

Writing Eco-poetics: The Poetry of the Watershed

Course Description

This course asks you to get outside, explore the area, and engage with environmental concepts from the perspective of an artist. By doing so we will study two major themes of eco-poetry: the emphasis on the poet operating in the community and the idea that eco-poetics requires a paradigm shift from traditional notions of nature poetry. We will engage in a community service project, read foundational texts of eco-poetics, and write our own texts that make use of the experimental techniques and strategies employed by practitioners of eco-poetry.

In this course we will learn about Wilmington's watershed, the tidal and estuarial system of the city, and some of the environmental justice initiatives in the area. We will examine how poets and writers have written about various watersheds and waterways and have integrated scientific knowledge, historical texts, oral history, and activism into their writing projects. We will especially emphasize poets who have written about rivers and waterways. They will serve as models and inspiration as we write our own texts that emulate the networks and systems of our watershed.

We will practice research techniques, writing in response to literature, writing collaboratively, writing individually, and workshoping. We will also work together as a group to identify an opportunity to participate in a community service project or public event related to the topics discussed in class.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- ...define eco-poetics and its relationship to nature poetry and environmental poetry.
- ...understand, appreciate, and apply eco-poetry strategies to your own writing.
- ...make an argument about the relationship between poetry and the environmental movement.
- ...write an eco-poetic text and articulate how your text engages with the strategies and theories of eco-poetry.

Course Assessment

Grading Criteria

20% Journal of reading responses
25% Participation
25% Eco-poetry text
30% Final project

Journal. (20%) Every week you will receive a prompt to guide your journal entry reflecting on the activities and readings of the week. Although formal assignments—that is, they must be typed and turned in on time—these are “write to learn” assignments. They are a way to try to understand the readings and reflect on class discussion and activity. In addition, please carry a small notebook with

you so you can log at least two daily encounters with water. Note the date, time, and circumstance as well as one sensory detail.

Participation. (25%) Much of this class will involve class discussion, workshop, and small group work. You should be prepared to ask concrete and specific questions related to the reading and the class activities and to offer concrete and specific feedback on your peers' work.

Ecopoetic text. (25%) In this class we will read poetry, creative nonfiction, and hybrid texts. Your final text can take any form depending on your interests. You will write a reflection essay articulating how your text related to the field of ecopoetics. This essay will be the main source of your assessment.

Final Project. (30%) As a class you will engage in a community service project. You will be assessed on you articulate the partnership with the agency and what role you played in that project.

Possible Readings

William Carlos Williams. *Paterson*. New Directions, 1963.

Alice Oswald. "The Dart." from *Spacecraft Voyager I*. Greywolf 2007.

Lewis MacAdams. *Dear Oxygen*. University of New Orleans Press, 2011.

Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street. *The Ecopoetry Anthology*. Trinity University Press, 2013.

Forrest Gander and John Kinsella. *Redstart*. University of Iowa Press. 2012.

Scott Byron. "Introduction." *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*. University of Utah Press. 2002.

Deming, Alison and Lauret E Savoy. *Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*. Milkweed Editions, 2011.

Hood, Mary. *Rivertime: Ecotravel on the World's Rivers*. State University of New York Press, 2008.

Possible Writing Assignments

Write a poem or hybrid text that formally emulates some of the estuarian concepts we learned about during our visit to Lower Cape Fear River Program.

Working in teams, collect oral histories from individuals who regularly interact with the water as workers and activists or as part of their recreation. How can these oral histories be incorporated into your text?

During this semester, you have logged in your pocket notebook times you have encountered the water. Use these logs as a source for an ecopoetry text.