

**AFTER NATURE:
VICTORIAN LITERATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

DANIEL WILLIAMS (BARD COLLEGE, FALL 2019)

When did humans leave nature behind? As the tragic realities of climate change, species extinction, and ecological crisis become daily more visible, humanity's appreciable mark on the earth-system has prompted the suggestion that we now live in a geological epoch of our own making: the "Anthropocene." In this course, we'll turn back to a major inflection point in humanity's relationship with the natural world, examining nineteenth-century ideas about—and representations of—nature and the environment that continue to inform our own. Across novels, poetry, scientific writing, art criticism, and social theory, we'll look at different senses of "nature" as a source aesthetic wonder and moral value, and as a zone of alterity and violence: "red in tooth and claw." We'll consider advances in, and literary responses to, sciences like geology, evolutionary biology, and climatology that remain vital for understanding humanity's roles and effects in the natural world. We'll read about how human activity was seen—in a steam-powered and coal-fired industrial age—as entangled with nature as an extractable resource and sink for waste products, both in Britain and across the territories of its empire. In writings about polluted landscapes and toxic workspaces, we'll address the significant costs of Victorian industry to human health. And, throughout the course, we'll contemplate alternative visions of human/nature interaction, from rural landscapes that nostalgically record vanishing ways of life to apocalyptic visions that look ahead to a world actually existing "after nature."

REQUIRED TEXTS

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Oxford, 2008); ISBN: 9780199536276
 Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (Penguin, 1998); ISBN: 9780140435474
 Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Penguin, 1984) ISBN: 9780140431841

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Week 1 | Introduction

- Sep. 2: Robert Frost, "Our Hold on the Planet" [in-class reading]
 Sep. 4: Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature" (73-93), "Ecology" (70-1)
 Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen, and John McNeill,
 "The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives" (842-67)

Week 2 | Romantic Ecologies

- Sep. 9. William Wordsworth, "Lines Written in Early Spring," "Resolution and Independence," "The World is Too Much with Us," "Composed upon

Westminster Bridge,” “Daffodils,” “Expostulation and Reply,” “The Tables Turned”

Sep. 11: John Clare, “Helpston Green,” “To a Fallen Elm,” “The Mores,” “Remembrances,” “The Badger,” “Poets Love Nature,” “Pastoral Poesy,” “I Am”

Felicia Hemans, “Nature’s Farewell”

George Gordon, Lord Byron, “Darkness”

Week 3 | Moralizing Nature

Sep. 16: John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (“Of the Pathetic Fallacy”; “Of Truth of Space”; “Of the Open Sky”; “Of Modern Landscape”; “Of the Turnerian Picturesque”)

Sep. 18: John Keats, “To Autumn”

Emily Brontë, “High Waving Heather,” “Alone I Sat the Summer Day,” “Loud Without the Wind was Roaring,” “Shall Earth No More Inspire Thee,” “No Coward Soul is Mine”

Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Spring”

Week 4 | Urban-Industrial Nature

Sep. 23: Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (7-167)

Sep. 25: Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (continued)

Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (“The Great Towns”)

Edwin Chadwick, “Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population”

Week 5 | Urban-Industrial Nature

Sep. 30: Dickens, *Hard Times* (168-274)

Oct. 2: Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (excerpts), “A Visit to the Cholera Districts of Bermondsey”

Week 6 | Geology and Deep Time

Oct. 7: Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology* (excerpts)

Oct. 9: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (Prologue, Cantos 1-15, 19, 21-7, 34-36, 39, 54-6, 69-70, 95, 112-113, 118, 120-124, 127, 129-131, Epilogue)

Tennyson, “The Constant Spirit of the World Exults”

Week 7 | Evolution and Natural Selection

Oct. 14: [Fall Break: No Class]

Oct. 16: Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (Introduction, ch. 3, Recapitulation and Conclusion)

Ernst Haeckel, *The Evolution of Man* (excerpt)

Week 8 | Darwin’s Bards

Oct. 21: Robert Browning, “Caliban Upon Setebos”

Tennyson, “Flower in the Crannied Wall,” “The Higher Pantheism,” “De Profundis,” “Vastness,” “The Making of Man”

Oct. 23: Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach,” “The Future”

Thomas Hardy, “Hap,” “Nature’s Questioning”

May Kendall, “The Lower Life,” “Lay of the Trilobite”

Constance Naden, “Natural Selection”

Week 9 | Nature, God, Humanity

Oct. 28: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Earth and Her Praisers”

Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Pied Beauty,” “God’s Grandeur,” “The Sea and the Skylark,” “Binsey Poplars,” “Ribblesdale,” “Inversnaid”

Oct. 30: Christina Rossetti, “Goblin Market,” “The World,” “Amor Mundi”; poems from *Sing-Song*

Anna Laetitia Barbauld, “The Mouse’s Petition”

Anne Brontë, “The Captive Dove”

Week 10 | Forest and Farm

Nov. 4: Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (5-173)

Nov. 6: Hardy, “Throwing a Tree,” “To a Tree in London,” “The Felled Elm and She,” “The Tree and the Lady,” “Transformations”

Charlotte Mew, “The Trees are Down”

Week 11 | Forest and Farm

- Nov. 11: Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (174-367)
- Nov. 13: Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (continued)
- Hardy, “The Dorsetshire Labourer”

Week 12 | A Changing Climate

- Nov. 18: Hopkins, “The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe”
- John Tyndall, “On Chemical Rays, and the Light of the Sky”
- William Thomson, Lord Kelvin, “On the Age of the Sun’s Heat”
- Nov. 20: Ruskin, *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (Lecture 1)

Week 13 | London and After

- Nov. 25: Alice Meynell, *London Impressions* (“The Climate of Smoke,” “The Trees,” “The Spring,” “The Smouldering City”)
- Nov. 27: Richard Jefferies, *After London* (excerpt)
- M. P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud* (excerpt)

Week 14 | Colonial Nature

- Dec. 2: Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (28-133)
- Dec. 4: Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (continued)
- Schreiner, *Thoughts on South Africa* (excerpts)
- Ruskin, *Lectures on Art* (excerpt from Inaugural Lecture)

Week 15 | Colonial Nature

- Dec. 9: Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (135-301)
- Thomas Pringle, “Afar in the Desert”