City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

2021

21st Century Ecopoetics and Ecotheory

Robert Balun
CUNY City College

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21st Century Ecopoetics (Selected Topics in Literature and Science)

Course Description

Ecopoetics is the study of literature that is concerned with ecology and nature. However, beyond just literature about nature, this course will examine how ecology and nature have become complicated in the 21st century, the age of the Anthropocene, the age of the climate crisis and the 6th mass extinction (don't worry, we will define these and other key terms).

In the 21st century, humans are now confronted with a growing awareness of their destructive impact on the earth, its environments, and its human and non-human inhabitants. In this class we will examine how ecology and nature have become complicated in the 21st century, alongside many other questions that appear when we start to unravel that complication:

What do we even mean by nature? How do we think about interconnection? Interconnection between whom and what? How are authors writing about the climate crisis, ecological justice, and non-human beings? How can the study of ecopoetics actually help us think about the complicated, interconnected challenges of the twenty-first century at large?

We'll look at poems written from the perspective of non-humans; we'll consider those who have come before us and those who'll come after; we'll look at and think about the (supply) chain of associations between you and a cup of coffee; write along the path of NYC's watershed and waterways from source to tap; and invent new words to describe the challenges of this new century.

Ultimately, in this class, we will discuss the profound questions raised by the study of ecopoetics, questions of what it means to be human, to live in an organized society, on a finite earth, now, and 100 years from now.

Weekly Class Structure

This class will be a blend of synchronous and asynchronous--some of the time we will meet together as a group at our normal start time, 11:30am, and the rest of the time will be given to you to complete discussion questions and assignments:
- Daily video chat to introduce and discuss each day's readings
- Blackboard discussion questions and short writing assignments

Zoom Etiquette

- Please arrive a few minutes before class so that we can begin on time
- Use the chat to ask questions, post references, and supplement your participation
- Please keep yourself muted if you are not speaking
- Use the "raise your hand function"

Assessment - Detailed instructions and rubrics will be given for each assignment:

25% - Daily discussion board questions - ***due before the next class***
 -respond to each day's discussion questions on Blackboard
  -you may also reply to a classmate's response in lieu of answering questions
  -posts should be thoughtful, free of typos, use direct quotations, and be approximately 200 words (aim for 200 words. If you land near there, you're good)
  -students will also introduce a text each week, summarizing key points and posing discussion questions to the group. These will count as a discussion board post, and will be scheduled ahead of time

50% - Two Short response papers (25% each)
 - these may be written, audio (podcast), or visual (video)
 -you will write a 3-4 page paper (or 7-8 minutes) that responds to the week's topic; use our discussion board posts to guide your thinking. You may use your discussion board posts to write these. However, be sure you cite anything your classmates write (even if you only paraphrase/use an idea).

Paper #1 Assignment Sheet

25% - Course recap paper

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Become familiar with a range of definitions and concepts relevant to the study of ecopoetics in the 21st century
- Engage with and analyze creative and scholarly texts through class discussions and short, daily writing assignments
- Practice reading closely, critically, and expansively
- Have a critical and aesthetic appreciation of a variety of literary modes, genres, and uses of language within the context of ecopoetics
- Construct written arguments grounded in textual evidence and strengthened by research

- Write clear, strong prose
- Reflect upon the ideas discussed in this class by writing a comprehensive final paper

Class Schedule

All readings must be read before the day in which they are listed
(anything that is not a link will be provided prior to class)

Week 1 - The Starting Point: The Ground Beneath Our Feet

Day 1

[Land Acknowledgment](#)

Introductions, syllabus

(discuss Land Acknowledgement)

[This 1946 map shows how Native American trails became the streets of Brooklyn](#)

["Water on the Tracks"](#)

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/06/nyregion/tibbets-brook-bronx-daylighting.html

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/28/opinion/hurricane-ida-new-york-city.html

Guiding Questions:
Have you ever seen or heard a land acknowledgement before?

What is settler colonialism? What are its legacies? How are they ongoing? Why is dismantling the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism the place to begin?

Day 2

Alan Michelson - *[Earth's Eye](#)*
(more info on Collect Pond [here](#))

[Mapping a Disappearance (or We Are the Goddamn Choir, and We're Singing): Alan Michelson Interviewed](#)

Ayana Elizabeth Johnson - [Racism derails our attempts to fight the climate crisis](#)

Guiding Questions:

How do these texts relate to our discussion of settler colonialism? What ideas do they add to our thinking?

What does Michelson mean when he says "drafting everything into service, turning everything into raw material"? How is this part of a "mentality"?

To what extent does political art/literature etc. have the ability to change people's minds/opinions or inspire them to work on the issues? How can/does art/literature/activism change or affect the wider culture?

In what ways might the social and the ecological be connected?

Day 3

Timothy Morton - *The Ecological Thought* (full-text available from CCNY library), "The Mesh" pg 28-38

Julian Charriere and Julius von Bismarck - *Jungle*

Shay Arick - *Second Nature*

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge - *Consciousness Self-learns*, *Singing*

Peter Greiner - *Impact Crater*

Guiding Questions:
What is "the mesh"?

How might Charriere, von Bismarck, and Arick's artistic interventions trouble our idea of "nature"?

How do the poems relate to the concept of the mesh?

~~Day 4~~

Where You At? A Bioregional Quiz (complete for class)

Nick Sousanis - *Unflattening,* brief excerpt

Interview between Lauren Bon and Oscar Tuazon

Natalie Diaz - from *The Museum of American Water*

Guiding Questions:

How do these texts link place with history? How does this connection affect our conception of the present?

Week 2 - Where is…

Day 1

Where You At? A Bioregional Quiz (complete for class)

Nick Sousanis - *Unflattening,* brief excerpt

Mendel Skulski, Adam Huggins, and Future Ecologies - General Ecology: The Story of the Understory of the Understory

Guiding Questions:

How does the form of the podcast mimic the content? What are three ideas that stood out to you?

Day 2

Maria Hetman interviews Jonathan Skinner - "The Original Home Ec."

the weird folds: everyday poems from the anthropocene, edited by Maria Sledmere & Rhian Williams, excerpts

Jenny Zhang - ted talk

Franny Choi - How to Let Go of the World

CA Conrad - *For the Feral Splendor That Remains*

Guiding Questions:
What is ecopoetics and why is it also useful for people who aren't writers?

Day 3

Alexis Pauline Gumbs - *Dub: Finding Ceremony,* excerpt

Alexis Pauline Gumbs - Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals, excerpt

Day 4
Go over short paper assignment

"I am deliberate/ and afraid/ of nothing": Poetry, Protest & Climate Change Activism

Ursula K. Le Guin - "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"

Week 3 - ...the future?

Day 1

Sarah Jaquette Ray - Climate Anxiety Is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon

Jonathan Franzen - What if We Stopped Pretending the Climate Apocalypse Can Be Stopped?

Timothy Morton - *The End of the World Has Already Happened* (Part 1)

Guiding Questions:
How does the study of ecopoetics affect the way that one thinks about the past, present, and future?

Day 2

Timothy Morton - *The End of the World Has Already Happened* (Parts 2 and 3)

Day 3

Naomi Klein - *The Battle for Paradise*

Harmony Holiday - "An Artist's Guide to Herbs: Black Seed"

Guiding Questions:
How might speculation--imagining alternative possibilities and/or alternative futures-- affect our thinking with regard to political realities?

Day 4

Go over short paper

China Mieville - "Polynia"

Josh Bell - "Sci Fi Violence"

Last Week Tonight with John Oliver - Plastics

Ursula K Le Guin - "The Trouble with the Cotton People"

Guiding Questions:
How do these sci-fi stories engage with topics like global warming and the climate crisis (or anything else we've been discussing)? How does their strangeness affect or engage with those topics?

Week 4 - Telling new stories

Day 1

Michael Madsen - *Into Eternity*

Guiding Questions:
How big is the timescale that this film tries to grapple with? Why is that difficult? Why is it necessary? What other large timescales have we looked at in this class? Why is thinking with large timescales necessary in general?

Day 2

Adam Flynn - "Solarpunk: Notes toward a manifesto"

Alyssa Hull - Hopepunk and Solarpunk: On Climate Narratives That Go Beyond the Apocalypse

Jeremy Lent - "Deep Transformation"

Day 3

Linda Russo & Marthe Reede - *Counter Desecration*, excerpt

And here is the prototype to Counter Desecration

Ursula K. Le Guin - "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"

Guiding Questions:
Have you ever thought about the human origin story / mythology before? What two distinct origin stories does Le Guin describe? If we think about the origin of human culture differently, how does that change the story of who we are and who we could be?

Day 4

Course recap discussion and prep for final paper

Course Policies:

Office Hours and Contact Information:
Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the course, our readings, or our assignments. Before and after class, by email, or during office hours are the best times to reach me. Be aware that I generally do not check or respond to email after 7pm, so please plan accordingly; emergencies will be handled on a case by case basis. Please do let me know if any circumstances should arise that will affect your ability to complete your coursework. Also, I highly recommend you stop by during office hours; one on one time is invaluable. I'm looking forward to working with you all this semester!

Attendance: Students are expected to attend every class session of this course and to be on time. If you miss 2 classes, your final grade will be dropped by one full letter. Consistent late arrivals and early departures will have a negative impact on your grade.

If you have extenuating circumstances, please email me. I'm happy to work with you to help you complete this course.

Late Homework, Classwork, and Assignments:
If an extenuating circumstance arises, contact me as soon as possible to make arrangements to submit your work.

CCNY Email and Blackboard: Students must sign up for and access Blackboard. I will post digital copies of course materials here. Students must use Blackboard to upload digital copies of their papers. I will also use Blackboard to send out emails, open discussion board forums, and post homework assignments, so be sure to be checking your CCNY emails.

Written Work: All written assignments will be submitted digitally through Blackboard. All written assignments must use standard fonts and margins (eg Times New Roman, size 12 font). All written assignments must be proofread for spelling and grammatical errors. All written assignments must use MLA citation conventions.

Technology: The use of laptops and tablets is acceptable; I encourage you to integrate technology into your reading, research and writing. However, it's pretty easy to tell when someone is surfing around on

their computer, so please don't do that. Cell phones must be silent and away. If there is an emergency and you need to have your phone handy, please notify me before class.

Restrooms: Please use the restroom before class.

Food and Drink: Please do not eat in class.

Student Support Services:

Gateway Advising Center: NAC 1/220
http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/gateway/
Students without a declared major can receive academic advising, especially if you have questions about your course of study, core requirements, etc.

AccessAbility Center Tutoring Services: NAC 1/218
http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/accessability/
Provides one-on-one tutoring and workshops to all registered students with learning or physical disabilities.

The AccessAbility Center/Student Disability Services ensures equal access and full participation to all of City College's programs, services, and activities by coordinating and implementing appropriate accommodations. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations and services, please visit the office in NAC 1/218, or contact AAC/SDS via email (disabilityservices@ccny.cuny.edu), or phone (212-650-5913 or TTY/TTD 212-650-8441).

SEEK Peer Academic Learning Center: NAC 4/224
Phone: 212-650-5786**;** email: seekpals@ccny.cuny.edu
Offers counseling and peer tutoring for students in need of academic and financial support who have registered for the SEEK Program.

The Writing Center: If you need extra help with your papers, you are highly encouraged to see the Writing Center. The Writing Center is located by the Amsterdam entrance to the NAC (ext. 8104):
http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/writing/

CUNY Academic Integrity Policy:
Academic Dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion, as provided herein (link below). Academic Dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents.

These definitions and the full policy can be found at:
http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf

CCNY's Statement on Community Standards: https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/studentaffairs/community-standards

Academic communities exist to facilitate the process of acquiring and exchanging knowledge and understanding, to enhance the personal and intellectual development of its members, and to advance the interests of society. In order to realize its purpose, the College and its members must be free from personal injury or harm; bias or harassment; intimidation or coercion; damage or loss of property; disruption of educational and social activities; unreasonable interference with the exchange of concepts and ideas; and unreasonable interference with the administrative and supporting services offered by

the College. Accordingly, all student members of the College community are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates mutual respect for the rights and personal/academic well-being of others, preserves the integrity of the social and academic environment, and supports the mission of the College. The College has an inherent right to address behavior that impedes, obstructs, or threatens the maintenance of order and attainment of the aforementioned goals by violating the standards of conduct set forth in the University student conduct policies noted below as well as other policies that may established by the respective Schools, Global Sites, and administrative offices of the University.

The goals of the CCNY Community Standards are:
1. To promote a campus environment that supports the overall educational mission of the University
2. To protect the University community from disruption and harm
3. To encourage appropriate standards of individual and group behavior
4. To foster ethical values and civic virtues
5. To foster personal learning and growth while at the same time holding individuals and groups accountable to the standards of expectations established by the Code of Conduct

SERVICES
- Develop, disseminate, interpret, and enforce campus rules and regulations
- Teach students about appropriate behaviors and the consequences for unacceptable and/or inappropriate behaviors through the use of critical thinking skills
- Intervene effectively when behavior violates the Code of Conduct
- Offer educational and leadership opportunities for students who participate in the operation of the Student Conduct process
- Cultivate a community supportive of community standards

A Note on Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is defined as the following:

"Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person's ideas, research or writings as your own. The following are some examples of plagiarism, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:
• Copying another person's actual words without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source.
• Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source.
• Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the source.
• Failing to acknowledge collaborators on homework and laboratory assignments.
Internet plagiarism includes submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the internet without citing the source, and "cutting & pasting" from various sources without proper attribution."

This definition and City College's policy on plagiarism can be found at:
http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf

You must cite a source if you did not make up the words on your paper in your brain. This includes everything from the internet. Plagiarism completely undermines the point of education; plagiarism is very serious and will not be tolerated. If you are found to have plagiarized you will receive in F in the course.