

EN/ES 357: Literature and Environment
4 Credits * Spring 2024

Professor: Dyani Johns Taff
Class Time: TR 1:00-2:15 pm
Class Location: Lovejoy 119

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Office Hours: W 1-3 & By Appt.



Course Description

In this course, you will explore some of the many ways to read and write ecocritically. We will examine the history of the field of ecocriticism and dig in to several theoretical approaches to the environment, human-nonhuman entanglements, and planetary-scale crises. Equipped with theorists' big ideas, we will practice ecocritical methods for reading and writing about literature, broadly conceived. We'll begin with poems, stories, and a graphic novel that define and redefine home, place, and land. Next, we'll explore a film, a novel, and more stories and poems that probe the impulse to voyage and to escape; these texts ask what events and crises and environments makes us *move*, voluntarily or involuntarily, through physical or mental spaces. If home or place or *earth* is compromised, where can we go? Who can go? Is *going* really the solution? How do race, ethnicity, caste, location, class, ability, gender, sexuality, family history, economic position, species, and other factors affect answers to these questions? By engaging fully in the work for this course, you will:

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- Gain familiarity with ecocriticism as a field and a set of methods for reading and writing.
- Explore global environmental cultures through close engagement with a range of artistic media, forms, genres, and historical and geographical canons.
- Practice ecocritical reading and writing inside and outside of the classroom, in Miller Special Collections, and in the Colby Museum, honing methods that will transfer to other courses and future writing situations.

Texts

The following required books are available at the Colby College Bookstore. **Please buy these editions in hard copy (not ebook) as soon as possible.** Other readings will be available as PDFs in our google drive and on Perusall. **If you have trouble locating or paying for these books, contact me and I can help.**

- Mihku Paul, *20th Century PowWow Playland*, Bowman Books, 2012 (ISBN: 9781105786105).
- Morgan Talty, *Night of the Living Rez*, Tin House, 2022 (ISBN: 9781953534187)
- Richard McGuire, *Here*, Pantheon Books, 2014 (ISBN: 9780375406508)
- Wu Ming-Yi, *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, trans. Darryl Sterk, Vintage Books, 2015 (ISBN: 9780345802880)
- **Ursula K Le Guin**, *The Birthday of the World: And Other Stories*, Harper Perennial, 2003 (ISBN: 9780060509064)
 - ****NOTE:** this book is not available at the bookstore; please buy a copy through your favorite local bookstore, through bookshop.org, or from another bookseller. You may also buy another collection of Le Guin's short stories and novellas that contains the novella *Paradises Lost*. If you're not sure what to buy, get in touch.

Since we will write frequently in this course, I recommend buying a book about writing. My two favorites are Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say*, 5th edition (ISBN: 9780393538700) and Trimble's *Writing With Style*, 3rd edition (ISBN: 978-0205028 80). We will likely read excerpts of these books during the semester, which I will provide as pdfs; both are excellent, friendly guides to learning to write well. The [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) and the [Colby College Library "All About Citations" Guide](#) are excellent, free resources for citation, grammar, and writing help.

Grading System

I take a holistic approach to grading, aiming to reward process, collective support, and *learning* in as many forms as we can imagine it. I am inspired by the research of scholars including Alfie Kohn, Asao Inoue, Cathy Davidson, and Jesse Stommel; their work and my own observations of students during my fifteen years of teaching have led me to believe that numerical and letter grades are not especially useful tools for assessment and feedback. They can, in fact, cause harm and reflect systemic biases.

I have modeled our assignments and assessment structure on labor-based contract grading and ungrading systems. These systems seek to measure students' work differently, accounting for as many modes of learning as possible, and seeking to create equitable, socially just classrooms where students feel comfortable taking risks, exploring and being brave about new ways of speaking, reading, and writing, and even experiencing failure: these are key aspects of the process of learning.

We will work together—as a class community as well as in our one-on-one meetings—to reflect on and assess the work—the labor—that I ask you to complete this semester. I have designed all assignments for this course with care; everything I ask you to do is meant to support your work in **four core areas** that I take to be vital to learning at the college level:

1. Community

Proximity—simply being together in a room—does not equal community: making our class into a community takes the hard, rewarding work of being an engaged citizen. Assignments include: arriving on time to class sessions having completed reading and other assignments, **participating** fully during class **verbally or otherwise**, large and small group work, formal and informal **peer review** and class **discussion leadership** activities.

2. Textual Engagement

Our texts are essential materials for learning in this course; they function like lab equipment for a science course or paints and brushes for an art course. We'll learn about ecocriticism, environmental literature, ourselves, and each other by *reading* and engaging actively with our texts both before and during class. To promote active reading, and to extend our learning community beyond the classroom, you will complete **at least 2 Perusall entries each week**. These entries can take the form of questions, annotations, or responses, and ideally, you'll engage in all three over the course of the semester.

3. Writing

We often think of writing as a medium of communication, which it is. But writing can also serve as a means for thinking itself; I often use messy drafts and freewriting to work out what I *actually* think or feel about a topic, or to organize my understanding, or to work through or synthesize complex or overwhelming scholarly work. We will do many kinds of writing, informal and formal, in this class, but your main assignments will include **three explorations (~500 words)**, **two read/write-in-place exercises (~1000 words)**, and **a longer, polished essay (2000-2500 words)** that revises and expands 1-3 of your shorter pieces, placing your central claim in conversation with scholarly work on our topic. We will engage in drafting, peer-review, and revision work throughout the semester, and you will **meet with me 1-1 twice** to discuss your writing.

4. Reflection and Revision

As you complete your work for this course, I want you to think actively about *why* and *how* you are doing the work you are engaged in, and about how your work will influence your next steps within and beyond my course. Honest reflection is a powerful tool, and sustained learning cannot take place without it. To promote reflective thinking, you will track your time in a **labor log** for a month, and complete two detailed **self-assessments** (one at mid-semester and one at the end). You will also create a **portfolio** that showcases your learning.

Detailed assignment directions are available on Moodle and in the assignment handbook; see below for reading advice. **You will assess your work in these core areas, and I will use your self-assessments to arrive at your course grade.** As a general baseline, completing all assignments in a timely, thoughtful manner will earn you a B; rushed, missing, or otherwise lackluster work will earn you a lower grade; work that exceeds expectations, deepens your own or the community's learning, or otherwise goes above and beyond will earn you a higher grade.

Community Care Policies and Resources

We are continuing to learn how to live with Covid-19; the Public Health Emergency Declaration in the US expired in May 2023, but we also know that Covid-19 is still circulating and vulnerable members of our communities are still at risk. I assume that each of you has your own complex relationship with the virus and its fallout over the last three years. We are all also subject to a welter of other circumstances that can affect our mental and physical health. In response, **we need to prioritize an ethic of care: caring for yourself and caring for your community.** Here are policies designed to promote self and community care:

- **Masks are optional;** I encourage you to wear a mask if you have a cold or other respiratory illness (Covid-19 or otherwise), if you have recently traveled by bus, train, or plane, if you think you might have been exposed to Covid-19, or for any other reason that you might have to keep germs in or out. **I will bring a few extra masks to class with me every day; if you need one, just ask.**
 - I strongly encourage you to get your flu and covid booster shots; it's not too late! Keeping up-to-date on your vaccinations can do A LOT to control transmission in our community and beyond.
 - *****If ANY member of our class community needs us to mask for their safety, we will alter this policy.** Please contact me as soon as possible if you need us to mask FOR ANY REASON: no need to explain why. Simply email me and write: "Dear Prof. Taff, I request that we wear masks in class for my safety."
- **Attendance and missing class:** In order to create and sustain a compassionate community, we all need to commit to preparing for class, showing up, and attending to what members of our community (students and professor) say and ask of us. That said, our lives are complicated; if, for any reason at all, you are unable to attend one or more of our class sessions, you may complete an **alternative attendance** assignment, described in the in-class notes document, that will count for participation in the missed session.
 - *****We'll need a critical mass of folks in class each week.** Participating asynchronously (after class has happened) will mean that you will miss out on group work and real-time insights. **Please prioritize synchronous, in-person participation,** but use this option as a back-up whenever you need to.
- **Late work:** Completing course assignments on time is part of how you show your commitment to community, textual engagement, and writing work. Completing assignments on time will also save you from the stress of having assignments pile up. That said, we all sometimes find ourselves overwhelmed or in need of more time for one reason or another. One or two late assignments is fine. Chronic lateness will affect your grade because it will affect your ability to complete the course work in a thoughtful, timely way.
- **Academic Support:** The Dean of Studies office offers comprehensive academic support in the form of academic success programs, learning consultants, tutors, and much more. [Consult the academic success page to learn more.](#)
- **Financial Security:** If you need support so that you can buy textbooks or food, pay rent, buy or borrow a laptop or interview clothes, or any other kind of financial relief, [contact your class Dean](#) (they are friendly and ready to help! If you want help reaching out, let me know!).

- **Counseling Services:** [Colby College provides cost-free mental health and counseling services](#) to help you manage challenges that threaten your personal or academic wellbeing. **Getting help when you need it is the smart, courageous thing to do.** I am not a mental health professional, but I can make you an appointment, walk with you to Counseling Services, discuss coursework-related stress (and make plans to alleviate it), or help you to see or know when you need to get help beyond my expertise. **Email me any time.**
- **Access and Disability Services:** In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodations will be provided to qualified students with documented disabilities. Students seeking accommodations should start by contacting the [Office of Student Access & Disability Services](#).
- **The Farnham Writers' Center:** From the FWC's website: "The FWC is a place for you to get skilled feedback on your writing. Our peer writing tutors have experience working with Colby's diverse student populations, and they are eager to engage you in collaborative conversations about your writing." [To learn more and to make an appointment, visit their website.](#) The Writers' Center also has a Multilingual Writing Specialist, Dr. Chaoran Wang, who meets individually with international and multilingual students and provides workshops to support multilingual writers. You can reach her at chaowang@colby.edu. Please feel free to contact her, either to discuss your writing concerns and issues in general or to discuss a specific course-related writing assignment.
- **Academic Integrity:** Please read [the Colby Affirmation](#) and review Colby's policies and resources regarding [academic integrity](#). It is the responsibility of every student and faculty member to be familiar with, and comply with, these expectations for honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility. If you have any questions at any time about whether or how to cite a source, about when it's ok to collaborate and when you must work alone, or other topics relating to your own or others' conduct, please ask me! I am happy to explain how to correctly give credit where credit is due or to discuss other concerns.
- **Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT** are tools that generate text probabilistically, outputting the most likely next word. They are trained on large amounts of text taken from the internet *without the writers' permission*. I do not yet know, fully, what I think about LLMs. I do know two things:
 - ChatGPT and other LLMs raise **serious labor and ethics concerns**: who's going to make money from these tools? Who's going to lose a job? What happens when it is *so* easy to generate plausible but fake, misleading, harmful information?
 - **Writing is thinking** and thinking well is difficult and vital: if you let the LLM do your writing for you, you are not learning to *think*.**For this course, please do all of your own writing at each stage, including brainstorming, drafting, revising, and polishing.** Writing is hard and time consuming, but putting in that time will enable your intellectual growth, deepen your understanding of our texts, and hone your communication skills. If you would like to experiment with an LLM (and analyze and cite what it generates!), get in touch and we can discuss your plans.

- **Sexual Misconduct/Title IX Statement:** Colby College prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination of any kind. [Colby is legally obligated to investigate sexual misconduct](#) (including, but not limited to sexual assault and sexual harassment). If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact Colby Counseling Services (207-859-4490) or Kate Smanik, the Confidential Resource Advisor and Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life (207-859-4272).
 - Please note that as your professor, I am designated a “responsible employee,” a legal category that requires me to report to the Title IX Coordinator, Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4266) if you disclose an experience related to sexual misconduct. This is not as scary as it sounds: if I contact Emily, she and her office will email you. If you want to follow up, you can. If not, you don’t have to.
 - **I will support you whatever you decide:** I can connect you to community resources for dealing with sexual misconduct without you needing to disclose specific information to me. If you wish to disclose a specific incident to me, I will help to connect you to Emily Schusterbauer. The college will take initial steps to address the incident(s), protect and support those directly affected, and enhance the safety of our community. Emily will work with you to determine the best way to proceed.

- **Bias Incident Prevention and Response Team (BIPR):** From the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion website: “BIPR is a non-disciplinary body charged with both responding to bias incident reports and implementing educational initiatives designed to decrease the frequency of bias incidents in our community. Community members who have experienced and/or witnessed a bias incident are encouraged to submit a BIPR report or contact BIPR chair Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093).” [To submit a Bias Incident Report, click this link.](#)

Course Schedule

The following schedule will give you an overview of our readings, topics, and schedule of assignments for the semester. *****This schedule is subject to change, as needed, throughout the semester.** Our Moodle site will be our home base: I will update checklists and assignments there regularly.

Reminder: for a 4-credit course, you should expect to spend approximately 8 hours per week on your work *outside of class*. Some weeks you will need more than 8 hours and some less; I have designed my assignments with that time frame in mind. Plan your time outside of class accordingly and get in touch if you have questions!

	Readings and Assignments
Week 1:	<p><u>Unit 1: Place / Land / Home</u></p> <p><u>Th Feb 8:</u> Course Introductions; Alfie Kohn, “The Case Against Grades”; Rachael Meager, “Thinking is difficult”</p> <p>Begin your Labor Log</p>

<p>Week 2:</p>	<p><u>Sign up for your discussion leadership date (by Feb 15); buy our course text books.</u></p> <p><u>T Feb 13:</u> Brian Burkhardt, excerpts from <i>Indigenous Philosophy through the Land</i></p> <p><u>Th Feb 15:</u> Timothy Clark, from <i>Introduction to Literature and the Environment</i>; Keywords: Greg Garrard on “Ecocriticism”; Kate Rigby on “Ecopoetics.”</p>
<p>Week 3:</p>	<p><u>T Feb 20:</u> Leo Marx, from <i>The Machine in the Garden</i>; Vergil, from <i>Eclogues</i>; Andrew Marvell, “The Mower,” “The Mower to the Glowworms,” “The Garden,” and “Bermudas.”</p> <p><u>Th Feb 22:</u> Bruno Latour, from <i>We Have Never Been Modern</i>; Hester Pulter, “The Eclipse,” “The Pismire,” “The Wish,” and “View But This Tulip”; William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tinturn Abbey.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Exploration 1 DUE by 11:55pm F Feb 23</p>
<p>Week 4:</p>	<p><u>T Feb 27:</u> Donna Haraway, from <i>Staying with the Trouble</i>; Emily Dickinson, “A Bird Came Down The Walk”; Walt Whitman, from “Song of Myself.”</p> <p><u>Th Feb 29:</u> Watch Language, Land, & Belonging; read Rita Joe, “I Lost My Talk,” “I am the Indian,” “Who are you?” “Images from the past,” “I lay my body upon the grass,” “There is a hill,” and the glossary.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Exploration 2 DUE by 11:55pm F Mar 1</p>
<p>Week 5:</p>	<p><u>T Mar 5:</u> Mihku Paul, <i>20th Century PowWow Playland</i>; Maria Puig De La Bellacasa, from <i>Matters of Care</i>.</p> <p><u>Th Mar 7:</u> Morgan Talty, “Burn,” “In a Jar,” and “The Blessing Tobacco.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Exploration 3 DUE by 11:55pm F Mar 8 Labor Log and Reflection DUE by 11:55pm on F Mar 8</p>
<p>Week 6: 1-1 Writing Meetings</p>	<p><u>T Mar 12:</u> Morgan Talty, “Safe Harbor,” “Earth, Speak,” and “Night of the Living Rez.”</p> <p><u>Th Mar 14:</u> Richard McGuire, <i>Here</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Exploration Peer Review Letters DUE by 11:55pm on F Mar 15</p>
<p>Week 7: 1-1 Writing Meetings</p>	<p><u>T Mar 19:</u> Special Collections Robinson Room Visit; Rachel Carson, “A Sense of Wonder,” and from <i>The Sea Around Us</i>, “The Gray Beginnings” and “The Birth of and Island.”</p>

	<p><u>Th Mar 21</u>: Rachel Carson, from <i>The Sea Around Us</i>, “The Shape of Ancient Seas,” “The Moving Tides,” and “The Encircling Sea”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REVISED Exploration DUE by 11:55pm on F Mar 22</p> <p>***Over break, watch Ai WeiWei’s film <i>Human Flow</i> (available to stream through the Colby Library) or watch as a group on M Apr 1.</p>
Week 8:	<p><u>Mar 23-31</u>: Spring Recess—No Classes</p>
Week 9:	<p>Mid-Semester Self-Assessment DUE by 11:55pm on M Apr 1</p> <p><u>Unit 2: Voyage / Escape</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">**<u>M Apr 1</u>: Screening of <i>Human Flow</i>; time and location TBD.</p> <p><u>T Apr 2</u>: Studio Visit with Brian Smith (Lunder Institute Fellow); Melody Jue, from <i>Wild Blue Media</i>; Read “The Seafarer” and re-read Marvell’s “Bermudas.”</p> <p><u>Th Apr 4</u>: Craig Santos Perez, “Guahan, The Pacific, and Decolonial Poetry” and from <i>Navigating Chamoru Poetry</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Read/Write-in-Place 1 DUE by 11:55pm F Apr 5</p>
Week 10:	<p><u>T Apr 9</u>: Stacy Alaimo, from <i>Exposed</i>; Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History,” “Sea Grapes,” and “Map of the New World”; Joy Harjo, “Ah Ah,” “Map to the Next World,” and “Invisible Fish.”</p> <p><u>Th Apr 11</u>: Wu Ming-Yi, <i>The Man with the Compound Eyes</i>, Parts I-II (p. 1-58), Neel Ahuja, from <i>Planetary Specters</i>.</p>
Week 11:	<p><u>T Apr 16</u>: Wu Ming-Yi, <i>The Man with the Compound Eyes</i>, Parts III-VII (p. 58-194); Ursula Heise, from <i>Sense of Place, Sense of Planet</i>.</p> <p><u>Th Apr 18</u>: Wu Ming-Yi, <i>The Man with the Compound Eyes</i>, Parts VIII-XI (p. 195-end); Anna Tsing, from <i>The Mushroom at the End of the World</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Read/Write-in-Place 2 DUE by 11:55pm F Apr 19</p>
Week 12:	<p><u>T Apr 23</u>: Zach and Kelly Weinersmith, from <i>A City on Mars</i>; Ray Bradbury, from <i>The Martian Chronicles</i>; re-read Pulter, “The Eclipse,” “The Wish,” and “The Pismire.”</p> <p><u>Th Apr 25</u>: Ursula K. Le Guin, <i>Paradises Lost</i>, p. 249-301 (“The Dirtball” to “Inside, Outside”)</p>

	<p>***Attend the Colby Theater Company’s production of <i>Macbeth</i>, Apr 25, 26, or 27, 7:30-8:45 pm.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Final Essay Planning Paragraph/s DUE F Apr 26</p>
<p>Week 13: 1-1 Writing Meetings</p>	<p><u>T Apr 30:</u> <i>Macbeth</i> performance discussion; Ursula K. Le Guin, <i>Paradises Lost</i>, p. 301-62 (“Words from Earth” to end).</p> <p><u>Th May 2:</u> NO CLASS: CLAS—see what your peers are presenting!</p> <p><u>F May 3:</u> Final Essay draft DUE; peer review workshop in class.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Peer Review Letters DUE by 11:55pm on Sunday, May 5</p>
<p>Week 14: 1-1 Writing Meetings</p>	<p><u>T May 7:</u> Writing meetings and work session</p> <p><u>Th May 9:</u> Final Essay Lightning Presentations and closing thoughts</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Final Essay and revision memo DUE by 11:55pm F May 10</p>
	<p style="text-align: right;">Portfolio DUE by 11:55pm M May 20</p>

A few notes on reading

All students read at different rates and different texts require different kinds of attention and time. Think about how it feels to read a twitter feed, a novel, a comic, a text from a friend, an art book, a poem, a play, a scholarly article, a scientific paper: these texts all invite you to engage in very different ways. This semester, we will be reading a wide variety of texts of varying length, topic, and density. **If you are struggling, or if it feels difficult to read our texts, don't worry:** that probably means you're doing it right! I can guarantee that you aren't alone in those feelings of struggle and difficulty. Here are a few things to try when the reading gets tough:

- **Assess your time/space:** try reading at a different time of day or in a different location. Some texts might require perfect silence, and some might actually feel easier to read with some ambient noise or music (in a coffee house, for instance).
- **Poems and other artistic texts:** re-reading is key! Read once quickly, for sound and initial impressions. Read again for comprehension. Read again for line breaks, rhymes, puns, metaphors, and so on. Your subsequent reads need not be linear! You might start in the middle or end; the key is to make time and space for reading slowly and re-reading.
- **Scholarly articles:** master the strategic skim. Read the first ~5 pages slowly and carefully, looking for the writer's central argument or point. Next, read section titles and topic sentences, and consider slowing down for a few paragraphs in the middle to see how the writer is using evidence (and to see what kind of evidence they're using). Next, read the conclusion or the final 3 paragraphs slowly. With your remaining time, go back and re-read as needed to clarify your understanding, ask questions, apply ideas, etc.
- **Use your resources (be a skeptical googler!):** bring the power of the internet to bear on your reading; I fully support you using SparkNotes, LitCharts, Schmoop, Wikipedia, and so on to aid you in understanding our texts. BUT: please note that although these sites provide great summaries, they also have errors and frequently provide one-dimensional or overly simplistic analyses. ALSO: **always, always, always** cite if you make use of these or any other aids in your writing, on Perusall or during class activities!
- **Listen to an audio book while you follow along in the text:** If listening while you read is helpful, check out LibriVox: they have crowd-sourced, FREE audio versions of many, many texts. One cautionary note: the reader quality is variable, and intonation IS interpretation, in my view. BUT: do you want to know how I got through reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* in college and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in grad school (twice!)? I read along while listening to LibriVox recordings. They are particularly useful for difficult or long texts, but helpful for anything you're reading.
- **Come to office hours:** I am always happy to talk more about our texts, to read sections slowly with you, to clarify key concepts, and so on.

The Most Important Thing: embrace uncertainty and do your best.

Reading *some* is infinitely better than reading *none*; sit calmly with your confusion about or boredom with or other reaction to a text you're reading, read as much of it as you can, and then, crucially, try to articulate your confusion to our class. Engagement does not mean mastery; spend time, slowly, with our texts, and then bring your reactions, observations, perplexities, and so on with you to Perusall and to class for discussion.