

Instructor: Sarah Wald
Office Hours: Monday 10:30-11:30 and by appointment
Fall 2005 AC 0019 S06

Beyond Nature Writing

Eco-Critical Readings of Race, Gender, and Landscape

In this class, we use a variety of materials including advertisements, novels, non-fiction essays, and real landscapes around us to prompt discussions about what nature is. We will explore how our ideas about race, gender, and class inflect the way we imagine and understand the landscapes around us.

This class serves as an introduction to eco-criticism. Eco-criticism is a way of reading literature that foregrounds the role of nature in the text. For example, how do particular authors understand nature? How do those authors' ideas about nature influence their ideas about social justice?

In this class, we expand our application of eco-criticism beyond traditional nature writing (such as Thoreau) to three contemporary novels by women writers. We also apply the lessons of eco-criticism to explore how nature is understood in culture more generally, such as how it is depicted in social movements and advertisements. The class is structured around three contemporary ways that we approach or understand nature: wilderness, environmental justice, and globalization.

Course Requirements:

Participation: 10%

Mini-Assignments: 15%

Paper 1 (1500 words): 20%

Paper 2 (1500 words): 20%

Revision of Paper 1 or 2: 10%

Final Project (Choice of Creative or Academic Writing: 1500 words): 25%

Note: Students should expect to spend 4-6 hours per week outside of class completing reading and writing assignments. Approximately 20 pages of writing will be due over the course of the semester, not including one paper revision.

Required Texts: Available at Brown Bookstore & on reserve at the Rock

William Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Norton: 1996.

Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy, eds. *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and The Natural World*. Milkweed Editions: 2002.

Marilynne Robinson *Housekeeping* Noonday: 1980.

Helena Maria Viramontes *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Plume Books: 1996.

Karen Tei Yamashita *Tropic of Orange*. Coffee House Press: 1997.

Recommended Texts:

Joseph Gibaldi *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Modern Language Association of America, 6th Addition: 2003.

William Strunk and EB White. *The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition*. Longman: 2000.
Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans and Rachel Stein. *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics and Pedagogy*. The University of Arizona Press: 2002.

We will also make extensive use of articles and links made available on WebCT.

Course Schedule

*Article Found on Electronic Course Reserves

+Article Found on WebCT

Section I: Approaching Nature Critically

Week I: Introduction to Course

Key Questions: What are the Goals & Objectives of the Course? What is American Studies? What is the relationship between Eco-Criticism and American Studies? What does it mean to think about nature critically?

W, 9/8: Aims & Objectives of Course; Class Expectations; Syllabus Overview

Week II: Eco-Critical Theory

Key Questions: What is nature? What is Eco-Criticism? What is nature-writing? What are the some of the major debates in eco-criticism? What techniques do eco-critics use?

M, 9/12: What is Nature? What is Nature Writing?

Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy: "Introduction as Conversation" in *The Colors of Nature*: 3-15.

*Lawrence Buell: "What is an Environmental Text?" From *The Environmental Imagination*: 6-8.
Built Environment Tour of Campus (In-Class)

W, 9/14: Defining & Applying Eco-Criticism

+Select definitions on Eco-Criticism

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston: "Crossing Boundaries" in *The Colors of Nature*: 171 180.

Mini-Assignment 1: 1-2 page Eco-Critical Reading of Houston's "Crossing Boundaries." Is "Crossing Boundaries" an "environmental text" according to Lawrence Buell's suggested guidelines? How does Houston depict the relationship between Japanese Americans and nature? How does she depict the relationship between Native Americans and nature? Do you think she successfully links the histories of Japanese Americans and Native Americans?

Week III: Race, Gender, Nature

Key Questions: How is nature gendered and racialized? How do we use eco-critical techniques to talk about depictions of race and gender in literature? How do authors respond to or reclaim the racialized and gendered landscape in their writings?

M, 9/19: Gendering the Land

*Mei Mei Evans. "Nature and Environmental Justice" from *The Environmental Justice Reader*. Pages: 181-193.

* Annette Kolodny. "Unearthing Herstory: an Introduction" from *The Eco-Criticism Reader*. Pages: 170-181.

* Judith McCombs. "The Man" pg 315-317 from *Sisters of the Earth*. Pages: 315-317.

* Terry Tempest Williams. "Clear-Cut" from *Sisters of the Earth*. Pages: 371-374.

*Pat Mora. "Distance" from *Borders*. Page: 57.

Mini-Assignment 2: Write 1 Paragraph Synopsis of one of today's articles (Evans, or Kolodny). Think about how you would apply this article to the creative pieces by McCombs, Williams, or Mora.

W, 9/21: Race & Landscape

Selection from Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (in class).

*David Lionel Smith. "African Americans, Writing and Nature" from *American Nature Writers, Volume II*. Pages: 1003-1012.

Joseph Burchac. At "The End of Ridge Road" in *The Colors of Nature*. Pages: 49-66.

* Pat Mora. "Echoes" 23-24; "My tierra" 70; "Desert Women" 80 from *Borders*.

Section II: Re-Thinking Wilderness

Week IV: The Wilderness Landscape

Key Questions: *What is meant by Wilderness? How are our ideas about Wilderness related to our ideas about the American West? What assumptions do we create by linking wilderness and western landscapes?*

M, 9/26: Defining Wilderness

Roderick Nash. Excerpts from *Wilderness & the American Mind*.

Read Prologue, "The Condition of Wilderness" and your assigned chapter.

On Reserve.

Mini-Assignment 3: Please bring one item (be creative) to class that fits the description of Americans' response to wilderness during the time period of your assigned chapter. Be prepared to explain in 2-5 minutes what it is that Nash argues/describes/explains in your chapter, how your found object is representative of that, and what you think are the most significant issues raised by Nash in your chapter.

W, 9/28: Critiquing Wilderness

*Ramachandra Guha. "Radical Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique" from *Environmental Ethics* Vol 11.1 (Spring 1989): 71-83.

+1964 Wilderness Act

Melissa Nelson "Becoming Metis" in *The Colors of Nature*. Pages: 146-152.

DISCUSSION: Paper Expectations (in class)
+“How to Write Academic Papers”

Week V: The Trouble with Wilderness:

Key Questions: *What is meant by saying Wilderness is a “human artifact”? How do wilderness landscapes and representations of wilderness expose ways of thinking about race, gender and nature?*

M, 10/3: Constructing Wilderness

William Cronon. “The Trouble with Wilderness” in *Uncommon Ground*. Pages:69-91.

Louis Owens. “Burning the Shelter” in *The Colors of Nature*. Pages: 142-145.

W, 10/5: Housekeeping

Marilynne Robinson. *Housekeeping*. Chapters 1-5.

Week VI: Housekeeping in the Wilderness:

Key Questions: *How do we apply eco-critical techniques and analysis of Wilderness landscapes to a critical reading of Housekeeping? Does Robinson embrace or critique Wilderness landscapes? Does Robinson’s novel embrace or challenge the collapse of “Wilderness” and “The West”?*

M, 10/10: No class.

W, 10/12: Housekeeping.

Marilynne Robinson. *Housekeeping*. Chapters 6-11.

Assignment 1: 4-6 Page Paper Responding to Guide Questions on *Housekeeping*.

Section III: The Struggle for Environmental Justice

Week VII: The Environmental Justice Movement

Key Questions: *How does the Environmental Justice (EJ) Movement define nature? How does it define environment? How do we compare the definitions of environment and nature, and particularly the place of humans, in the EJ movement, to the definitions of environment and nature found in the discourse of wilderness?*

M, 10/17: Defining the Environmental Justice Movement

Giovanna Di Chiro. “Nature as Community: the Convergence of Environment and Social Justice.” In *Uncommon Ground*. Pages: 298-320.

Robert D. Bullard “Confronting Environmental racism in the Twenty-First Century.” in *The Colors of Nature*. Pages: 90-97.

Wionna LaDuke. *Recovering the Sacred*. Introduction, What is Sacred?

Mini-Assignment 4: Write a paragraph synopsis of Di Chiro’s, LaDuke’s or Bullard’s piece.

W, 10/19: Environmental Justice Testimonials

*Mei Mei Evans. “Testimonies” from *The Environmental Justice Reader*. Pages: 29-43.

*Joni Adamson. "Throwing Rocks at the Sun: An Interview with Teresa Leal." from *The Environmental Justice Reader*. Pages: 44-57.

*TV Reed. "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism." from *The Environmental Justice Reader*. Pages: 145-163.

Week VIII: Labor & Landscape

Key Questions: How do the authors this week understand the relationship between humanity and nature? Is all labor environmentally destructive? When we privilege some forms of labor as less environmentally destructive than others (doctor versus logger for example) what conceptions of humanity's relationship to nature are we appealing to?

M, 10/24: Narratives of Environmental Justice

Ray Gonzalez. "Hazardous Cargo" in *The Colors of Nature*. Pages: 163-170.

Al Young. "Silent Parrot Blues" in *The Colors of Nature*. Pages: 113-124.

*Martin Espada. "Frederico's Ghost" from *Alabanza*. Pages: 89-90.

Mini-Assignment 5: Write a 1 -2 page response using either the work by Gonzalez or by Young. How does the author think about the relationship between humanity and nature? How do they define environment?

W, 10/26: Working Landscapes

Richard White: "Are You an Environmentalist or do you work for a living?" in *Uncommon Ground*. Pages: 171-186.

David Mas Masumoto. "Belonging on the Land" in *The Colors of Nature*. Pages: 198 208.

Week IX: Agricultural/Pastoral Landscapes

Key Questions: This week we will compare/contrast three visions of Agricultural landscapes: the yeoman farmer, the factory in the field, and the machine in the garden. How is the relationship between humans, labor, and landscape represented in each? How do race and gender affect each vision of agriculture?

M, 10/31: Racing the Pastoral

* Wendell Berry. Excerpts from the *The Hidden Wound*. Pages: 1-3, 94-121,

bell hooks, "Earthbound: On Solid Ground" in *The Colors of Nature*. Pages 67-71.

+Pastoral Poetry & Pastoral Comedy <http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl339/pastoral.html>

Mini-Assignment 6: One paragraph describing something thing you would like to work on/improve in your next paper. +Read "Steps in Paper Editing."

W, 11/2: Industrialized Agriculture

* Leo Marx. "Excerpt from The Machine in the Garden" from *The Green Studies Reader*. Pages: 104-108.

*Don Mitchell. "California: The Beautiful and the Damned" from *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape*. Pages 13-35.

Week X: Under the Feet of Jesus

M, 11/7: Environmental Justice Movement
Helena Maria Viramontes. *Under the Feet of Jesus*.

W, 11/9: Labor & Landscape.
Helena Maria Viramontes. *Under the Feet of Jesus*.

Assignment 2: 4-6 page paper applying articles from Week VII, VIII or IX to *Under the Feet of Jesus*. You have two topics to choose from. 1) How do you compare the depictions of nature in the Environmental Justice Movement to depictions of nature in *Under the Feet of Jesus*? Is *Under the Feet of Jesus* a novel of Environmental Justice? Why, or Why not? 2) How does Viramontes represent the relationship between labor and landscape?

Section IV: Nature in the Global City

Week XI: Nature in the Global Economy

Key Questions: *How do we approach advertisements as a primary source? When we buy products that are sold through nature, what are we buying? What is the relationship between consumption and production of nature?*

M, 11/14: Buying Nature
Susan Davis. "Touch the Magic" in *Uncommon Ground*, Pages: 204-217.
Jennifer Price. "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company" in *Uncommon Ground*, Pages: 186-203.

W, 11/16: Selling Nature
Read Making Sense of Advertisements: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Ads/>

Mini-Assignment 7: Bring in an advertisement that uses nature. What ideas about nature (and nature's relationship to humanity) are embedded in the advertisement? What ideas about race, gender, and labor are present in this advertisement? How does this advertisement conceptualize the relationship between production and consumption? What is this advertisement actually selling? Be prepared to present your eco-critical reading of the advertisement to the class (5 minutes).

Week XII: Immigration & Globalization

Key Questions: *What are the ecological issues around border, immigration, and population? What is the role of "the nation" and "borders" in environmentalist discourse? How do we approach globalization and the global justice movement from an eco-critical perspective?*

F, 11/18: Population, Immigration and Border Ecologies
*Paul Ehrlich. "The Population Bomb" Excerpted from *Takin' it to the Streets: A Sixties Reader*. Pages 520-523.
*Maria Mies and Vandiva Shiva. "People or population: Towards a New Ecology of Reproduction." From *Ecofeminism*. Pages 277-298.
+Selected Documents from Sierra Club Immigration Referendum
+Selected Documents Environmental Justice at the Border

M, 11/21: Globalization

+Susan George. *Another World is Possible If...* Chapter 1, pages 3-28.
Selections from *The Miami Model* (in class, approx 30 minutes)

Week XIII: Tropic of Orange

M, 11/28: Tropic of Orange

Karen Tei Yamashita. *Tropic of Orange*. Read Monday and Tuesday.

W, 11/30: Tropic of Orange.

Karen Tei Yamashita. *Tropic of Orange*. Read Wednesday.

Mini-Assignment 8: Each student will be assigned one image or character in the novel to think about in terms of the ideas we have thought about in class this semester. At the beginning of each class day spent on the novel (11/28, 11/30 and 12/5) – a 150-200 word eco-critical reflection on that character or image from that section of the novel is due.

WEEK XIII: Tropic of Orange & Conclusion

M, 12/5: Tropic of Orange

Karen Tei Yamashita. *Tropic of Orange*. Read Thursday - Sunday.

*Julie Sze, "From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice."
The Environmental Justice Reader. Pages: 163-180.

F, 12/9: Revision of Paper 1 or 2 Due.

M, 12/12: Final Project Due.