

**ENGLISH 484.01**

T, 9:30am-12:00pm, New North 311

## Nineteenth Century Ecologies



L to R: Anna Atkins, from *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (1843); Henry Mayhew, from *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851); Thomas Moore and John Lindley, from *The Ferns of Greater Britain and Ireland* (1847).

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**Nathan K. Hensley**

Fall 2019 / Georgetown University

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The Victorians invented ecology. The term first entered English usage in 1875, in a British science journal, and while the word had been coined in German a few years before, that term had itself been adapted from Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Even earlier than this, British scientists, economists, and literary writers, among other thinkers, had begun to imagine human life as intimately related to other forms of being, and these entangled groupings to be themselves related to yet other entities across vast swaths of prehuman time. This course surveys England's most modern century, the nineteenth, to track how the conceptual dilemmas of a world newly understood (in Darwin's terms) as evolving, relational, and holistic generated dilemmas of aesthetic presentation. By what figural means could one hope to represent, in a coherent literary or artistic work, an entire ecosystem, where no single thing can be abstracted from that system of mutual codependence? Our readings will touch on nineteenth century scientific, literary, and political writing from across the period of early fossil-fueled industrialization; of special concern to us will be the vastly exploitative hierarchies enabled by the interplay of race and gender in this period, in particular as those categories played out in what is arguably the central institution of the British nineteenth century, the Empire. Coordinates will come from the recent volume of scholarly essays, *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire*, whose authors we will engage with in a series of Skype discussions. Primary readings will include work by Mary and Percy Shelley; Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Charles Darwin, George Eliot, Christina Rossetti, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and others; theory and criticism from Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Timothy Mitchell, Gillian Beer, and others.

### **Required Texts:**

Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford World's Classics): 978-0199541898

Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (Oxford World's Classics): 978-0199219223

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Penguin Classics): 978-0141439679

George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Oxford World's Classics): 978-0199536757

Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (Penguin Classics): 978-0140435474

Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer, eds. *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire* (Fordham UP): 978-0823282111. Please note that this text will be available free to download on the course blog / Canvas page.

### **Optional Texts:**

These are books from which we'll read significant sections. Relevant sections will be available as PDFs but if you're serious about continuing this line of inquiry I recommend you own them. Used is cheapest.

Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (Verso): 978-1784781293

Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Major Works* (Oxford World's Classics): 978-0199538850

William Wordsworth, *The Major Works* (Oxford World's Classics): 978-0199536863

Christopher Ricks, ed. *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* (Oxford UP): 978-0199556311

### **Additional Readings:**

A substantial amount of our semester's reading will be posted on our course blog; these readings are marked on the syllabus with an asterisk (\*). You should plan to budget at least \$50 for printing these files in the required hard copy format. It may seem counterintuitive to be asked to print the readings for a class on ecology, but we need to write with pencils on our readings; unless you have a reading device that accepts stylus-input annotations, you are expected **to print the PDFs in hard copy; read everything on printed paper; and (of course) bring all secondary texts to class.** Readings marked "supplementary" are just that: not required (formally or informally) but available to you should you desire further guidance, detail, or nuance for a given session.

### **Assignments:**

*Formal Course Work (70% of final grade)*

**Close reading assignment.** (2 pages, single-spaced, 1,000 words.) Details for these exercises in minute and sympathetic attention will be provided, but essentially this is an assignment in the hyperbolically slow, close, and intimate apprehension of a literary artifact. (We will discuss these metaphors.) Your task will be to take time to understand and thus appreciate this object in all its

dynamic and concrete specificity: terms, tips, and helpful suggestions will be provided. You are not meant to argue but to *read*; the job is to notice everything. Details to be announced.

**Multispecies Ethnography.** (4-5 pages, double spaced.) Guidelines are forthcoming for this exercise, which will ask you to use advanced descriptive techniques to examine carefully and with technical specificity a given relational ecosystem or part of one. The object of your analysis need not be “natural,” but must account for relations among human and nonhuman actors at multiple scales. This is an exercise in faithful and detailed descriptive writing.

**Seminar paper or final public humanities project.** (12-15 pp. or equivalent) This final project will take one of two forms (your choice). One option is a sustained academic argument that follows the format of a published scholarly article, if slightly shorter. For this you are encouraged to expand on your earlier work (blog posts, close readings, etc) for longer, more developed and fully-researched analysis; you are also feel free to generate an entirely new argument about new text(s). The other option, more amorphous, is a *public humanities project*. This you will devise in consultation with me, and can take almost any form: a website, an art installation, an exhibit, a happening. The work put into this should be the equivalent of that for a 12-15 pp. paper, or more.

*Other Work (counted as part of participation grade, which is 30% of final grade)*

**Weekly posts to our online blog.** Each week every seminar participant will make a brief but focused contribution to the class blog, c 400-500 words each. These posts can take almost form, so long as they (1) demonstrate familiarity with the readings for the week and (2) help push us collectively to new ideas. Posts might take the form of short essays making an argument about the week’s reading(s); close readings of single passages with questions appended; or sets of discussion questions in dialogue with other posts. You may also gather and present a piece of writing, art, science, or mass culture that you see as relating to what we’ve read. (In this case a word about the relation you see would be appropriate.) I encourage you to vary the form of your entries, moving from criticism to questions to creative posts and remediations of archival objects. *Posts are due the night before class, no later than midnight. All class members are required to read all posts.*

**Informal research presentation.** At the end of the term you may be asked to present in brief a snapshot of the research you have conducted for your final project. Guidelines for this informal presentation will be forthcoming.

### **Policy on Late Work:**

Respect for our shared academic endeavor means that lateness is strongly discouraged. Blog posts, papers, and other assignments will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade for each day beyond their due date, with the first 24 hour period beginning immediately. Please see me in advance if extraordinary circumstances arise. Incompletes are offered only in genuinely exceptional moments of duress, as when, in the K-Pg extinction event, a meteorite crashing in from space ended three quarters of life on the planet.

### **Course Grading Policy:**

Your final grade for this course will reflect the quality of written work you produce (70%); it will also reflect the quality of your participation in the collaborative labor of the course (30%). Thus, your thoughtful responses to the texts, your active participation in class discussions, and your level of commitment to our

shared undertaking will all contribute crucially to your final grade. The central component of your grade is your final paper. Responsible collegiality is mandatory.

### **Absence and Tardy Policy:**

The seminar-style nature of this course makes your presence in class imperative. See me *in advance* if a situation arises that will result in an absence. Do not come to class late. Repeat absences (i.e. more than one) will result in a lowered grade; same with tardies (more than two). In all cases it is your responsibility to make up missed class material.

### **Values in the Classroom:**

Our class is guided by the principle of mutual respect and an ethic of care. Our classroom is a space where debate of ideas and substantive disagreement are enabled by the fact that this mutual respect is unquestioned. In keeping with this, I ask that you please inform me of your preferred name and pronouns and I will, of course, use them. Mine are he/him. The Department of English has adopted [a statement of principles](#) that states, in part: “The Department of English at Georgetown University stands united in its commitment to the fundamental equality and inherent dignity of all human beings. These values are the foundation of our work in the humanities and transcend political affiliation. They are also embedded in our University’s mission and the Jesuit tradition of seeking social justice. As humanists we are committed to the practices of principled argumentation, free inquiry, careful consideration of evidence and fact, and sustained, contemplative engagement. A prerequisite for those practices is respect.”

### **Plagiarism:**

Do not do it, ever. If you do, you will (at the very least) fail the course. See the Georgetown Honor System website for guidelines about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it:

<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. Note that, as suggested above, in all matters I expect you to observe the Georgetown honor pledge: *To be honest in every academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.*

### **Disabilities and Accommodations:**

I am committed to providing whatever it takes to help you be successful in this course. This comes from the Georgetown Academic Resource Center: “Georgetown does not discriminate or deny access to an otherwise qualified student with a disability on the basis of disability, and students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable accommodations and/or special services in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAA) of 2008. However, students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not requested an accommodation and adequately documented their disabilities. Also, the University need not modify programmatic, course, or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction.” Please consult <http://guarc.georgetown.edu/disability/accommodations/>; and do see me early in the term to discuss how I can help.

### **Note on Title IX:**

University policy requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct or gender-based violence to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University’s response to sexual misconduct.

Georgetown has a number of *fully confidential* professional resources able to provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence. These resources include: Jen Schweer, MA, LPC / Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention / (202) 687-0323 / [jls242@georgetown.edu](mailto:jls242@georgetown.edu) / and Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist / Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) / (202) 687-6985 / [els54@georgetown.edu](mailto:els54@georgetown.edu). More information about campus resources and faculty reporting obligations can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

### Guides for Further Study and Research:

Thinking in interdisciplinary ways across boundaries of science and culture is difficult. For reliable scientific information, please see the NOAA website, the International Panel on Climate Change site, and the climate coverage of, especially the *Guardian* (UK) and the *Washington Post*. The GU Library has compiled a hub for accessing interdisciplinary information about climate change: <http://guides.library.georgetown.edu/climate>. For matters of literary and theoretical terminology, your first line of defense is the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*. Second stop is the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available with a Google search. For matters of literary history, consult the *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* or the *Columbia Guide to British Literature*. (Links to these are available the library's [19<sup>th</sup> century resources site](#).) Only after exhausting these options should you bother with Wikipedia. Please stay away from online summaries not mentioned here. And as always, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions about this material. We're in this together. I'm here to help.

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## NINETEENTH CENTURY ECOLOGIES | COURSE SCHEDULE

*Please note that this schedule may shift and stretch depending on our progress through the term. I reserve the right to alter the schedule as our progress demands. The authoritative schedule will be housed on our course blog / Canvas site.*

Pre-Reading | (no class) August 28

Get ready. Read PDFs sent by email, review blog site. Prepare for day 1.

Tuesday, September 3 | Coordinates. What is the nineteenth century? What is an ecology?

Nathan Hensley and Philip Steer, *Ecological Form*, "Introduction"\*

"The Victorian Age: 1830-1910"\*

"What Made the Victorians So Proud"\*

*Victorian Literature and Culture* "Keywords" essays: (1) Oak Taylor, "Anthropocene"; (2) Hensley, "Environment"; (3) MacDuffie, "Environment"; (4) Miller, "Ecology"\*

Tuesday, September 10 | Pre-Victorian System Poetics

William Wordsworth, from *The Major Works*:

"Home at Grasmere," "The Ruined Cottage," "The Old Cumberland Beggar," "The Thorn,"

"Nutting," "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," "O Nightingale! Thou surely art,"

"Appendix A: "There is an active principle alive in all things."\*

John Ruskin, "The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century," *Lecture 1*

only: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20204/20204-h/20204-h.htm>

Zach Fruit, "Enclosure"\*

Jerome McGann, from *The Romantic Ideology*\*  
“Versification”\*  
Andreas Malm, from *Fossil Capital*\*  
Raymond Williams, from *The Country and the City*\*

Tuesday, September 17 | Evolutionary Relations

Charles Darwin., *On the Origin of Species* pp. 5-100; 230-254; 303-360  
Charles Lyell, from *Principles of Geology* [skim this online]  
John Stuart Mill, from *On Liberty*\*  
Elizabeth Grosz, from *The Nick of Time* (Pls. print and read only the “Conclusion,” pp. 244-261)\*  
Gillian Beer, from *Darwin’s Plots*\*  
Prof. Hensley to give short biographies / writing samples for each symposium speaker

[Friday, September 20 | Symposium: Ecology and Religion in the Nineteenth Century]

*Attendance at this Georgetown event is encouraged but not mandatory: there is an International student climate strike on this day, with which I am in full solidarity.*

Tuesday, September 24 | Beings that are not me

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*  
From Richard Oastler, from *Yorkshire Slavery*\*  
Anna Tsing, “Arts of Inclusion, or How to Love a Mushroom”\*  
Nathan Hensley and John Patrick James, “Soot Moth: *Biston Bistularia* and the Victorian End of Nature”\*  
Catherine Gallagher, from *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*\*  
Audrey Jaffe, from *Scenes of Sympathy*, pp. 1-23\*

Tuesday, October 1 | No class, professor traveling to UBC. **[MULTISPECIES ETHNOGRAPHY DUE BY EMAIL, 5 pm 10/1]**

Read *Wuthering Heights*. Each student writes a full blog post with two discussion questions.

Tuesday, October 8 | An Existence of Yours Beyond You

*Wuthering Heights*  
Essays on “Yorkshire Slavery” tbd\*  
Christina Sharpe, “Introduction” and “The Weather,” from *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*\*

Tuesday, October 15 | Poetic Knowledge & the Species Division.

Christina Rossetti, selected sonnets, and from *Sing Song* and *The Face of the Deep*\*  
Robert Browning, select dramatic monologues including “Caliban Upon Setebos”  
Donna Haraway, from *Making Kin in the Cthulucene*\*  
Roberto Esposito, from *Person and Thing*\*

Tuesday, October 22 | Incalculable Diffusion I

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Tuesday, October 29 | Incalculable Diffusion II

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*  
Gage McWeeny, from *The Comfort of Strangers*\*  
Review “Digital *Middlemarch* Project”\*

Tuesday, November 5 | Incalculable Diffusion III [**CLOSE READING DUE**]

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*  
Laura Otis, “The Webs of *Middlemarch*”\*

Tuesday, November 12 | Imperialism and Ecological Knowledge

John Hanning Speke, from *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*\*  
Richard Francis Burton, from *The Kasidah of Haji-Abdu Al Yezdi*\*  
Richard Francis Burton, *Falconry in the Valley of the Indus*\*  
Edward Said, from *Orientalism*\*  
Mike Davis, from *Late Victorian Holocausts*\*  
Optional: Jessica Howell, "Mapping Miasma, Containing Fear: Richard Burton in West Africa"

Tuesday, November 19 | Cosmic Time, Open Systems

Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*  
Aaron Rosenberg, “‘Infinitesimal Lives’: Thomas Hardy’s Scale Effects” (in *Ecological Form*)

Tuesday, November 26 | Cosmic Time, Open Systems II

Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*  
Critical essays on eco-nihilism and “dark ecology” tbd

Tuesday, December 3 | Wreckage & Redemption

Gerard Manley Hopkins, selected poems, including “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” “God’s Grandeur,” “As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame,” “The Windhover,” “Inversnaid,” “Binsey Poplars,” “Ribblesdale”; “Author’s Preface” pp 106-107; Journal entries, pp. 202-211  
Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”\*  
Zach Samalin, “A Map the Size of the Empire”: Introduction to *Theories of the Nineteenth Century*\*  
JMW Turner, selected paintings and from *The Sketchbooks*\*

Monday, December 9 [make up class] | Poetry is Not a Luxury

Class reception & research presentations. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor”\*; Audre Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury”\*

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 12 pm. Final projects due by email.**