

English 216:
Environmental Literature
MWF 11:45-12:50pm
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Course Introduction

This course will introduce you to ideas and literature that have shaped the way we think about “nature” and the “environment.” An essential premise of the course is that “nature” and “environment” are historical ideas: we have not always thought the same about them. Looking at a landscape, or appreciating a view from a mountain top, or going for a hike to get some perspective, engage us in a long tradition of environmental philosophy, despite that they may seem perfectly “natural,” timeless activities. In brief, “nature” is a social & historical construct.

We will chart this construction both in time and space. We begin in Europe, cross the Atlantic to the New World, wend our way to the American West, and finally arrive here in Southern California, in order to try to understand how our ideas about environment *here* and *now* intersect with (and challenge) ideas in other places and other times. The course aims to help you gain *environmental literacy* in the ideas about land and landscapes that define our modern age. By the end, you will have been exposed to--and expected to demonstrate your conversancy with--an array of literature (essays, poetry, fiction) touching on a number of ideas including: aesthetics, ethics, economics, conservation/preservation, ecology, race, colonialism, religion, environmentalism, the Anthropocene, and restoration.

Experiential Learning: Our local and regional landscapes provide unparalleled opportunities to witness, through personal experience, how ideas and history are written onto nature. There will be three mandatory weekend “excursions” that will require you to travel up to an hour from campus. These excursions will form the basis of key writing assignments. We will also engage our immediate campus environment on occasion for in-class activities. We will continually put these excursions and activities into the context of our reading, as well as use them to give a felt reality to that reading.

Required Texts (available through CLU Bookstore, or online vendor). Please note that you must purchase print copies of these texts: electronic copies are not acceptable (see Electronics in the Classroom Policy, below).

- Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*,
- Lewis MacAdams, *The River, Books I, II, and III*. Blue Heron Press, 1998.
- John Muir. *My First Summer in the Sierra*. Dover, 2004.
- Claire Vaye-Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus*. River Head, 2015.
- A “field journal”. A durable, weatherproof notebook that you can easily carry with you into “the field”. I recommend one no larger than 5” x 7”, and no more than 100 pages. Suggested brands include Moleskine, Rite in the Rain, and Sokkia. I also suggest colored pencils or pens and a small pen case.

Electronic Texts will be available for **downloading** and **printing** on the course Blackboard site, using the “Course Readings” tab. There will be a considerable number of these.

Assignments

Field Journal (24%) Throughout the semester, you will be asked to keep a natural history field journal to record your experiences at particular sites. Two of these sites we will visit as a class (Charmlee Wilderness Park and the Los Angeles River); one you will select on your own; and others may involve campus locations visited during class time.

On these occasions, you will take detailed and copious “field notes” (think Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Grasmere Journal* and Thoreau’s *Journal*). **Field notes** are on-site writing: They are just for you, so they may be messy and disorganized. Later, you will elaborate on these on-site notes in your **field journal**, where you will clean up and elaborate your observations, and perhaps supply additional information and/or research, in order to try to communicate something about the natural world to an audience (think Humboldt’s *Cosmos* and Muir’s *My First Summer in the Sierra*).

Natural History Assignments (3 @ 12% each = 36%) “Natural History” has been defined as “a practice of intentional, focused attentiveness and receptivity to the more-than-human world, guided by honesty and accuracy.”¹ This is a pretty broad definition. In a sense, all the reading that we’ll do in the semester might be considered “natural history,” which should show you that there are many ways to write natural history. Unlike the more specialized disciplines of science like biology, natural history has

¹ Fleischner, T. L. “Natural history and the spiral of offering.” *Wild Earth* (2001): 11(3/4):10–13.

historically been an explicitly *amateur* pursuit. And unlike more specialized science, the natural historian has historically attempted to *make meaning* from observations on the natural world (think Thoreau's "Huckleberries").

You will write 3 "natural histories" based on your direct experience. Your Natural History Assignments will be based on-site observation and writing that you record in your field notebook and revise/elaborate in your field journal (see above). You should expect to provide more than a reiteration of your field notes and journal: you will be expected to develop those materials into a coherent piece of writing (an essay, for example), that draws out a key theme or idea. You will also be expected to synthesize relevant and representative materials from class (the literature and other material). Two of these assignments will be based on our class excursions at Charmlee Wilderness Park and the Los Angeles River. One of these will be a site of your choice.

Reading Responses (40%) RR's are short writing assignments that will help you process the literary and critical reading material and give you the opportunity to practice the literary analytical skill of "close reading." In grading them, I will emphasize quality of writing and insight over quantity.

We will frequently use these short assignments to begin class discussion, and so you will be expected to share your insights with the class. *Sharing your insights during class discussion will be part of my evaluation process: doing so may boost your grade on the assignment; failure to do so may lower it.*

There will be a total of 12 RR assigned during the semester. **You must write 10 of them.** I will drop your lowest registered grade of 1 or higher (you may not drop a zero grade. In other words, you can't just write 9). RR's should be typed. They will generally be 300-500 words (or, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page, **single spaced**, in Arial 12pt font and 1" margins). If you are not doing well on the first couple of RR's (that is, you're getting less than a 4 out of 5), please come see me right away and I can help you strategize for ways to do better. Don't wait until it's too late!

In a typical RR, you will respond to a given prompt. The emphasis is on *textual analysis* of relevant features of a given work, and *synthesis* of ideas among various works. Textual analysis, or "close reading," involves careful attention to detail, and drawing your conclusions from those details. Synthesis involves making explicit connections between the work at hand and other works, to help establish an ongoing conversation about our course topic.

Here are some strategies for a successful RR:

- As you read, pay attention to and mark ("annotate") features of the text that seem interesting and/or revealing to you. This could be a word, a phrase, a metaphor, an image, and idea, etc. Clusters of words/phrases/metaphors/ideas frequently

make up a coherent “pattern” that provides the piece with a certain logic.
Uncovering the logic of the pattern is your aim.

- While writing, refer to the text early and often. *Remember that the RR is about the specific features of the text. Use evidence. Talk about the language.*
- There is no need simply to summarize or describe. *While sometimes summary and description are necessary to situate your analysis when you write longer papers, you should use these sparingly, if at all, in a RR.*
- Focus your writing by saying more about less. *Once you notice something interesting and have shown a couple of examples, go deep, not wide. You may like multiple examples, but you only need to discuss one. The more time you spend with your evidence, the deeper you can get into it.*
- Seek to explore the significance of your analysis through synthesis. *Look for ways to connect your analysis to other works or ideas. Use this connection to answer the (implicit) question, so what? That is, what does your analysis reveal about the longer, larger conversations going on among our works?*

I will evaluate **RR's** on a 5-point scale:

5: *demonstrates that you read the material assigned; responded thoughtfully and insightfully to the prompt; composed in clear, concise, and grammatically correct language; and that your ideas illustrate exemplary thinking and engagement for a student writing for a 200-level English course*

4: *demonstrates that you read the material assigned; responded thoughtfully and insightfully to the prompt; composed in clear, concise, and grammatically correct language*

3: *demonstrates that you read the material assigned; that you responded to the prompt in a cogent fashion; and that your writing is more or less free of significant errors*

2: *demonstrates a failure to read assigned material and/or lack of understanding, thoughtful engagement with the material, response to the prompt, and/or clear, concise, and grammatically correct language*

1: *demonstrates a failure to read assigned material, provide a significant or complete response to the prompt; and/or use clear, concise, and grammatically correct language*

0: *failure to turn in the assignment*

Please note that Reading Responses must be typed and submitted in person and during class on the day they are due. Under no circumstances will I accept RR's via email or by proxy (i.e., turned in for you by another student).

**English 216: Environmental Literature
Schedule of Assignments***

*Schedule is subject to modification according to our pace. I will alert you if the schedule changes and it will be up to you to update your records. For this reason, I **don't recommend** that you print this out.

	Reading Assignment	Writing Assignment
Unit 1: Romantic Landscapes		
Week 1		
W 1.17	Course introduction; William Wordsworth, "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (Handout)	
F 1.19	Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned" (Drive); Dorothy Wordsworth, Grasmere journal (Handout)	RR 1
Week 2		
M 1.22	Burke, <i>Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime & Beautiful</i> ; Shelley, from <i>Frankenstein</i> (Drive)	
W 1.24	Burke, Shelley, Wordsworths, cont.	
F 1.26	MacFarlane, from <i>Mountains of the Mind</i> (Drive); Humboldt, from <i>Cosmos</i> , selections; (Drive)	
Week 3		
M 1.29	Humboldt, from <i>Views of Nature</i> , ch. 2, Waterfalls of the Orinoco (<i>only skim the "annotations" beginning on page 130</i>); Wulf, "In Awe of Nature." <i>New Philosopher</i> . http://andreawulf.typepad.com/files/new-philosopher-humboldt.pdf ; Wulf, "Humboldt, The Man Who Made Nature Modern."	

	http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-wulf-rediscovering-alexander-von-humboldt-20150705-story.html ;	
W 1.31	Humboldt, from <i>Cosmos</i> ; from <i>Views of Nature</i> , ch. 3, Nocturnal Wildlife of the Primeval Forest (Drive)	
F 2.2	Field writing practice (bring your field notebook and meet at the SEEd Garden ; we will depart the SEEd Garden for a short walk to Mt. Clef promptly at the start of class)**	Field Notebook prompt
Unit 2: Transcendental Landscapes		
Week 4		
M 2.5	Humboldt, cont.; Emerson, from <i>Nature</i> (“Introduction”; “Nature”; “Beauty”) (Drive)	
W 2.7	Emerson, cont; Thoreau, from “Walking” and from <i>Journal</i> (Drive)	Mt. Clef Field Notebook & Journal, due
F 2.9	Thoreau, “Walking,” cont.; Thoreau, from <i>Huckleberries</i> (Drive)	
Week 5	Natural History Excursion I: Sat, 2.10, 9am-1pm, Charmlee Wilderness Park https://www.nps.gov/samo/planyourvisit/charmleewilderness.htm Park Map: https://www.nps.gov/samo/planyourvisit/upload/CharmleeWildernessPark_Map_CityofMalibu.jpg	
M 2.12	No class: Natural History Excursion	
W 2.14	No class: Natural History Excursion	
F 2.16	Natural History Excursion, discussion; Muir, <i>My First Summer in the Sierra</i> , thru June 7	

Week 6		
M 2.19	<i>Muir and Wilderness Preservation:</i> Muir, "Hetch Hetchy" (Drive); Muir, <i>My First Summer in the Sierra</i> , thru Aug 9	Field Notebook & Journal, due
W 2.21	<i>Preservation v Conservation:</i> Pinchot, "Prosperity"; Roosevelt, selected writings (Drive); Zahnisser, The Wilderness Act of 1964 (Drive); Muir, <i>My First Summer in the Sierra</i> , to end	
F 2.23	<i>Cathedral, Garden, Survival of the Fittest:</i> Muir, <i>My First Summer in the Sierra</i> , cont.; Darwin, from <i>Origin of Species</i> (Drive)	
Week 7		
Unit 3: Indigenous Landscapes		
M 2.26	<i>The Wilderness Problem:</i> Callicott and Ybarra, "Puritan Origins of the American Wilderness Movement" (Drive); Purdy, "Environmentalism's Racist History," http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalisms-racist-history	Natural History Assignment I (Charmlee Wilderness Park), due
W 2.28	<i>The Wilderness Problem, cont:</i> Cronon, from "The Trouble with Wilderness" (Drive); Whitman, "Song of the Redwood Tree" and contexts (handout)	
F 3.2	Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness" (cont.); Anaya, <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> , 1-38	
Week 8		
M 3.5	Anaya, <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> , 39-82	
W 3.7	Anaya, <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> , to 123	

F 3.9	Anaya, <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> , to 202; Anaya, "Writer's Landscape" (Drive)	
Week 9		
M 3.12	Anaya, <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> , to 235	
W 3.14	Anaya, <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> , to end; "Death of Environmentalism"	
F 3.16	Lopez, "A Literature of Place" (Drive)	
Week 10	Sat/Sun: Natural History Excursion II: Location of your choosing	
Unit 4: Anthropocene Landscapes		
M 3.19	Claire Vaye-Watkins, <i>Gold Fame Citrus</i> , to 80	
W 3.21	Vaye-Watkins, <i>Gold, Fame, Citrus</i> , to 109 Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth." http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html	
F 3.23	Vaye-Watkins, <i>Gold Fame Citrus</i> , to 139; "A Reckoning for Our Species," <i>The Guardian</i> . https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher	Field Journal, due
Week 11	Spring Break	
M 3.26-4.2	No class	
Week 12		
M 4.2	No class	

W 4.4	Vaye-Watkins, <i>Gold Fame Citrus</i> , to 200; Reisner, from <i>Cadillac Desert</i>	
F 4.6	Vaye-Watkins, <i>Gold Fame Citrus</i> , to 225; Reisner, from <i>Cadillac Desert</i>	Natural History Assignment II, due
Unit 5: Restoring Landscapes		
Week 13		
M 4.9	Vaye-Watkins, <i>Gold Fame Citrus</i> , to 238	
W 4.11	Vaye-Watkins, <i>Gold Fame Citrus</i> , to end	
F 4.13	Intro to Los Angeles River	
Week 14		
M 4.16	Lewis MacAdams, <i>The River</i> , Book I	
W 4.18	MacAdams, <i>The River</i> , Book II; From, Giovanni, "Just Subtract Water" (<i>LARB</i>)	
F 4.20	MacAdams, <i>The River</i> , Book III; Natural History Excursion discussion	
Week 15	Natural History Excursion III: Sat, 4.21, 9am-1pm, Los Angeles River	
M 4.23	Natural History Excursion	
W 4.25	Natural History Excursion	
F 4.27	Natural History Excursion followup discssion & in-class writing; MacAdams, cont.	
Week 16		

M 4.30	Price, "Remaking American Environmentalism: On the Banks of the L.A. River"	Field Journal, due
W. 5.2	Price, cont.	
F 5.4		
Week 17		
M 5/7	Final Exam, 10:30-12:30am	Natural History Assignment III (LA River), due

Other Important Dates

Tuesday, January 30: Last day to drop a class

Tuesday, April 5: Last day to withdraw from a class and receive a "W"

March 26-April 2, 4pm: Spring Break, no class

May 7-11: Finals week