

## English 338: Environmental Criticism “The Hydrological Turn”

Spring Semester 2017

Instructor: Lowell Duckert

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Meeting Time: 11:30-12:45 pm TR

Meeting Place: Woodburn Hall G10

Office: Colson Hall 131

Office Hours: 1:30-4:30 pm T and by appointment

Ever since Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” the field has never been at rest; instead, it has taken multiple *turns*. Within the word “environment,” after all, is the French word *virer* (“to turn, veer”). Following this erratic yet ever-expanding impulse inherent to ecostudies, this class takes specific swerves into, with, and through water. In their edited collection *Thinking with Water* (2013), Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis “propose that waters enable lively possibility even as they exceed current understandings.” They ponder a “hydrological turn” that “enter[s] into a more collaborative relationship with the aqueous, actively questioning habitual instrumentalizations of water.” Over the course of the semester, we will read works of literature – primarily novels – conversant with popular ecocritical methodologies (such as ecofeminism, queer ecology, and postcolonial ecocriticism,) and their corresponding terms. Our goals are (1) to investigate what wet environmental criticism *is* and *does*, and (2) to discover the complications and joys that arrive when we theorize how physical bodies of water – from a drop to an ocean, by flood and by drought – affect the imagination. Overall, you will understand how literature theorizes ecology as much as ecological theory informs literature, thereby revealing literature’s potential to reshape, and even redress, contemporary issues of environmental health and justice.



Roni Horn, *Water, Selected*, 2003/2007  
Vatnasafn/Library of Water, Stykkishólmur, Iceland

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. to analyze the fluid relationship between place and the imagination: what is commonly referred to as “ecopoetics.”
2. to construct thematic connections across works of art, investigating (and interrogating) keywords like “nature,” “animal,” “extinction,” “sustainability,” “climate change,” “pollution,” and “indigeneity.”
3. to hone your writing through close readings and critical analysis of literature.
4. to learn contemporary methods of studying English literature within an ecocritical frame and along hydrological routes.
5. to critique anthropocentric (human-centered) modes of our age in order to imagine an ethics that accounts for our enmeshment with all things, one that might offer alternative futures besides catastrophe.

### **Required Books:** (available from the WVU Bookstore; note the exact edition specified)

Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason, and David N. Pellow, eds., *Keywords for*

*Environmental Studies* (9780814760833)

Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife* (9780804171533)

Richard Flanagan, *Gould’s Book of Fish* (9780802139597)

Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (9780618711666)

Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon* (9781481440882)

Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being* (9780143124870)

William Shakespeare, *Pericles* (9780743273299)

### **Requirements:**

1. *The basics:* attend class; finish assigned readings on time; participate in discussions. I expect you to be prepared for every meeting, which means that you need to pose thoughtful questions and ideas to the group. This is not a straightforward lecture course: whether or not you meet these criteria determines how many participation points you receive. Choppy water lies ahead, but the challenge, I assure you, will be mutual. I want us to grapple with the texts, engage in spirited conversation, and pose more questions than answers.
2. *Waterwords:* cultural theorist Raymond Williams famously regarded the blank pages at the end of his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) “as a sign that the inquiry remains open, and that the author will welcome all amendments.” Since this course examines the core principles of environmental criticism (i.e., its “keywords”) that are similarly – necessarily, productively – invitational and incomplete, you will post on eCampus two paragraph-length responses (15-20 lines) for every text (12 posts total). I will serve as moderator and respondent. Before we begin each of our required books, I will choose several terms from Adamson, Gleason, and Pellow’s *Keywords* to serve as prompts. You will choose one of the words and discuss its significance to/in the text: once at the beginning, once at the end. (You may post more than twice, of course.) Each submission will be graded pass/fail according to length and relevance to the reading (i.e., whether you cite and expand on the text rather than merely summarize it). I encourage you to converse with your peers and create wavy dialogues online. Your posts will be valuable springboards for your papers.

3. *A short paper* (3 pp.) on Ghosh's *Tide* and issues of conservation-preservation (possibly in conjunction with the experiential learning component).
4. *A midterm paper* (5 pp.) that places literature in conversation with several keywords for environmental study and a current hydrological issue of your choice.
5. *A final paper* (10 pp.) that builds on your midterm research. An excellent (A) paper follows these criteria: it demonstrates an advanced level of literary analysis, engages and cites text throughout, puts forth a sophisticated and compellingly innovative argument, and contains few or no grammatical or mechanical errors.

**Grading:**

Participation and attendance in class	15%
Short paper	15%
Waterwords	25%
Final paper (includes midterm)	45%
Total	100%

**Experiential Learning Component:**

Because one of our stated objectives is to think about literature's potential influence upon environmental policy at present, we will meet with Friends of Decker's Creek (or a similar organization) during the semester. If you have any reservations about this conversation, or feel unable/unwilling to join for any reason, please do not be reluctant to tell me. I will assign you a different task.

**Attendance Policy and Code of Courtesy:**

I define "present" as arriving on time with your cellphone silenced; bringing the appropriate book to class; giving me and your peers your full attention; and remaining in the room until the class ends. Laptops are allowed only for note-taking purposes. I will allow three absences: after that, your grade drops a letter for each additional absence (e.g., an A becomes a B). Late work will not be accepted. At six absences, you fail the course. If you foresee a scheduling conflict, please notify me as soon as possible. Incompletes will be considered only if you apply to me before the end of the term; once I agree, we will negotiate the conditions under which the grade of "I" will be changed to a letter grade and sign a contract. Incomplete work will be submitted before the last day of class of the following semester (at the latest).

**Academic Integrity:**

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the West Virginia University Academic Catalog at <http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecredittermsclassification/#academicintegrity> text. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

**Inclusivity Statement:**

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. Any attempt to disrupt the nondiscriminatory environment of this class will not be tolerated. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

**Affirmation of Values:**

We, the members of WVU's Department of English, believe that critical and creative reading and writing constitute acts of radical love. We ally ourselves with a multitude of departments, student bodies, and dedicated individuals across the country and the world who refuse to remain silent within a climate of hatred and violence: be it from sexism, racism, classism, ableism, nativism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, or Islamophobia. We are committed to building communities, not dividing them. Colson Hall and our classrooms campus-wide are spaces where students, faculty, and staff may safely voice their concerns and where we may, together, foster futures more just. We aim to raise the status of those suppressed by the status quo; in assembly with human and nonhuman beings, we protest all types of environmental degradation, especially those prescribed at the expense of inhabitants' health. Our research and syllabi affirm the core values of compassion, inclusivity, and care that a diverse humanities program holds for everyone. By telling stories of those who suffer under oppression in any form, past and present, we honor the ability of language and other means of communication – in each area of study we offer – to redress these wrongs, urge unity, and pursue peace. To those who seek shelter or wish to expand its scope, we welcome you; we thank you; we are with you.

**Adverse Weather Commitment:**

In the event of inclement or threatening weather, everyone should use their best judgment regarding travel to and from campus. Students who cannot get to class because of adverse weather conditions must contact their instructors as soon as possible. Similarly, instructors who are unable to reach the class location will notify their students of any cancellation as soon as possible, through the many means at their disposal, to prevent students from embarking on any unnecessary travel. If students cannot get to class because of weather conditions, instructors will make allowance relative to required attendance policies, as well as any scheduled tests or quizzes. Safety should be the main concern.

**Contact:**

I encourage you to take advantage of my office hours (information above), and feel free to email me at any time. Never hesitate to ask a question, express a doubt, or request clarification. Make sure that your MIX email address is operational; I will frequently notify you about what to read on a given day (for one).

**Schedule of Readings (subject to change):**

Week One	<b>Turn</b>
T 1/10 R 1/12	Introductions Adamson, Gleason, and Pellow, "Introduction" (k); Greg Garrard, "Ecocriticism" (k); Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Introduction: Stories Come to Matter" (online)
Week Two	<b>Cyclone</b>
T 1/17 R 1/19	Stephanie LeMenager and Teresa Shewry, "Green" (k); Chen, MacLeod, Neimanis: "Introduction: Toward a Hydrological Turn?" (online) Ghosh, <i>The Hungry Tide</i>
Week Three	
T 1/24 R 1/26	Ghosh Ghosh
Week Four	<b>Cut</b>
T 1/31 R 2/2	Ghosh Bacigalupi, <i>The Water Knife</i>
Week Five	
T 2/7 R 2/9	Bacigalupi; <b>short paper due</b> Bacigalupi
Week Six	<b>Aquarium</b>
T 2/14 R 2/16	Bacigalupi Flanagan, <i>Gould's Book of Fish</i>
Week Seven	
T 2/21 R 2/23	Flanagan Friends of Decker's Creek classroom visit
Week Eight	
T 2/28 R 3/2	Flanagan Flanagan; <b>midterm paper due</b>

Week Nine	No class: Spring Recess
Week Ten	<b>Boom</b>
T 3/14	Okorafor, <i>Lagoon</i>
R 3/16	Okorafor
Week Eleven	
T 3/21	Okorafor
R 3/23	Okorafor
Week Twelve	<b>Stage</b>
T 3/28	Shakespeare, <i>Pericles</i>
R 3/30	Shakespeare
Week Thirteen	
T 4/4	Shakespeare
R 4/6	No class
Week Fourteen	<b>Tsunami</b>
T 4/11	Shakespeare
R 4/13	Ozeki, <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i>
Week Fifteen	
T 4/18	Ozeki
R 4/20	Ozeki
Week Sixteen:	
T 4/25	Ozeki
R 4/27	Class conclusion
R 5/4	<b>Final paper due</b> at 10:00 am (day of scheduled exam)