impossible for us to imagine the kind of j