

E. 870-010

Planetary Thinking: Ecocriticism and Science Fiction

Prof. Siobhan Carroll

Th 9:30-12:15pm, MH 107

Office hours: W 12:30-1:30pm, Th 1:30-3:30pm, and by appointment- DGS office

Email: sicarrol@udel.edu

In *Staying With the Trouble* (2016), Donna Haraway argues for braiding together “science fact and speculative fabulation” (3) as a means of thinking through the challenges of ecological crisis. Like other ecocritics before her, she treats the science fiction of authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin not as traditional literary texts but as an alternate form of theorizing the (post)human. In this seminar we will explore the links between the environmental humanities and the science fiction and fantasy literature typically referred to as “speculative fiction.” We will read texts by critics such as Donna Haraway, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ursula K. Heise, and Rob Nixon alongside works by authors like Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Paolo Bacigalupi, and China Miéville. Given that ecocritics often use speculative fables to advance their arguments, assignments will include a short fiction-writing assignment as well as a traditional seminar paper or public humanities project.

Assignments

Minor Assignments (20%)

Each student will be responsible for writing **two response papers** (approximately 2-3 double-spaced pages *maximum*—10% of final grade), to be emailed to the class by 6pm on the day before we have class. One of these papers will summarize the argument of a secondary text; one will interpret a primary text. All students will be responsible for reading the emailed papers and should be prepared to comment on them in discussion.

- **Interpretive paper:** consider this a dry run of a topic you might be interested in exploring at greater length. Offer us a reading of a primary text – either a pure close reading or a reading informed by one or more of the theoretical works we’ve read in class. Conclude by posing two questions to the class that could spark wider discussion.
- **Summary paper:** summarize the arguments you have read in one of the secondary sources assigned for the upcoming class, concluding by reflecting on what you find useful or provocative in the article / excerpt. Finish by posing two discussion questions to the class.

Tip: Impress us with your concision! Remember that your peers will not have a lot of time to read your response paper before class, so focus and brevity will be appreciated.

Short Story (20%)

This is an experimental assignment. Compose a short, complete work of speculative fiction that reflects on or implements ecocritical ideas. Your story should be accompanied by a 1 page reflection on your story’s engagement with ecocriticism. In evaluating these stories I’m not anticipating that you’ll write classic or even particularly good short stories (though you’ll impress me if you do). Rather, I want to see how you can think creatively about the ideas we encounter in class.

Proposal (10%)

Write a 300-500 word abstract of the fabulous final paper you have yet to write. Make sure to clearly identify your thesis, sources of evidence, and how your paper will modify a scholarly conversation. End by making a claim for the significance of your paper to that conversation/field.

Final Paper (40%)

This should be a 16-20 page analytical essay suitable for publishing in an academic journal like *American Literature*, *Victorian Studies*, *Paradoxa*, or *ISLE*.

Professionalism (10%)

This is not a lecture class. This is a class in which you are expected to spend the majority of class time discussing the text with your peers, with the instructor acting as facilitator.

For independent researchers such as yourselves, class provides an opportunity for you to test out your ideas about a text, ask questions about points that confuse you, and build on other people's ideas. Don't waste time sitting silently, worrying that people will think you're stupid if you ask about "X."

Discussion will factor into a 10 % "professionalism" grade that will reflect my evaluation of your professional conduct over the course of the semester. In other words, I will be looking at how you treat your peers in the classroom, how you respond when someone challenges your argument, whether you can "share the floor" with other speakers, whether you can raise questions & make points articulately, etc.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

Please note that the class calendar may be subject to change.

Week 1:

8/31 Le Guin, "Vaster than Empires and More Slow," Heise, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism;" Haraway, from *Staying with the Trouble*

Extra reading: Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow"

Week 2:

9/7 Coleridge, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner;" Williams, "Ideas of Nature," Levine, from *Forms*

Week 3:

9/14 Shelley, *Frankenstein*; Moore, from *Capitalism and the Web of Life*;

Extra reading: Tsing, from *Friction*

Week 4

9/21 Shelley, *Frankenstein*; Haraway, "The Cyborg Manifesto;"

Week 5

9/28 Wells, *The Time Machine*; Morton, from "Victorian Hyperobjects"; Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses;"

Week 6:

10/5 VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, Morton, from *Ecological Thought*; Royle from *The Uncanny*

Extra reading: Freud, "The Uncanny"

Week 7

10/12 Lemanager, from *Living Oil*; Graham and Thrift, "Out of Order;" Bacigalupi, "Pump Six;" "The People of Sand and Slag," "The Fluted Girl"

Week 8

10/19 Miéville, "Polynia," Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in Los Angeles;" Skype talk with Adrienne Greve, **Short Stories due;**

Week 9

10/26 Du Maurier, "The Birds," Lamsley, "Suburban Blight," Sloterdijk, from *Terror from the Air*; Beck, from *Risk Society*

Week 10

11/2 Butler, *Parable of the Sower*; Nixon, from *Slow Violence*;

Week 11:

11/9 Butler, *Parable of the Sower*; Pellow, "Towards a Critical Environmental Justice Studies," TBA

Week 12

11/16 prof at conference; **proposal due**

Week 13

Thanksgiving

Week 14

11/30 Morrison, *We3*, Haraway, from *When Species Meet*; Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)"

Week 15

12/7 **Last Class –discussion of projects**

Final Paper – due on Sakai, May 20, by 6pm