

## **ENGLISH 550: JUNIOR SEMINAR**

Prof. John MacNeill Miller  
Office: Oddfellows 230  
Office Hours: W 9:30–10:30am  
                  Th 2–4pm  
                  F 10am–1pm  
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**Victorian Earth**  
Oddfellows 222  
MW 11am-12:15pm

### **Course Description**

We don't generally think of the Victorians as *earthy* people. They were polluters—too busy making products, making money, and making their reputations to concern themselves with their impact on the planet. Then again, the same industrial growth that led to pollution and public health crises catalyzed our awareness of the fragility of the natural world. This course will examine the Victorians' conflicted legacy on ecological issues, investigating how attitudes towards nature enshrined in nineteenth-century novels, prose, and poetry contributed to our dawning concern for the natural world—and also to our failure to respond decisively to the devastation we cause.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete this course will . . .

- . . . demonstrate their skills as close readers of literary texts.
- . . . articulate an independent critical or craft-based question informed by individual interests and scholarly research.
- . . . formulate an answer to the question that combines independent research and original textual analysis.
- . . . complete a substantive written project that develops an original analysis situated in a broader scholarly tradition of theory, craft, or historical research.

### **Required Texts**

All the readings on the course schedule are required. It is also necessary to purchase (or rent, or borrow) **specific editions** of some of our texts.

You **MUST** obtain the following editions for this course:

Eliot, George. *The Mill on the Floss*. Oxford UP, 2015. [ISBN: 978-0-19-870753-0]  
Hardy, Thomas. *Return of the Native*. Oxford UP, 2005. [ISBN: 978-0-19-953704-4]  
Jefferies, Richard. *After London*. Dover, 2015. [ISBN: 978-0-486-79749-6]

Other readings will be posted to Sakai.

## Course Requirements

### *Graded Assignments*

Final grades are determined on the basis of two large writing assignments, several short writing assignments, and class participation. Final grades will be calculated by weighting assignments as shown:

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| <u>90%</u> | <u>Writing Assignments</u>                        |
| 30%        | Final Paper (12-20 pages)                         |
| 20%        | Close Reading Paper (6-8 pages)                   |
| 15%        | Craft Reflections (3 reflections, 2-3 pages each) |
| 15%        | Annotated Bibliography Entry                      |
| 10%        | State of the Field Statement (3-4 pages)          |
| <u>10%</u> | <u>Participation</u>                              |

### *Class Policies*

#### I. Presence and Participation

Your presence and participation are expected in every class.

The participation grade reflects the type and frequency of student participation. Those students who arrive well-prepared every day, who regularly comment on and respond to others' questions (including mine), and who offer their own incisive contributions can expect an A in participation. Students who generally arrive well-prepared and make a clear effort to participate in class each week can expect a B in participation. Students who come to class having done most of the reading, and who occasionally pitch into the conversation with relevant comments, can expect a C in participation. Students who show up, but rarely say anything relevant can expect a D in participation. Students who do not show up regularly, or who never say anything relevant to the conversation, will receive an F in participation.

If you miss 30% of our course meetings (8 classes for a twice-weekly course), your participation grade will **automatically drop to 0%**, regardless of whether individual absences were excused.

If you miss 40% of our course meetings (11 classes for a twice-weekly course), you will **automatically fail the course**, regardless of whether individual absences were excused.

#### II. Assignments

A hard copy of every assignment must be turned in during class on the day it is due. If, for some reason, you cannot print out a hard copy, you may upload the assignment to your drop box folder on Sakai. Assignments turned in on-time online will be given a one-class grace period. If I do not receive a hard copy by the time of our next class meeting, however, regular lateness penalties apply.

Late assignments are dropped by one grade interval (A- = B+, B+ = B, B = B-, etc.) for each class they are late.

Incorrectly formatted assignments risk being dropped by one grade interval, especially if the formatting results in a shortened assignment.

Missed quizzes cannot be made up. Unexpected absences on quiz days result in a score of 0% on the quiz. If you inform me of an unavoidable absence well in advance, however, I will not count the quiz in your final grade calculation.

### III. Miscellaneous

Every student should familiarize themselves with the Allegheny Honor Code. Drawing on someone else's thinking or writing without properly attributing that work to its source is plagiarism. Plagiarism, like other forms of cheating and academic dishonesty, constitutes a violation of the honor code. Violating the honor code will result in a 0% on the assignment—and may also result in a failure of the course alongside other more serious academic repercussions.

Computers, cell phones, etc. are not permitted in class, except insofar as they are functioning as e-readers.

If you are concerned or simply curious about your current grade, you should come to see me during office hours to talk about it. I do not calculate grades upon request.

This class, like many classes in the humanities, is something like a “bull session.” That means that we will cover very important topics, and we will cover them earnestly—but not necessarily in a sober, self-serious manner. It is important to check your ego at the door: don't worry about whether you look smart or stupid; don't assume others' responses to your words are judgments on your innermost character; and, on the flipside, don't assume that what others say reveals profound facts about their characters. Instead, try to allow the classroom to become an open, even playful space—a sort of sandbox for experimenting with new ideas:

What is distinctive about the sort of informal discussion . . . that constitutes a bull session is, it seems to me, something like this: while the discussion may be intense and significant, it is in a certain respect not ‘for real.’

The characteristic topics of a bull session have to do with very personal and emotion-laden aspects of life—for instance, religion, politics, or sex. People are generally reluctant to speak altogether openly about these topics if they expect that they might be taken too seriously. What tends to go on in a bull session is that the participants try out various thoughts and attitudes in order to see how it feels to hear themselves saying such things and in order to discover how others respond, without its being assumed that they are committed to what they say: it is understood by everyone in a bull session that the statements people make do not necessarily reveal what they really believe or how they really feel. The main point is to make possible a high level of candor and an experimental

or adventuresome approach to the subjects under discussion. Therefore provision is made for enjoying a certain irresponsibility, so that people will be encouraged to convey what is on their minds without too much anxiety that they will be held to it.

– Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (1986/2005)

On a related note: while playfulness is encouraged, this world we share can be a grim, gruesome place. The authors, artists, and thinkers we encounter in class are trying to make sense of the world by representing it. They are also, in their own ways, historically bound, flawed human beings. In their work, then, they may represent facets of life that some people find disturbing or overwhelming, and they may do so in ways that strike us now as inadequate, offensive, or even unethical. Please prepare yourself accordingly. If you find that something you encounter in a text or that we discuss in class profoundly and pathologically unsettles you, I would like to know about it. Nevertheless, I am not a trained mental health professional. If such a case arises—and I hope it never does—I encourage you to seek the guidance of our counselors at the Counseling Center on the third floor of Reis Hall. They can be reached at (814) 332-4368 during work hours, or after hours through Campus Security: (814) 332-3357.

### **Expectations and Exceptions**

Course policies are designed to make this class run smoothly. In order for a teacher to do his or her job effectively (see **Learning Outcomes**) and deliver the best course possible to students, students must hold up their end of the bargain (see **Course Requirements**). Having this syllabus in your possession and choosing to remain in this course constitutes a kind of contract, both among all students and between every individual student and the instructor. You break these rules, or ask for exceptions to them, at your own risk.

If you do end up needing an extension or other exception, you are much more likely to get it by **speaking with me about it as soon as you think you may have an issue**. Emergencies and unexpected situations arise—of course—and it is your duty to inform me of them as soon as possible, so that we can work together to make sure they do not disrupt your individual work or our work as a class. While I will try to inform you when you accumulate too many absences or late arrivals, or are in any other way no longer a member in good standing of this class, following the rules is finally your responsibility.

If you need to get in touch with me, feel free to email me or to come to my office hours. I check my email regularly during normal work hours (8am – 5pm). If I receive an email from you during that window, I tend to respond as soon as possible—often immediately, or within an hour or two of receiving it. Emails that arrive at other times may take longer to receive a response. You are also welcome—no, encouraged!!!—to come and speak to me during my office hours.

Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at 814-332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please contact that office as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely manner.

As with any other absence, if you need to miss class due to a religious observance, please let me know in advance so we can make arrangements to ensure that your absence does not adversely affect your standing in this class.

### **Course Schedule**

Non-bold, non-italic items denote readings to be completed in preparation for class.

**Bold items** denote in-class activities or events.

*\*Starred, italic items* denote assignments due on a certain day.

“SK” indicates that readings can be found on Sakai.

All assignments and due dates may be subject to change.

#### Week 1

——Prologue: Scenery Saved My Life——

W 8/30 SK: John Stuart Mill, from *Autobiography* (1873)  
William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (1798)

#### **Introductions**

#### Week 2

——Book One: Changing Landscapes——

M 9/4 SK: Jesse Oak Taylor, “Where Is Victorian Ecocriticism?” (2015)

#### **Syllabus Quiz**

#### **Annotated Bibliographies Assigned**

W 9/6 SK: Emily Brontë, “The Night-Wind” (1840), “Shall Earth No More Inspire Thee?” (1841)

#### **Craft Reflections Assigned**

#### Week 3

M 9/11 SK: John Ruskin, Preface to *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866)

W 9/13 SK: Mark Frost, “Reading Nature: John Ruskin, Environment, and the Ecological Impulse” (2017)

*\*\*Students 1-4 Annotated Bibliography due*

#### Week 4

M 9/18 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), bk. 1

*\*\*First Craft Reflection Due*

W 9/20 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), bk. 2 chs. I–IV

Week 5

M 9/25 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), bk. 1 ch. X–bk. 3 ch. III

W 9/27 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), bk. 3 chs. IV–IX

Week 6

M 10/2 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), bk. 4 ch. I–bk. 6 ch. IV

W 10/4 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), bk. 6 chs. V–X

*\*\*Second Craft Reflection Due*

Week 7

M 10/9 **\*\*\*FALL BREAK / NO CLASS\*\*\***

W 10/11 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), bk. 6 ch. XI–END

**Close Reading Paper Assigned**

**Mandatory Office Hours Scheduled for M 10/16–F 10/20**

Week 8

M 10/16 SK: Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, “Fixed Capital and the Flow: Water Power and  
*The Mill on the Floss*” (Forthcoming 2018)

*\*\*Students 5-8 Annotated Bibliography Due*

——Book Two: The Hills Are Alive!——

W 10/18 SK: Algernon Swinburne, “Anactoria” (1866)

Michael Field, “La Gioconda” (1892)

Week 9

M 10/23 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878), bk. 1 chs. I–IX

W 10/25 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878), bk. 1 ch. X–bk. 2 ch. III

*\*\*Close Reading Paper Due*

Week 10

M 10/30 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878), bk. 2 ch. IV–bk. 3 ch. V

W 11/1 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878), bk. 3 ch. VI–bk. 4 ch. II

Week 11

M 11/6 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878), bk. 4 ch. III–bk. 5 ch. VII

W 11/8 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878), bk. 5 ch. VIII–END  
**Close Reading Paper Returned**  
**\*\*Third Craft Reflection Due**

Week 12

M 11/13 SK: William A. Cohen, “Faciality and Sensation in Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*” (2006)  
**\*\*Students 9-11 Annotated Bibliography Due**  
**State of the Field Statement Assigned**  
**Final Paper Assigned**

**\*\*\*PROF. MILLER AWAY FOR CONFERENCE W 11/15 – F 11/17\*\*\***

W 11/15 **\*\*\*NO CLASS\*\*\***  
**\*\*Email Prof. Miller Completed Brainstorming Worksheet by 12:15pm**

Week 13

M 11/20 **Topics and Research Discussion**

W 11/22 **\*\*\*THANKSGIVING BREAK / NO CLASS\*\*\***

Week 14

——Book Three: Who Will Save the Scenery?——

M 11/27 Richard Jefferies, *After London* (1885), Part I ch. I – Part II ch. V  
**\*\*State of the Field Statement Due**

W 11/29 Richard Jefferies, *After London* (1885), Part I ch. VI – Part II ch. IX

Week 15

**\*\*RSE Week\*\***

M 12/4 Richard Jefferies, *After London* (1885), Part II ch. X – Part II ch. XXI

W 12/6 Richard Jefferies, *After London* (1885), Part II ch. XXII – END

Week 16

M 12/11 SK: Charlotte Mew, "The Trees Are Down" (1929)  
**Course Wrap Up**

*\*\*Hard copies of your final essays are due to my mailbox in Oddfellows 205 by 9am on Tuesday, December 19.*