

Reading Poetry
E314L
Haley Eazor
haleyazor@utexas.edu

Reading Poetry: Ecopoetry and Environmental Imaginings



“In every part of every living thing / is stuff that once was rock”
Lorine Niedecker, “Lake Superior”

Course Description

While ecopoetry as a subfield of American poetry has only been defined and developed in the past few decades, American poets’ engagement with the environment, both built and natural, is embedded within America’s poetic roots. In this course, we will trace the relationship between environment and poetry, moving from traditional nature poetry to contemporary lyrical conceptions of the interconnectedness of humans and nature in a time of environmental crises. Integrating discourses on environmental criticism and contemporary poetry, our course will consider the emerging field of ecopoetics within nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century American poetry. Moving chronologically, we will begin with historically canonical poets such as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman and conclude with contemporary poets grounded in ecocritical conversations, such as Julianna Spahr and Tommy Pico. We will inquire: what constitutes an ecopoem? Must nature always be the subject? How do we account for built or constructed environments? What distinguishes ecopoetics from other fields of poetry? How has climate change impacted the way poets write about the natural world? How might poetry be particularly attuned to human and non-human interactions with the earth? Course goals include introducing students to some of the principal issues and theoretical critiques of ecopoetics while also learning how to close-read poems through a focus on formal techniques, styles, and traditions in American poetry. We will consider ecopoetics in relation

to current movements such as climate justice, ecofeminism, and environmental racism, examining how ecopoetry confronts understandings of human accountability, nonhuman agents, and environmental change.

This course carries a writing flag. The writing assignments in this course are arranged procedurally with a focus on invention, development through instructor and peer feedback, and revision; they will constitute a major part of the final grade.

Reading

Fisher-Wirth, Ann and Laura-Gray Street, Editors. *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, 2020.

Pico, Tommy. *Nature Poem*, 2017.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen*, 2014.

All other reading materials will be made available on Canvas.

Assignments

Weekly Poem Annotations. Choose one poem to annotate closely, noting formal characteristics, literary devices, and marking general observations or patterns. Annotations can also be constructed through emulation: writing your own poem imitating the formal characteristics and patterns of the poem chosen. There will be checkpoints throughout the semester and a portfolio will be submitted at the end of the semester.

Close Reading Paper. Choose one poem by a poet we've read so far and write a 500 to 750-word analysis on how the poem's form and content inform the overall meaning of the poem. No outside sources required. Revisions optional, to be submitted within four weeks of original deadline.

Reverse Outline. Complete a reverse outline of a secondary source that will go towards the bibliography of your short paper.

Short Paper + Revision. Write on a poet either in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* that is not included in the syllabus or a poet you've found on your own. Make an argument for how their work is engaging with nature, built or natural, or how they fit into the field of ecopoetics at large. Must speak to more than one of their poems and draw on 1-2 secondary sources. 750-1000 words total. Revisions required.

Final Research Paper. Write an argumentative paper on a poet of your choice. You can build upon your short paper or write on a poet from the syllabus. Be sure to address the three categories that divide our units—nature, environmental, and ecological—in some capacity. Must draw upon at least 2-3 secondary sources. 1500-2000 words total. Drafts for peer review will be due in advance of the final deadline and the final submission will include a short paragraph speaking to the changes made during the peer review process.

Grading

Weekly Poem Annotations 20%

Participation + In-Class Activities 10%

Close Reading Paper 15%

Reverse Outline 5%

Short Paper + Revision 20%
Peer Review 5%
Final Research Paper 25%

Course Policies

Accessibility and Accommodation

All students are welcome in this course including students with learning, emotional, physical, cognitive, and/or hidden disabilities, illnesses, and injuries, regardless of diagnosis. Access is a collective and collaborative project, and we all learn and process information differently. It is my goal to make this course as accessible as possible for everyone. If there is anything I can do to facilitate your learning in this class, please let me know. I welcome any suggestions for how to make the course more inclusive of different learning styles. Please know that it is never too late to have this conversation with me. I understand that bodies, minds, and circumstances change over time and that it can take time to find the language needed to describe your needs; with or without documentation, we can discuss how to improve your access to course materials and explore different possibilities for learning.

Reading Schedule

i. wild things

week 1	8/23. syllabus day.	
	8/25. excerpts from preface & introduction to <i>The Ecopoetry Anthology</i> , pages specified in class.	
week 2	8/30. Frost, "The Most of it." Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar." Berry, "The Peace of Wild Things."	pp. 24 pp. 31 pp. 177
	9/1. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness."	essay, 20 pp., <i>canvas</i>
week 3	9/6. Hogue, "Fluff." Nye, "Negotiations with a Volcano." Moore, "The Fish."	pp. 339 pp. 412 pp. 48
	9/8. Kimmerer, "Learning the Grammar of Animacy."	essay, 6 pp., <i>canvas</i>
week 4	9/13. Eliot, "The Burial of the Dead" + "The Fire Sermon."	pp. 52 -57
	9/15. Eliot continued.	

close reading paper due.

ii. political pleas

week 5	9/20. Rukeyser, "Alloy" + "The Dam." Rich, "What Kind of Times are These." 9/22. chapter 4 in Merchant's <i>The Death of Nature</i> .	pp. 112 -116 pp. 442 essay, 16 pp., <i>canvas</i>
week 6	9/27. dg nanouk okpik, "She Sang to Me Once" Harjo, <i>from</i> She Had Some Horses. dg nanouk okpik, "If Oil is Drilled in Bristol Bay." 9/29. Whyte, "Indigenous Climate Change Studies."	pp. 415 pp. 296 <i>canvas</i> essay, 7 pp., <i>canvas</i>
week 7	10/4. Shockley, "weather or not." Shockley, "Fukushima Blues." Dungy, "On the rocks." 10/6. hooks, "Touching the Earth." Dungy, "Writing Home."	<i>canvas</i> <i>canvas</i> pp. 232 essay, 2 pp., <i>canvas</i> essay, 3 pp., <i>canvas</i>

reverse outline due.

week 8	10/11. Rankine, <i>Citizen</i> . 10/13. Rankine, <i>Citizen</i> .	book, pp. 1 - pp. pp.
week 9	10/18. Rankine, <i>Citizen</i> . 10/20. Rankine, <i>Citizen</i> .	pp. pp.

short paper due.

iii. foraging

week 10	10/25. Skinner, "Editor's Statement" in <i>ecopoetics no. 1</i> . essay,	2 pp., <i>canvas</i>
	10/27. Pico, <i>Nature Poem</i> .	pp.
week 11	11/1. Pico, <i>Nature Poem</i> .	pp.
	11/3. Pico, <i>Nature Poem</i> .	pp.
<i>short paper revisions due.</i>		
week 12	11/8. Pico, <i>Nature Poem</i> .	pp.
	11/10. Spahr, <i>from</i> Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache.	pp. 500
week 13	11/15. Ammons, "Corsons Inlet" Ammons, <i>from</i> Garbage.	pp. 133 pp. 137
	11/17. Hass, "The State of the Planet."	pp. 306
<i>drafts due for peer review.</i>		
week 14	<i>thanksgiving week.</i>	
week 15	11/29. peer reviews.	
	12/1. concluding thoughts.	
<i>final paper due exam day.</i>		