Literature and the Environment

Professor: Yanoula Athanassakis
Time: Tuesdays 11am-1:15pm EST
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Office Hrs: Fridays 11-12pm
ENVST 675.001; ANST-UA 475.001; ENGL-UA 252.001

In this class we will examine post-1900 texts written predominantly by U.S. writers that explore interactions between humans and nature, including nonhuman animals. Texts will include essays, novels, articles, film, and excerpted chapters from academic works.

We find ourselves in a time of multiple climate crises, questioning how we got here and how to proceed. Part of what we hear, again and again, is that “we” have “lost” a “connection” with “nature.” This class attempts to cleanly pull apart the messy tendrils of who, exactly, “we” are and what we’ve “lost” in our ties to “nature.” In readings by authors of fiction, marine ecologists, public intellectuals, social scientists, and more, we will study how we came to think of ourselves (Homo sapiens) as different from other animals and how that influences our relationship to environmental forces. Words like “resource,” “human being,” “conservation,” “animal,” “ecology,” and “protection” will shift in meaning and weight as narratives of domination and difference unfold. A central question of the class is who and what is *anthropos* in the time of the Anthropocene?

This course welcomes students of all majors to collaboratively explore big questions about animals and the environment through the lens of literature. You can expect to read work by Elizabeth Kolbert, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Willa Cather, J.M. Coetzee, Rachel Carson, John Steinbeck, Julie Sze, and Sylvia Earl.
This is a 4-credit course that can only be taken synchronously. It meets on Tuesdays from 11-1:15pm. I am using NYU Classes for Zoom information, resources, and for turning in your work.

Assignments include but are not limited to: weekly responses, term definitions, in-class presentations, leading discussion, and a final writing project. This is not a lecture course. In order to have the most positive experience, it's best to have done the reading before class and be prepared to talk about it and to lead discussion on it.

Percentage Breakdown
- Participation: 10% includes attendance and discussion
- Responses: 20% due each Sunday by noon EST
- Discussion Leader: 15% on the date and reading you choose
- In-class Presentation: 20% during the last few weeks of class
- Paper: 35% due May 4th by midnight

Participation
Your participation in the course is crucial to the final evaluation of your work. If you are severely ill or have an emergency, please contact me. Please make every effort to have done your work and collected your thoughts before class, and be respectful and considerate of the comments and ideas of your colleagues. Because this is a small seminar with discussion and because we are virtual it's even more imperative that you 1) attend on time 2) have your camera on and 3) most importantly, contribute to discussion when appropriate. There are not suggestions, they are required in order to pass this course. This course is offered live and if you have a documented emergency and cannot participate for that day, I will consider this in the final evaluation of your work. Otherwise, you will receive zero points for a missed lecture.

Office Hours
My office hours are meant for you; I am more than happy to help you work through the concepts of the course. Kindly let me know if you plan to “visit” and around what time so that I can plan for multiple slots.

A Note on E-tiquette
We are fully online and as such we have a plethora of different distractions. Please be mindful that this is the time we have all set aside to tune in, and kindly minimize other forms of communication.

Term Definitions and Responses
Weekly response papers consist of two parts, 1) your response to the upcoming week’s texts (including film) and 2) definition of terms from the previous week. Please visit “Assignments” at our NYU Classes site to post your response and to see the terms for the week.

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1) **Responses:** Post to NYU Classes about any aspect of all of the upcoming week’s readings. This is a place to try out ideas, to raise questions for the class, and to connect ideas from the past week to the upcoming one. Responses should focus on material for the upcoming week, not the past week. Responses are analytical, concise, and should be at least 400 words. They are due by noon each Sunday. The term definitions do not count towards the word count of the response and should be at the bottom of your response. The responses in general are evaluated by three criteria 1) the strength of the analysis and critique, 2) the quality of the writing itself (concise – not repetitive and general), and 3) the innovative and novel connections you draw. These are not reflection papers nor biographical commentary. Please turn them in as a Word .doc & paste them as well. You are both attaching and pasting your work.

2) **Terms:** During each lecture, I may introduce terms, for which I will usually offer definitions. At the end of a given lecture, you should have notes on that term and its connections to the course’s texts, both from my lecture and also from your own notes. In your term definitions, you will want to make 2 to 3 separate points about the term. If I don’t offer a definition but the term is posted, it means that you can glean the definition from the assigned readings. The term definitions are evaluated on 1) how closely they mirror the provided definition, 2) on any additions (not substitutions) made, and 3) on their function as real definitions that one could look at without having attended lecture and understand what the term means in its fullest sense. These are the three grounds for evaluation.

*Note: responses are due each Sunday except when you are presenting, or leading discussion, you are not also expected to write a response for that week. Check the “assignments” section for exact due dates. You can choose one response for which you will “pass” and not turn it in. When it’s due, simply write that in the assignment area of the response so I know that this is your chosen pass. Responses are “pass/fail” but I keep a record of assigned points and consider this for the final grade.

**Discussion Leader**
You will pick a work and date and lead discussion on that work during 10-15 minutes total of a given class period. You are by no means lecturing on the piece, nor “teaching” it, you are instead engaging with it alongside the rest of the class and sharing your opinion of it, how it may connect to other works in the class, and what it did, or did not do, to tease out other themes and works of the course. Depending on the work and date, you may do it solo or in pairs if need be in some cases. You are welcome to use illustrative media and sources but not required to do so and you will want to do a deep dive into the work in order to have command of the material and help the discussion develop. It’s good to anchor your work in a passage(s) or section(s). You will sign up for a slot during week 1.

**Presentations**
Near the end of the semester, you will do one in-class presentation of 10 minutes, for which you will assign readings & work to the class, and you will be in charge of discussion with prepared
questions, for a total of 15-20 minutes. The work assigned, if a reading, should not exceed 10-15 pages. If it’s other forms of media, it shouldn’t exceed viewing or listening of more than an hour. You can also simply bring the material to class if it’s short and talk about why you’re presenting on it and present on it in real time as it’s read by the class. The point is not to assign long reading but to share novel ideas and your own work. You are welcome to use media for your presentations if it seems helpful but you are not required to do so.

Final Projects
Your final paper is 6-8 pages (a minimum of 1,800 words), on a subject which we’ll agree on before you begin writing, related to the course’s terms and topics. Papers must conform to MLA guidelines: double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12-point TNR font, surname and page # on each page. Essays that do not meet the basic requirements in terms of length, format, and content will receive an “F.”

Adding the Course
If you add the course after week 1, you are required to write a make-up response for each week, of 1,000 words, covering all works due during previous weeks. In addition, you may be asked to present or work on essays/readings that are not on the syllabus (depending on how sign-up looks for presentations and for leading discussion).

POLICY FOR ALL WORK IN THIS COURSE
I do not accept late work. I accept pre-arranged requested extensions, with a deduction of 1/3 of a grade for each day past the deadline, on a case-by-case basis. Any work submitted more than 20 minutes after the deadline is late and will not be accepted. Extensions and make-ups will be granted in rare cases, such as medical emergencies or religious observance (assuming documentation is provided and assuming, when it's a religious observance, it’s been arranged well in advance). In order to pass the class, you must complete and pass every assignment, and ever section that makes up the final grade (i.e. participation, presentation, etc.).

Academic Resources
• There are many resources to help you succeed and deepen your educational experience, though I’d say the best resource is your instructors so always ask us for advice or guidance and in addition, please visit: ARC
• Students requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
   Telephone: 212-998-4980 // Website: http://www.nyu.edu/csd // Email: mosescsd@nyu.edu
• Purdue OWL, MLA guidelines: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/

Honor Code: Academic dishonesty is an assault on the integrity of the University and intellectual property and shows extreme disrespect for your instructor, fellow students, and yourself. Taking credit for work that is not your own, downloading papers or parts of papers from the Internet, and submitting work that you have written for another class or purpose are all constituted as plagiarism. Plagiarism is a serious offense that will not be tolerated and can only result in the failure of this class and possibly suspension or expulsion from the University. When
in doubt, cite. Refer to: http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity. For details on NYU’s
Academic Integrity Policy please visit: Academic Integrity for Students at NYU

*No student will pass this course without completing all of the above requirements*

**Texts you must have in hard copy, preferably:**
*Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015)
*My Ántonia*, Willa Cather (1918)
The Log from the Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck (1951)
*My Year of Meats*, Ruth Ozeki (1998)
*Weather*, Jenny Offill (2020)

**WEEK 1 – 2/2**
Catherine Pierce, “Anthropocene Pastoral” (2018)
Literary Terms Resource Sheet (YA)

**WEEK 2 – 2/9**
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*My Ántonia*, Books I-III
Robin Wall Kimmerer, excerpt from *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013)
Monday, February 15th is a holiday

**WEEK 3 – 2/16**
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*My Ántonia*, Books IV-V
Sherri Mitchell, “Indigenous Prophecy and Mother Earth (2020)
John Berger, “Why Look at Animals” (1972)

**WEEK 4 – 2/23**
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*My Year of Meats*, Ch. 1-4, pp 1-83

**WEEK 5 – 3/2**
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*My Year of Meats*, Ch. 5-8, pp 83-198
Stacy Alaimo, “Bodily Natures” pp 1-7 only (2010)
Julie Sze, “Intro” to *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger* (2020)
WEEK 6 – 3/9
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*The Lives of Animals*, entire work
Peter Singer, Preface and Ch. 1 from *Animal Liberation* (1978)

WEEK 7 – 3/16
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, 1-16, pp 1-139
Earle and Carson, excerpt from *The Sea Around Us* (1951)
Friday, March 19th is a holiday

WEEK 8 – 3/23
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, 16-end, pp 139-224
Steve Mentz, excerpt from *Ocean*, “Seafood before history” (2020)
Steve Mentz, excerpt from *Ocean*, “Blue environmentalism” (2020)
Ian Urbina, excerpt from *The Outlaw Ocean* (2020)

WEEK 9 – 3/30
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*Weather*, pp 1-107
In-class presentations

WEEK 10 – 4/6
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*Weather*, pp 107-201
Elizabeth Kolbert, excerpt from *The Sixth Extinction* (2014)
In-class presentations

WEEK 11 – 4/13
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>
*Between the World and Me*, pp 1-71
Podcast episode w/Kathryn Yusoff *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018) (beg. at 15”)
In-class presentations
Monday, April 19th is a holiday

WEEK 12 – 4/20
<<NO Response Due to NYU Classes>>
<<Paper Draft of 4 pages plus a short outline due by Sunday at noon>>
Paper Workshopping and Group Meetings

WEEK 13 – 4/27
<<Response Due to NYU Classes>>

*Between the World and Me*, pp 72-end

Bees and Sleigh, excerpt from *Human* (2020)

In-class presentations

**WEEK 14 – 5/4**

<<NO Response Due to NYU Classes>>