

CLIMATE FICTION

DANIEL WILLIAMS (BARD COLLEGE, SPRING 2021)

What is the role of literature in understanding, representing, and adapting to climate change? How has our urgent ecological crisis shaped the scales, genres, and plots of contemporary fiction? This course surveys the literary genre that has lately come to be characterized as climate fiction, or “cli-fi.” Alongside the dystopian science fiction central to the genre, we will consider realist novels, nonfiction journalism, scientific writing, environmental memoir, poetry, and film from across the globe. We will examine how literature engages (or not) central concepts in earth-system science and scenarios of ecological calamity (hurricanes, megafires, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss); how it critiques (or not) environmental racism and injustice; and how it envisions possible futures for humanity in the Anthropocene. Reading critical materials from across the environmental humanities, we will also think about the challenges of narrative, representation, sympathy, and imagination as they apply to literature and climate policy. The course will emphasize methods of research, writing, and revision essential for Senior Projects in literature and other humanities fields.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (Grand Central, 1993) ISBN: 9781538732182
 Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Anchor, 2003) ISBN: 9780385721677
 Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (Bloomsbury, 2011) ISBN: 9781608196265
 Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (Mariner, 2004) ISBN: 9780618711666
 Ian McEwan, *Solar* (Anchor, 2010) ISBN: 9780307739537
 Jenny O'fills, *Weather* (Knopf, 2020) ISBN: 9780385351102 / 9780345806901

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Primary reading each week is the assigned novel. Secondary readings listed below are required as background and/or context. Further readings on the course website are optional and intended to enrich posts, presentations, and papers.

Week 1

Feb. 3: Margaret Atwood, “Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet”
 Helen Simpson, “Diary of an Interesting Year”
 Amitav Ghosh, “Stories,” excerpted from *The Great Derangement*
 Will Steffen et al., “The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship”

Week 2

Feb. 10: Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) (1-149)
 Jenny Price, “Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in LA”

Week 3

Feb. 17: Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (153-329)

Stephanie LeMenager, “To Get Ready for Climate Change, Read Octavia Butler”

Week 4

Feb 24: Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) (3-218)

Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”

Week 5

Mar. 3: Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (221-376)

Julia Adeney Thomas, “History and Biology in the Anthropocene: Problems of Scale, Problems of Value”

Week 6

Mar. 10: Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (2011) (1-130)

Rob Nixon, from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (1-22)

Week 7

Mar. 17: Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (131-258)

Natasha Trethewey, “Liturgy,” from *Beyond Katrina*

Week 8 [No Class]**Week 9**

Mar. 31: Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) (3-145)

Week 10

Apr. 7: Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (149-329)

Week 11

Apr. 14: Ian McEwan, *Solar* (2010) (3-167)

Week 12

Apr. 21: McEwan, *Solar* (167-330)

Week 13

Apr. 28: Jenny Offill, *Weather*

Franny Choi, “How to Let Go of the World”

Week 14

May 5: [Student Paper Presentations]

Week 15

May. 12: [Student Paper Presentations]