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Fall office hours: Tuesday & Thursday 2:00pm – 4:00pm, and by appointment.  
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ENG4932.001: Honors Seminar (3 credits)  
Literature and the Environment  
AL343  
Fall 2017, TR 4:00 – 5:20pm

...the Anthropocene did not arise fully formed from the brain of James Watt, the steam engine, and coal, but rather from a long historical process of economic exploitation of human beings and the world, going back to the sixteenth century and making industrialization possible.

Christophe Bonneuil & Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene* (2016)

### **Course Description:**

Artists have long provided a means through which to experience the affective substrate of modernity—an era made possible by our disastrous reliance on fossil fuels, along with other finite resources like groundwater. While some provide catharsis, others issue a prescient warning: consider the villain in *Mad Max: Fury Road* siphoning water from the local aquifer.

If we are to engage substantively and sufficiently with the climate crisis, it may be in the realm of imagination where we ought to begin. But we must also recognize that this is a crisis a few millennia in the making—traceable more likely to *Genesis* than to James Watt. While critics across the Humanities and Social Sciences are increasingly using the term “Anthropocene” (or “age of man”) to refer to a period of development popularly dated to *the* industrial revolution in England, this is demonstrably false. The material bases of economic development—agricultural and industrial enclosures, and the consequent displacement of local communities—were established well before the modern factory, or the 1773 Enclosure Acts that were its precondition. In fact, such phenomena find poetic expression in the Georgic and pastoral traditions dating to Hesiod and beyond. Meanwhile, the philosophical and political bases of the age emerge in such works as René Descartes’s 1641 *Meditations on First Philosophy* or John Locke’s 1689 *Second Treatise on Government*—themselves the legacy of such ancient conceptions of mastery as we will encounter in *Genesis*.

In this course, we will begin by asking a series of questions that might lead us toward a more robust understanding of the so-called Anthropocene. We will likewise employ the tools of literary and cultural criticism as we explore artistic expressions that span the ancient, pastoral, Romantic, and postcolonial periods. Amongst our central questions, we will ask:

- How do we understand the terms “nature” and “environment”?
- What aesthetic, philosophical, economic, and (geo) political traditions have contributed to our thinking?
- What is the “trouble with wilderness,” and how do conventional notions of wilderness and place contribute to our ecocritical practices?

We will likewise consider the role of the Humanities as we face the imminent crises attendant to climate change, particularly in South Florida. In this vein, we shall ask:

- What role does/can literature play in combatting (or at least mitigating) cultural ignorance, particularly in consuming nations like the United States?
- What are the stakes of bringing together the natural and human sciences, and what would this look like?

We will conduct this course as a seminar with each participant contributing substantively to class discussion. You will be expected to post concise syntheses of assigned texts prior to each class meeting as a means of generating discussion; and each student will be assigned a unit during which s/he will lead our seminar. Your informal responses will form the bases of your seminar papers, which will employ the tools of Ecocriticism while engaging in the sorts of interdisciplinary work at the heart of the Environmental Humanities. We will explore a variety of representative journals, including *ISLE* and *Environmental Humanities*, as you begin your research.

### **Catalog Description:**

*Honors Seminar (ENG 4932)*. Honors Seminar is required for honors students but open to those interested in more advanced literary study. This course allows students to synthesize the literary knowledge and critical skills gained in the English major. The seminar is more intensive and interactive than the Department's other courses and will be organized in ways that anticipate graduate-level courses. The topics of the seminar change from year to year. This course will be offered once a year in the fall.

### **Required texts:**

Chris Abani, *GraceLand*, ISBN-13: 978-0312425289

Ashley Dawson, *Extinction: A Radical History*, ISBN-13: 978-1944869014

Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, ISBN-13: 978-0415904636

Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, ISBN-13: 978-0312428594

Arundhati Roy, *Walking with the Comrades*, ISBN-13: 978-0143120599

Karen Russell, *Swamplandia!*, ISBN-13: 978-0307276681

Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*, ISBN-13: 978-1416578796

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, ISBN-13: 978-0195198102

\*All readings appended by an asterik will be available on Canvas.

### **Class requirements and Policies:**

1. Weekly syntheses of assigned readings. You may respond to the readings in a variety of ways: offer a close reading of one of the primary literary works; pose a series of engaging questions about the texts under discussion; examine one of the texts using a relevant theoretical lens that is not on the syllabus; engage with and elaborate postings by fellow students; discuss a theme that has been developing in the course; recap and build on earlier conversations using the new material of the day. These postings must be made *no later* than 5pm each Monday. The goal is to use our online discussions to build threads of discussion in class.

2. Each student will be assigned a weekly discussion to lead. This will require a brief (3-5 minute) presentation/synopsis of central ideas along with a minimum of two questions for class discussion. It is expected that hard copies of presentations will be provided for each seminar member.
3. Conference abstract (250-500 words): you are to construct an abstract for our December conference. At our last meeting on Thursday 12/7, you are going to present a 10 minute version of your final seminar paper.
4. Seminar paper (10-15 pages): you are to produce a formal critique of selected works inclusive of appropriate secondary source material. We will discuss secondary source material, including our library's electronic resources as well as a host of digital archives focused on Environmental Humanities research, as we move through the semester. Primary and secondary source material must be reflective of the work of our class.

**Grading policy:**

Weekly discussion board: 40%

Seminar presentation: 15%

Paper abstract: 5%

Conference presentation: 10%

Seminar paper: 25%

Participation in class discussions: 5%

**Grade Scale:**

Florida Atlantic University follows a plus/minus (+/-) grading system. Numeric Values for this course are as follows: 93-100 A+; 92-90 A-; 89-87 B+; 86-83 B; 82-80 B-; 79-77 C+; 76-73 C; 72-70 C-; 69-60 D; 59-0 F

**Note on absences:**

Your presence is vital to our classroom community, so regular attendance is required. You will be permitted *two absences* after which your grade will be negatively affected. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss assigned texts and to produce written responses both in class and at home. You are also expected to bring your textbook(s) to class every session.

**STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES:** In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)—in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 203 (954-236-1222); or in Jupiter, SR 110 (561-799-8585) —and follow all SAS procedures. For more information, see <http://www.fau.edu/sas/>

**CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the University mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the University community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and

individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see: [http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg\\_4.001\\_5-26-10\\_FINAL.pdf](http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf)

**Course Schedule: (subject to change depending on class progress)**

**Week 1: Introductions & Keywords (8/22, 8/24)**

A.R. Ammons, "Expressions of Sea Level"\*  
 Campbell McGrath, "The Everglades"\*  
 Raymond Williams, "Nature" from *Keywords*\*  
*Genesis*, Chapter 1:27-28\*

**Week 2: Imagining Arcadia (8/29, 8/31)**

Raymond Williams, "A Problem of Perspective," "Pastoral and Counter-Pastoral," and "Golden Ages," from *The Country and the City*  
 Andrew Marvell, "The Garden"\*  
 William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature"\*

**Week 3: Rural Virtue (9/5, 9/7)**

Raymond Williams, "The Green Language," from *The Country and the City*  
 William Wordsworth, "The Solitary Reaper"\*  
 Oliver Goldsmith, from *The Deserted Village*\*  
 John Clare, from *The Village Minstrel*\*  
 Stephen Duck, "The Thresher's Labour"\*

**Week 4: Primitive Accumulation and the Origins of Ecological Crisis (9/12, 9/14)**

John Locke, "Of Property," from *Two Treatises of Government*\*  
 Jason Moore, "The Capitalocene, Part I: On the nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis"\*  
 Samantha Grenrock, "The Sixth Age"\*  
 Ashley Dawson, *Extinction: A Radical History*

**Week 5: New Enclosures (9/19, 9/21)**

Vandana Shiva, from *Earth Democracy*\*  
 Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*

**Weeks 6-8: Ecological Imperialism (9/26, 9/28 | 10/3, 10/5 | 10/10, 10/12)**

Amitav Ghosh, "History" and "Politics," from *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*\*  
 --*Sea of Poppies*

**Week 9: The Environmentalism of the Poor (10/17, 10/19)**

Ramachandra Guha & Juan Alier, "Introduction" & "The Environmentalism of the Poor," from *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*\*  
 Arundhati Roy, *Walking with the Comrades*

**Weeks 10 & 11: The Resource Curse (10/24, 10/26 & 10/31, 11/2)**

Pablo Neruda, "Standard Oil Co."\*

Rob Nixon, "Pipe Dreams: Ken Saro-Wiwa, Environmental Justice, and Micro-Minority Rights"\*

Chris Abani, *GraceLand*

**Weeks 12 & 13: Toxicity (11/7, 11/9 & 11/14, 11/16)**

Stacy Alaimo, from *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*\*

Muriel Rukeyser, "Alloy"\*

Pablo Mukherjee, "Dead Air: Indra Sinha," from *Postcolonial Environments Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English*\*

W.S. Merwin, "Air"\*

Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*

**Weeks 14 & 15: Environmental Justice: Combatting Uneven Development in the Glades (11/21 & 11/28, 11/30)**

Rachel Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow"\*

Greg Garrard, "Beginnings: Pollution," from *Ecocriticism*\*

Marjory Stoneman Douglas, from *Everglades: River of Grass*\*

Karen Russell, *Swamplandia!*

\*Thursday 11/23 is Thanksgiving.

**Week 16: (12/5, 12/7)**

\***Tuesday 12/5:** Reading day/No class

\***Thursday 12/7:** Environmental Humanities Conference/student presentations

**Week 17: (12/12)**

Final papers are due via email no later than Tuesday 12/12.