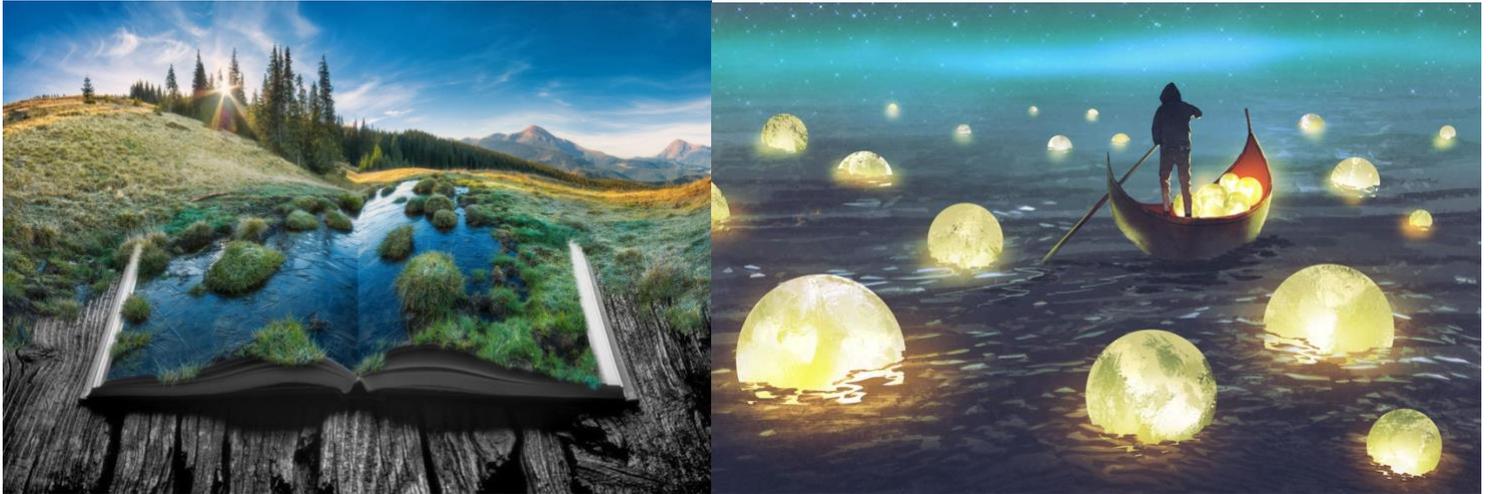


EN/ES 283: Environmental Humanities: Stories All The Way Down
Section A * 4 Credits * Fall 2021

Instructor: Dyani Johns Taff
Class Time: MW 1:00-2:15 pm
Class Location: Lovejoy 202

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Office: Miller 225
Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30pm & By Appt.



Left: Vitalii Bashkatov on Shutterstock, accessed at <https://lithub.com/in-defense-of-worldbuilding/>; Right: No author listed, Shutterstock, accessed at <https://thewritelife.com/worldbuilding/>.

Course Description

The environmental humanities is a big tent: under it, we gather a grand variety of modes of knowledge making from humanities disciplines that give us valuable traction on environmental problems. The central aim of this course is to invite you into the tent and show you around a bit.

No matter your discipline, storytelling is a crucial tool. In order to tell a good story—about data you’ve collected, about a human’s or species’ history, about a community’s religion, philosophy, food culture, and so on—you need to know your *purpose* and your *audience* and you need to shape your information carefully. Even when your goal is to break rules and create change, you need to know what your audience counts as a “good” story, what they see as reliable evidence, how they relate to someone from your background and training, and how they might react to the form and content of your story.

Stories are powerful; like any tool, they can cause harm: European cultural narratives about people from Africa and the Americas helped justify genocide and maintain systems of plantation slavery and oppression; cultural narratives about sharks or about swamps have prevented scientists from receiving training or grant money to study vulnerable species and habitats; cultural narratives about vaccines and about climate change have led many people to refuse life-saving care and planet-saving policies; I could go on. Humans made these harmful narratives. We can also confront their consequences and change the story. To me, the best stories are the weird ones, the ones that resist simple answers, the ones that teach us to embrace and inhabit complexity, the ones that provide rest or protest or challenge or solidarity.

So in this course we will study definitions and histories of “environments” and “humans” and “humanities,” and examine some of the central difficulties in the field. We will think capaciously about who we include, human and non, in the category of “personhood” and to whom we afford the dignity and rights due to persons. We will investigate the tools that several disciplines—literary studies, religious studies, history, philosophy, ecofeminism, indigenous studies—use to understand environments and persons. Equipped with our findings, we will read, watch, and listen to stories and we will create new stories with the goal of imagining otherwise for ourselves and for those other persons with whom we share space.

Texts

We have just one required text for this course: *The Second Body* by Daisy Hildyard (Fitzcarraldo Editions, ISBN 9781910695470). Fitzcarraldo is a small press, and so you cannot purchase this book through the Colby Bookstore; **you will need to order it ASAP** from either the Fitzcarraldo website or Bookshop.org:

- <https://bookshop.org/p/books/the-second-body-daisy-hildyard/277890?ean=9781910695470>
- <https://fitzcarraldoeditions.com/books/the-second-body>

I have also placed a copy of this book on reserve at the Miller Library. All other readings will be available as PDFs on Perusall (accessed through Moodle).

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 the environmental humanities, stories about nature, humans, creation, bodies, protest, 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: **six explorations (~500 words)**, **an artist's statement (~250-500 words)** to accompany a creative piece; and **a portfolio project** which can take the form of an essay (2000-2500 words) or a creative piece with an artist's statement (~1000 words). 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 assignments in a timely, thoughtful manner will earn you a B; rushed, missing, or otherwise lack-luster 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.**
 - [A new Covid booster is coming this fall](#) and will likely be available on campus; I strongly encourage you to get a booster! 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 our 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. A minor late assignment here or there 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.
- **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 the Director of the Gender and Sexual Diversity Program, Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093).
 - 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, Meg Hatch (207-859-4266) if you disclose an experience related to sexual misconduct. This is not as scary as it sounds: if I contact Meg, 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 Meg Hatch. The college will take initial steps to address the incident(s), protect and support those directly affected, and enhance the safety of our community. Meg Hatch 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 |
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| Week 1: | <p><u>Unit 1: Beginnings</u></p> <p><u>W Sept 6:</u> Course Introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin your Labor Logs! (No later than F Sept 9)• Explore Maya Lin’s <i>What is Missing</i>: Project Description and Website. Read the “Creative Response Project” assignment and begin to think about what you might like to do. |
| Week 2: | <p><u>M Sept 11:</u> Read Alfie Kohn, “The Case Against Grades” and Deborah Rose Bird, et. al., “Thinking Through the Environment.”</p> |

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| | <p><u>W Sept 13</u>: Read William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness.”</p> |
| Week 3: | <p><u>M Sept 18</u>: Read Robin Kimmerer, “Skywoman Falling” and “People of Corn, People of Light”; watch Dawn Land: Abenaki Creation Story; examine the maps in this online exhibit (if you click “info” you can see bigger pictures and more detailed information).</p> <p><u>W Sept 20</u>: Read Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>, books 1 and 10.</p> <p>Exploration 1 DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm on F Sept 22</p> |
| Week 4: | <p><u>M Sept 25</u>: Read Genesis 1-3, Exodus 7-8, Isaiah 42-44, and Revelation 21-22.</p> <p><u>W Sept 27</u>: Read John Milton’s <i>Paradise Lost</i>, excerpts.</p> <p>Exploration 2 DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm on F Sept 29</p> |
| Week 5: | <p><u>M Oct 2</u>: Read Margaret Cavendish, selected poems.</p> <p><u>W Oct 4</u>: Re-read one text from Unit 1.</p> <p>Exploration 3 DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm on F Oct 20</p> <p>Labor Log and Reflection DUE by 11:55pm on F Oct 6</p> |
| Week 6: 1-1 Writing Meetings | <p><u>M Oct 9</u>: NO CLASS—Fall Recess</p> <p><u>Unit 2: Middles</u></p> <p><u>W Oct 11</u>: Read Rachel Carson, excerpts from <i>Silent Spring</i></p> <p>F Oct 13: Screening of <i>Ixcanul</i> (time and location TBA); you can also watch the film on your own time via Prime, AppleTV, or by checking the film out from the library (it’s on reserve).</p> <p>Exploration Peer Review letters DUE by 11:55pm on F Oct 13</p> |

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| <p>Week 7: 1-1 Writing Meetings</p> | <p><u>M Oct 16:</u> Guest lecture from Tiffany Creegan Miller; watch <i>Ixcanul</i> and read two short reviews of the film: 1) Ixcanul [sic]: A commentary from Oxlajuj Aj and 2) Ixcanul (2015) and the Precarity of Health Care in Ixmulew, Guatemala</p> <p><u>W Oct 18:</u> Read Sandra Steingraber, excerpts from <i>Living Downstream</i></p> <p>REVISED Exploration DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm on F Oct 20</p> |
| <p>Week 8:</p> | <p>Mid-Semester Self-Assessment DUE on Moodle by 11:55pm on M Oct 23</p> <p><u>M Oct 23:</u> Read Stacy Alaimo, excerpts from <i>Bodily Natures</i> and <i>Exposed</i>; read Daisy Hildyard, <i>The Second Body</i>, pp. 1-27</p> <p><u>W Oct 25:</u> Read Daisy Hildyard, <i>The Second Body</i>, pp. 28-69</p> <p>Exploration 4 DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm on F Oct 27</p> |
| <p>Week 9:</p> | <p><u>M Oct 30:</u> Read Daisy Hildyard, <i>The Second Body</i>, pp. 70-119</p> <p><u>W Nov 1:</u> Colby Museum Visit: <i>Painted: Our Bodies, Hearts, and Village</i>.</p> <p>Exploration 5 DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm on F Nov 3</p> |
| <p>Week 10:</p> | <p><u>Unit 3: Ends/Beginnings</u></p> <p><u>M Nov 6:</u> Read Ursula Le Guin, “Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” and Ursula Heise, excerpts from <i>Imagining Extinction</i>; listen to “Poems can Stop Bulldozers”: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/podcasts/75448/poems-can-stop-bulldozers</p> <p><u>W Nov 8:</u> Read Mona Lisa Saloy, “Disasters, Nature, and Poetry” and Todd Borlik and Claire Egan, “Angling for the ‘Powte’: a Jacobean Environmental Protest Poem.”</p> <p>Exploration 6 DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm on F Nov 10</p> |
| <p>Week 11:</p> | <p>START your creative response project NOW if you have not already done so</p> <p><u>Unit 3: Ends/Beginnings</u></p> <p><u>M Nov 13:</u> Read Rob Nixon, excerpts from <i>Slow Violence</i> and Kyle Whyte, “Critical Investigations of Resilience”; explore the Poetry Foundation page “Poetry and the Environment” and pick two poems to read.</p> |

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| | <p><u>W Nov 15</u>: Read Robin Wall Kimmerer, excerpts from <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i>; read two more poems from the “Poetry and the Environment” collection</p> <p>Portfolio Project Planning Paragraph(s) DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm on F Nov 17</p> |
| Week 12: | <p><u>M&T Nov 20-1</u>: 1-1 Writing Meetings</p> <p><u>W&F Nov 22-4</u>: NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break</p> |
| Week 13: 1-1 Writing Meetings | <p>Artist’s Statement DUE on the Moodle Forum by 11:55pm Sunday Nov 26</p> <p><u>M Nov 27</u>: Creative Response Project Presentations</p> <p><u>W Nov 29</u>: Creative Response Project Presentations</p> |
| Week 14: | <p><u>M Dec 4</u>: Creative Response Project Presentations</p> <p><u>W Dec 6</u>: Cover letter and Portfolio work; closing thoughts</p> <p>Portfolio DUE Sunday Dec 10 by 11:55pm on Moodle.</p> |
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| | <p>Final Self-Assessment DUE F Dec 15 by 11:55pm on Moodle.</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 or Perusall entries!
- **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. 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.