

English/Environmental Studies 26403

Winter 2015

Professor Benjamin Morgan

Walker 512

Office Hours: 12-1 M/W, by appointment via <http://bjmorgan.ycb.me>

### **Environments of Literature**

#### **Course Description**

This course examines nineteenth-century British writing about nature and the environment in the context of our present situation of climate change and ecological collapse. It is often said that there is no longer such thing as a natural environment: humans have so extensively shaped the planet that anything we might point to as untouched “nature” in fact bears the trace of human agency. We will take this situation as the outcome of processes that were set into motion in the nineteenth century, when extraordinary expansions of industrial technology and fossil-fuel mining took place. We will examine in particular some of the ways in which nineteenth-century writers already understood the idea of a “natural environment” to be culturally made. We will also explore the period’s forceful literary critiques of industrialization. Some questions we will consider: In a world after nature, what new environments begin to emerge? Is “environment” itself an outdated, human-centered concept? How does the nature of the environment shift as we move between rural, urban, and colonial zones?

#### **Aims, Outcomes, Teaching Philosophy**

*Content and Skills.* By the end of this course, you should have a working knowledge of the British origins of environmentalist thought. You will also acquire knowledge about how humanities scholars are presently addressing ecological and environmental concerns. The assignments for this course will help you acquire or develop some of the analytical skills required of literary scholars. These include systematic close reading; paraphrasing and responding to theoretical arguments; and using research tools.

*Teaching Philosophy.* Instead of short bursts of intensive cramming (exams, papers, final projects), this course prioritizes sustained daily engagements with the reading. A substantial portion of your final grade will be determined by your performance on discussion preparation notes and weekly email posts. A primary goal of this model is to foster scholarly habits of reading and analysis. Note also that this is a discussion-based course in which students are largely responsible for framing, generating, and exploring questions.

#### **Course Requirements**

1. **Discussion preparation notes.** At each of our meetings, I will ask you to turn in the notes that you have taken in preparation for our discussion. I will give you a handout detailing my expectations. These notes will be graded on a scale of 1-5 (with 3 as the norm), and I may occasionally give brief feedback. You may skip up to four of these with no penalty.
2. **Weekly posts** of about 200 words to the class email list, [litenvironment15@lists.uchicago.edu](mailto:litenvironment15@lists.uchicago.edu). These should propose and begin to explore a

question that you want us to think through as a group. They should cite the assigned text. You may respond to a classmate's post as your post. These must be submitted no later than **Sunday at 5pm**. These will be graded on a scale of 1-5, and I will occasionally give brief feedback. I will bump your grade if you thoughtfully respond to a classmate's post or if you submit at least a day early. You can skip two of these with no penalty.

3. A **short paper** of 4-5 pages at mid-quarter. You have two options. One is to write a précis of one of the critical/theoretical texts. The other is to identify and closely analyze an important passage in one of our literary texts. I will give you a handout explaining each of these assignments.
4. A **final paper** of 8-10 pages at the end of the quarter. I will give you paper topics, but you are also welcome to pursue a topic of your own choosing in consultation with me. The paper must engage with at least one literary text and one critical/theoretical text from the syllabus.
5. **Participation.** I expect you to actively participate in each class discussion. In concrete terms, this means contributing at least one comment at each meeting and doing your best to facilitate our conversation.

### **Policies**

Attendance:

You must come to every class. If you miss more than one class, your final grade will drop a half grade (e.g. B -> B-) for each class missed. If you miss more than three classes, you may be given an incomplete.

Office Hours:

My office hours are **by appointment**, M/W 12-1pm. You may make an appointment at <http://bjmorgan.ycb.me>.

Technology:

Please do not use laptops or other devices in class. Phones must be turned completely off before class begins.

Online Submission Policy:

Papers for this course are submitted by email. Within 2 hours of the deadline, I will send you a receipt confirming that I have received and opened your paper/response. Until you have a receipt, the paper is not turned in. If you have not received a receipt within 2 hours of the deadline, contact me immediately.

Late Papers:

If your paper is late, it will lose a half grade (e.g. B -> B-). The grade will continue to drop every 24 hours. I give extensions only in case of major life events/emergencies.

Formatting:

Papers must be double spaced, in Times New Roman typeface, with 1-inch margins, numbered and include a header and title in MLA format. Papers must also include a works cited page in MLA format.

Grading:

Participation: 5%

Email posts: 15%

Discussion prep notes: 20%

Paper 1: 25%

Paper 2: 35%

**Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

It is your responsibility to ensure that all of your written work conforms to accepted standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is not only copying others' work; any improperly documented use of ideas can constitute plagiarism. Please consult the discussion of plagiarism and academic honesty in *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success*. If you were not given this book in your core humanities class, please let me know and I will obtain a copy for you. It is crucial that you are familiar with these standards, and it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with them. If these standards are in any way unclear to you or if you are uncertain about best practices with regards to note-taking please consult with me.

Any undocumented use of another person's ideas constitutes plagiarism. This includes copying another text word for word. It also includes summarizing and paraphrasing an original source with similar language and/or syntax, or presenting as your own an argument that you heard in another class or from another person. Please note as well that copying non-copyrighted material (such as Wikipedia or a non-copyrighted webpage) also constitutes plagiarism.

Academic dishonesty includes buying papers online, outsourcing your academic work to someone else (paid or unpaid), and submitting the same paper to more than one course. This is not an exhaustive list of the acts that constitute academic dishonesty and plagiarism. If you are uncertain about how or whether to cite your sources, please contact me.

**Academic dishonesty is a very serious offense, even if it is unintentional. Any form of plagiarism may result in immediate failure of this course and disciplinary action.**

**Required Texts**

You must purchase the indicated editions indicated by ISBN.

Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (9780199538539)

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (9780141439679)

William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (9780199539192)

Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (9780140431841)

All other readings are available on the course webshare:  
<https://webshare.uchicago.edu/users/bjmorgan/Public/el>

## Schedule of Readings

\*Readings marked with an asterisk are optional. Try to look at them at least briefly, as I will mention them in discussion.

### One: Victorian Ideas of Nature

- 1/5: Course introduction.
- 1/7: John Ruskin, from "The Moral of Landscape" (365-387)  
Henry David Thoreau, from "Walking" (75-92)
- 1/12: Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* 1-60  
Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature"
- 1/14: Hardy, *Woodlanders* 60-114  
Lawrence Buell, marked entries in glossary from *The Future of Environmental Criticism*  
\*Buell, "The Emergence of Environmental Criticism"
- 1/19: No class (MLK Day)
- 1/21: Hardy, *Woodlanders* 114-236  
Timothy Morton, "Thinking Big"  
\*Raymond Williams, "Wessex and the Border," from *The Country and the City*
- 1/26: Charles Darwin, "Struggle for Existence" and "Natural Selection" from *The Origin of Species*
- 1/28: Hardy, *Woodlanders* 236-331  
\*William Cohen, "The Tactile Ecology of Hardy's *Woodlanders*"  
\*Michael Marder, "The Soul of the Plant; or, The Meanings of Vegetal Life"

### Two: Critiques of Industry in the Early Anthropocene

- 2/2: Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* 9-102
- 2/4: Dickens, *Hard Times* 102-195  
\*Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses"
- 2/9: Ruskin, "The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century" (9-41)  
Alice Meynell, *London Impressions*, "The Climate of Smoke" (9-11)
- 2/11: Smart Museum Visit

**Saturday 2/14, 5pm: Midterm Paper Due**

- 2/16: Dickens, *Hard Times* 195-288
- 2/18: William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (selections)

### Three: Writing Nature in the British Colonies

- 2/26 Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* 27-104
- 2/25 Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* 104-136  
Rob Nixon, "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism"

- 3/2 Toru Dutt, "Buttoo," "Sindhu," "Sonnet—Baumarghee," "Sonnet--The Lotus," "Our Casuarina Tree"
- 3/4 Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* 136-220  
\*Ursula Heise, "Introduction," *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*
- 3/9 Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* 220-301
- 3/11 Sarojini Naidu, x"Coromandel Fishers," "Harvest Hymn," "Leili," "In the Forest," "Indian Dancers," "Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad," "Street Cries"  
\*Symons, "Introduction" to *The Golden Threshold*

**Monday 3/16, 5pm: Final Paper due**