

American Romanticism and Nature

ENGL 5326-001 Topics in American Literature Before 1900

Spring 2014 Syllabus

Wed. 6:00 – 8:50 p.m. Carlisle 212

Prof. Neill Matheson office: 406 Carlisle

office hours: Tues.-Thurs. 1:30-3:00 p.m., and by appointment

email: matheson@uta.edu

English Department main office phone: 817-272-2692

Course Description:

From its origins, the U.S. has been persistently imagined as “nature’s nation,” implying not only that early American wilderness was often contrasted with settled and civilized Europe, but also that many Americans imagined their national identity in terms of a unique relation to the natural world. This course explores ideas about nature in nineteenth-century American literature, especially American Romanticism, often associated with new ways of thinking about and valuing the natural world, even as it was beginning to come under pressure from an expanding human presence. We will read such writers as Thoreau, Whitman, Poe, and Melville, exploring the porous boundary between nature and culture. We will also consider some earlier American precursors, including naturalists William Bartram and John James Audubon, looking especially at Audubon’s extraordinary ornithological paintings (as well as other early American naturalist artwork). One particular focus throughout the course will be the human-animal distinction, which we will explore in light of recent critical and theoretical work in animal studies. Nineteenth-century America was a period in which the very notion of species was being negotiated, with profound implications for how humans thought of themselves, as well as how they conceived of other animals. We will read Melville’s novel *Moby-Dick* as an extended meditation on human attempts to make sense of animal otherness, and on the troubled, often violent history of relations between humans and nonhuman animals. The course will end with a unit on “dog stories,” and with Werner Herzog’s documentary film *Grizzly Man*, in order to explore some post-Romantic representations of human-animal relations.

Course Texts:

John James Audubon, *Writings and Drawings* (Library of America)

William Bartram, *Travels of William Bartram* (Dover)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Dover)

Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (Broadview)

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (Penguin)

Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Tales* (Oxford)

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Norton)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Norton)

Additional readings will be available electronically, unless otherwise noted.

Course Requirements:

1. Eight response papers. Minimum two full pages double-spaced. Response papers should engage with the week's readings, especially emphasizing critical/theoretical readings as well as primary literary texts. You should address the arguments of the scholarly texts we read, but you can also use these papers to explore your own ideas about the readings (critical or literary). Topics for your seminar paper may emerge out of your response papers.

Note: Response papers must be submitted in class the week of the readings they address, or emailed to me prior to class. These short papers will not be graded individually—I will give them an aggregate grade at the end of the course.

2. Final paper. A substantial research paper (minimum 15 pages) drawing on readings and issues from the course. Students will give a presentation based on their papers at the end of the course. The final class meeting(s) will be set aside for this purpose.

3. Participation.

Course Grade:

Eight response papers	25%
Participation and presentation	15%
Research paper	60%

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will become familiar with literary works by the authors covered in the course, as well as with important critical issues, particularly related to the course thematic, that have shaped scholarship on these writers individually, and in relationship to each other. Students will become acquainted with a range of contexts relevant to considering these authors, including literary historical accounts of literature in the period; nineteenth-century ideas about nature, natural history, taxonomy, and animality, especially as these ideas are explored or represented in literary works. Students will be able to produce original scholarship according to accepted academic standards, reflecting an awareness of existing scholarship on their topic.

Attendance and Participation:

Because this is a graduate seminar that meets once a week, absences will only be excused in the case of truly unavoidable circumstances. Two or more absences will have an effect on your final grade. I expect you to come to class each week having carefully read the texts for that day's meeting, prepared with questions, comments, thoughts, enthusiasms, or objections. Participation for the course includes informal contributions to class discussion as well as presentations.

Academic Integrity:

It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. "Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another

person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.” [Regents Rules and Regulations]

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero.

Americans with Disabilities Act:

The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

Reading Schedule:

Note: There may be minor changes, additions, or deletions in the course readings.

- 1/15 Introduction
- 1/22 William Bartram, from *Travels of William Bartram*: 15-79, 100-111, 153-302
Mary Louise Pratt, “Science, planetary consciousness, interiors”
M. Allewaert, “Swamp Sublime: Ecologies of Resistance in the American Plantation Zone”
Recommended: Michael Pollan, “The Intelligent Plant”
(http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/12/23/131223fa_fact_pollan?currentPage=all)
Anna Tsing, “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species”
- 1/29 Audubon, from *Mississippi River Journal* (3-95)—also read the note for February 21, 1821 (on 886-89); from *Ornithological Biography*: “The Wild Turkey” (195-211), “The Carolina Parakeet” (233-38), “The White-Headed Eagle” (238-48), “The Passenger Pigeon” (260-69), “The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker” (269-75), “The Black Vulture or Carrion Crow” (293-314), “The Pewee Flycatcher” (324-33), “The Golden Eagle” (354-58); “My Style of Drawing Birds” (759-64), “Myself” (765-94)
Christoph Irmscher, “Audubon at Large”
- 2/5 Emerson, *Nature* (1836)
Emerson, “Nature” (1844)
William Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey”
Lee Rust Brown, “The Emerson Museum”
Laura Dassow Walls, from *Emerson’s Life in Science*

- 2/12 Thoreau, *Walden*
Essays in Norton Critical Edition by H. Daniel Peck, Laura Dassow Walls, Lawrence Buell
- 2/19 Thoreau, "Walking," "Wild Apples," "The Journal and Walden," "Selections from the Journal, 1845-54," other excerpts from the Journal
Susan Fenimore Cooper, "Spring," from *Rural Hours* (1850)
Rochelle Johnson, "Passion for Nature beyond Metaphor"
- 2/26 Whitman, "Song of Myself," "To the Garden the World," "Spontaneous Me," "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing," "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life"
Whitman, "Birds—And a Day" and other selected entries from *Specimen Days*
Paul Outka, "(De)Composing Whitman"
- 3/5 Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)"
Ursula K. Leguin, "She Unnames Them"
Kari Weil, from *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?*
Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy"
Colleen Glenney Boggs, from *Animalia Americana*
- 3/12 **Spring Break!!**
- 3/19 Poe, "The Black Cat," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "Instinct vs. Reason—A Black Cat," "Four Beasts in One; The Homo-Cameleopard," "Hop-Frog," "The Raven"
Giorgio Agamben, from *The Open: Man and Animal*
Michael Ziser, "Animal Mirrors"
** Links:
"Instinct vs. Reason—A Black Cat" (<http://www.eapoe.org/works/essays/ivrbcata.htm>),
"Four Beasts in One" (<http://www.eapoe.org/works/tales/frbstse.htm>)
"The Raven" (<http://www.eapoe.org/works/harrison/jah07p43.htm>)
- 3/26 Melville, *Moby-Dick*
Philip Armstrong, "'Leviathan is a Skein of Networks': Translations of Nature and Culture in *Moby-Dick*"
- 4/2 *Moby-Dick*
Nicole Shukin, "Rendering's Modern Logics"
- 4/9 *Moby-Dick*
Lawrence Buell, "Global Commons as Resource and as Icon: Oceans and Whales"
- 4/16 **Dog stories:**
Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, "Loveliness" (1899)
Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (1903)
Mark Twain, "A Dog's Tale" (1904)
Donna Haraway, "Cyborgs to Companion Species"
Jennifer Mason, "Animal Politics, Affect, and American Studies"
** Links:
"Loveliness" (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35966/35966-h/35966-h.htm>)
"A Dog's Tale" (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3174/old/orig3174-h/3174-h.htm>)

4/23 Film: *Grizzly Man*
Ryan Hediger, “Timothy Treadwell’s Grizzly Love as Freakshow”

4/30 Presentations

5/7 Presentations (if necessary; final exam week class)

Final paper due Wednesday, April 30 in class