English 416: Environmental Writing and Ecocriticism
William Aarnes (100N Furman Hall)
Spring 2013
Office hours: 2:00-3:30 Tuesday and Thursday

Texts:
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*—with Bill McKibben introduction
- Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*
- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*
- David George Haskell, Preface through April, *The Forest Unseen: A Year’s Watch in Nature*
- Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*
- Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*
- A.R. Ammons, *Garbage*
- Heather Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*
- Richard Powers, *Gain*
- Barry Estabrook, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*

Optional: Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold From, *Ecocriticism Reader*
- John Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*

Working list of ecological/ecocritical propositions:

1. All life is valuable. (Or, if “valuable” is a questionable notion—Every individual of whatever species is an earthling, of equal status with all other individuals.)
2. Life requires destroying other life—through eating and using.
3. Live evolves.
4. All species live in a precarious relationship with their ever-changing environments (ecosystems).
5. Biodiversity is a necessity.
6. Ecology needs to focus on “nature” in urban, suburban, industrial, and agricultural areas—not just in the “wild.”
7. Although life has so far shown itself to be resilient and although in some forms life will outlast humanity, the human impact on the environment, on other species, and on humans themselves has been and continues to be, to a large extent, detrimental to devastating.
8. The religious, economic, and technological stories humans have used and continue to use to guide their behavior are anthropocentric and have often proved harmful to other species and the environment.
9. Attentiveness to the life within one’s environment enhances one’s concern for and ability to think about ecological concerns. Or—to suggest another possibility—knowing the source(s) of all of the goods one uses enhances one’s concerns for and ability to think about ecological concerns.
10. A key component of any ethical code should be an environmental ethic (such as Aldo Leopold’s suggestion that “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community” and that “It is wrong when it tends otherwise” Or, as 80% agreed in a New York Times/CBS Poll in June of 1989, “Protecting the environment is so important that requirements and standards cannot be too high, and continuing environmental improvements must be made regardless of costs” [quoted in Carolyn Merchant, Radical Ecology, 18]).
11. Individual responses to environmental problems are somewhat helpful, but collective actions are more effective.
12. Given the difficulty of reversing trends, sustainability is for the time being a reasonable, if somewhat questionable, response to environmental problems.
13. Reversing (undoing) human impact on the environment would be at once belated and essential to life on earth.
14. Because we do not know enough about the complexities of how life relates to environment (and we may never know enough), solutions to environmental problems can have unintended, harmful consequences.
15. A focus on environmental concerns can find itself in conflict with a focus on justice for all humans.
16. Along with other determinants (such as personal experiences like illnesses), one’s class, one’s class, and one’s race, and one’s locale all affect one’s relationship with the environment and one’s the intensity one’s environmental concern. (One’s circumstances help determine how one feels about how one is situated.)
17. The words (and other symbol systems) we use to describe our relationship with the environment both clarify and obscure our attention, ethical judgment, and behavior. (See, for example, the words in quotations marks in proposition 6.)
18. Although much current thinking suggests that the world is linguistically/socially constructed, nature (the biosphere) nonetheless exists as something other than what culture or language says it is. (Kate Soper: “It isn’t language which has a hole in its ozone layer.”)
19. Environmental writing considers (argues for or against) such propositions as the 18 listed above.
20. Ecocriticism employs a mix of critical/theoretical strategies to consider all writing (not just environmental writing) in terms of such propositions as those listed above.

Assignments (and percentage of grade):

10% 3 initiating reports: one on something blurring the natural/unnatural
one on a theoretical or critical article
one on a portion of one of the assigned texts (can be done in conjunction with one of your 3 response papers)

10-20% class discussion (if necessary, quizzes will be used to help determine discussion—and course—grade)

0-10% weekly questions (optional, can be started at any time)

5% Short (two-page essay either on a poem to be assigned or a section of Walden--due by noon Friday, January 25
10%  3* response papers (first due by beginning of class, Thursday, **January 29**—second and third due dates to be established by rotation)

0-3% Optional response papers on *The Day of the Triffids*

17-20% 1 long essay (no less than 10 pages, no more than 13) based on a subject agreed upon with the instructor: prospectus due by March 14, draft due by March 28, final draft due by Thursday, April 11

20% 2 take-home tests (2 retrospective essays each): February 14 and March 19

15% 1 take-home final (3 retrospective essays): due no later than 2:30 Monday, April 29

**Expectations and Guidelines:**

**Reading—daily assignments:**

A main purpose of this course is to help you become familiar both with representative works of environmental writing and with some of the concepts/concerns of ecocriticism. Most of the reading you do for this course will focus on the works assigned for daily discussion. Your aim in reading in preparation for class should not be merely to be ready to listen to someone else discuss the works. Instead, you should come to class prepared to start and/or add to discussions about what you find interesting, attractive, puzzling, or off-putting about the details and/or form of each work assigned. Read each assignment with care, with attention to detail, nuance, and form—with attention to such questions as those listed under the optional short essay assignment below. Get to know the works well enough that you can consistently come to class prepared to help others understand what you have discovered about them. You may find it helpful to make notes to yourself before you come to class. (Taking notes during class is also a good idea.)

You will be expected to demonstrate the quality of your daily reading in class discussions.

**Class discussion:**

For the most part, the procedure of this course is not for me—as the professor—to tell you what to think about the works assigned. Instead, the procedure is for all of us to help each other better appreciate and more fully understand both the works we read and the concepts/concerns that help us focus.

For this procedure to work, we will all need to come to class ready to demonstrate that we have read the assignment with care. In our discussions we will want to value particularly those questions, comments, or theoretical speculations that most help us focus with insight on the work under discussion. We will usually help ourselves if we see the claims that we make and hear others make as exploratory rather than definitive. Also, each of us will want to avoid dominating the discussion. And we will each need to listen and respond to the others in the class with attentiveness, respect, and encouragement.

Your discussion grade will reflect how much your comments add to the effectiveness of the class—how much they help us to appreciate and understand the works and the concepts/concerns of ecocriticism. Be forthcoming; do not be passive or grudging. Asking questions, making comments, providing supporting details, and adding qualifications that help to clarify works and our thoughts about them will strengthen both your ability to be articulate about literature and your class discussion grade. Inattention, distractions, tardiness, and lack of preparation will suggest disinterest in demonstrating and improving your thoughtfulness and weaken your grade.

Given the importance of discussion to this class, **attendance** at all classes is expected. Having more than two unexcused absences will lower your discussion grade three points for each of the first two unexcused absences and for any additional unexcused absences; in other words, you’re a third unexcused absence will lower your class participation grade nine points and three points more with each additional absence. (An **excused absence** is one that is signed by a doctor by someone in the infirmary or by Dean Gabbert. An **unexcused absence** is any other kind of absence.)

From time to time, there may be some short written assignments to help promote discussion. If it seems that many of you are not coming to class prepared to add to discussions, I will conclude that those who are not participating (or turning in weekly questions) are either not doing the reading or reading inattentively. If I reach such a conclusion, I will say so and then start giving quizzes on the reading. If quizzes occur, earning an average of 75 or below will mean that you class participation grade will be no higher, no matter how much you add to the discussions (my conclusion based on the assumption that a low quiz grade suggests you are not reading with care).
Weekly questions:
Weekly questions (optional*): To receive the full (10%) credit, turn in at least two questions a week from the first week through the fourteenth week. Weekly question should be e-mailed to me (Bill Aarnes or bill.aarnes@furman.edu) by 9:30 a.m. on one of the days that the work you consider is listed on the syllabus. Focus your question on the pages assigned.

Your question should include both a question on some difficulty you have in understanding and/or interpreting the work (questions on the denotation of words are not acceptable) and a thoughtful five-to-ten-sentence explanation of why you ask the question (you will not receive any credit if the explanation is not included or is too short).

*If you choose not to turn in weekly questions, be sure that your contributions to discussions show that you have kept up with the reading and that your reading has been thoughtful. If you tend not to take part in class discussions, you would do well to turn in weekly questions.

3 oral presentations:
You each will make present three oral reports—one on something that blurs the distinction between “natural” and “cultural,” one that focuses on a daily reading assignment, and one that focuses on a theoretical or critical essay (or chapter). In the second and third, you will want both to demonstrate your attentiveness to and thoughtfulness about the details and nuances of the material you discuss. Your presentations will be graded in part on how clearly your present your ideas, so you will want to organize them carefully. (With the critical/theoretical article, do not give a presentation that consists of your paging through the article and reading highlights.)

3 response papers: two to three pages each. You will all write a response paper on the final reading assignment for Sand County Almanac (due at the beginning of class January 29. I will establish a rotation for the subsequent two response papers (so that you will write them about a month apart).

1 optional response papers: One on The Day of the Triffids

Short essay: due as an email attachment by noon, Friday, January 25
A three-page essay focused on one of the poems I will provide, or on a section of Walden (to be discussed with me in conference). What you will want to do is emphasize an ecocritical issue. You will find it useful, in the preliminary stages of thinking about the essay, to consider questions such as these:

- Can you identify the assumptions that the writer expects the reader to share?
- Does the writer strike you as predominantly anthropocentric or biocentric?
- What is the mix of personal experience, data based on research and/or field study, speculation, moral suasion?
- How does the writer characterize the past, the present, and the future?
- Are imaginative gestures more attempts at fanciful revising of conventional thinking or attempts at increasing the accuracy of attention?
- How does the writer open the piece? How does the writer close it?
- What insights do you gain by paying close attention to the writer’s choice of words
  - the writer’s characterization of self and others (including the reader)
  - the images, metaphors, analogies, allusions used
  - the modulations of tone
  - the sound and rhythm of the language
  - any unattended lapses in diction, tone, fact, or consistency
  - the handling of personal pronouns
  - the handling of tenses?
- Do the details you have noted while thinking of the previous question work together to produce a unifying effect?
And/or do the details you have noted show the writer to be searching for conclusions rather than asserting them?

**Essay:** prospectus due by March 14, draft due by March 28, final draft due by Thursday, April 11

One major purpose of this course is to have you write either a ten-to-thirteen-page essay in which you focus on a written work from an ecological prospective. This essay should demonstrate your ability to your topic with attentiveness, insight, clarity, and persuasiveness.

This essay will explore a topic that you develop in consultation with me. In some cases, I suspect, the essay will develop out of one of your oral presentation. I will suggest other topics early in the semester.

To help you approach this essay with increasing focus, I will ask you to meet with me at least three during the course of the semester:

I. Early in the term *(no later than January 29)* a conference for helping me become alert to both your interests and your questions about the assignment.
II. No later than March 21, a conference for discussing a brief prospectus with, if needed, a working bibliography, turned in by March 14.
III. Preferably before but no later than April 4, a conference for discussing the draft you have turned in by March 28.

Should you decide to use secondary sources, you should read at least eight secondary print sources in preparing to write this essay. (You may use sources that you find on-line, but only if they are in addition to the print sources and if you either provide me with a print copy or—preferably—help me bring up the material on my own computer.) Though an essay written with the help of secondary sources should reflect the secondary reading you have done, your thesis should be your own and your use of the secondary material should be limited to helping you support or qualify your claims. Do not write an essay that is a mere summary of your research.

Be scrupulous in your use of secondary sources. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the essay or in the course.

Use the MLA format for handling citations and bibliography—with the exception that, instead of only having a bibliography of works cited have a bibliography that includes all of the material you have read in preparing to write the essay.

Each essay should have a title and be typed, doubled spaced (font size 10 or 12).

“Ten–to-thirteen-page” means what its says. (Nine-and-three-quarters pages or less will lower your grade.

You can email your final version, but you must also turn in your draft by noon, April 11. A late essay—one that is emailed after noon, April 11, will be docked 5 points (1/2 letter grade) if it is turned in during later that afternoon or any time during the following weekend. the following Monday. After that, it will be docked 10 points for each week day it is late. Failure to turn in the final essay will mean failure of the course.

**Takes-home tests and final exam:**

For each of the two tests you will be asked to write essays (2 per test) that demonstrate your familiarity with both the reading and theoretical concepts.

One of the essays will address an issue such as (This list suggests some of the issues we will focus on while discussing the first three works of environmental writing):

Define “Romanticism” and explain how as a way of thinking it can help and/or hamper discussing human interaction with the environment.

Differentiate “georgic” from “pastoral” and discuss the extent to which the writers we have read employ the georgic mode.

How is anthropomorphism (personification) helpful and/or harmful to an understanding of our involvement in our environment; or alternatively emphasizing human resemblance to other kinds of animals.

What strategies do the writers employ to change the spaces they study into “places”?

What do writers gain/lose by using a seasonal/journal/almanac structure?
Clarify the difference between “nature writing” and “environmental writing” and discuss how discriminating between the two modes are blended—and to what effects—in passages of the three of the writers we have read.

Other possible issues:
- the human relationship with its food chain
- the relation of gender to environmental writing
- images that repeat themselves from work to work
- the relationship of self and environment
- the relationship of economy to ecology
- the definitions of wild
- the definitions of nature
- the difference between ecological writing and other kinds of writing
- a topic of your choosing (such as one that plays off one or more of the 20 propositions listed early in the syllabus) that you have discussed with me

The other essay will address an issue brought up by one of the reports made by your classmates.

For the final you will be asked to write three essays, one of which is a reconsideration of one of the essays you wrote for one of the take-home exams.

You will be expected to show, in your tests and final, your familiarity with the works we have read, your attentiveness to class discussion, and your thoughtfulness about issues suggested by our reading in and your classmates’ reports on ecocriticism. Insightful, well-informed essays will of course be valued over answers that show only a cursory awareness of the material.

Failure to turn in any one of the written assignments—response papers, tests, long essay, final—means failure of the course.

*Extension policy. The final essay and the final exam may not be turned in late. Two written assignments may be turned in at the next class meeting without penalty. Written work will lose 10 points for each class meeting it is late or each day after classes stop meeting.

Disability

Students with disabilities who need academic accommodations should contact the Disability Services Coordinator Gina Parris at 2322.

Week I: January 8 and 10

T: Introduction: Issues to have in mind while reading Lawrence Buell, “What is an Environmental Text?” The Environmental Imagination, 6-8
Sample report on something blurring the natural/unnatural
Assignment of short essay


Timothy Clark, Introduction and Chapters 1, 2 and 10, The Cambridge Introduction, 1-34 and 102-110
Sample initiating report: on Raymond Williams’ definition of “Nature” (Williams, Raymond. “Nature.” In Keywords. 219-224.)
Sample initiating report on assigned text

Week II: January 15 and 17

T: Bill McKibben, “Introduction” to Walden, vii-xxii
Annie Leonard, *Story of Stuff*: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLBE5QAYXp8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLBE5QAYXp8)

Henry David Thoreau, “Economy” and “Where I Lived and What I Lived For,” *Walden*, 1-93

(H. Lawrence Buell, “Thoreau’s Projects” and “The Projects Reconciled,” *The Environmental Imagination*, 126-139)


Week III: January 22 and 24

T: Henry David Thoreau, “House-Warming” through “Conclusion,” *Walden*, 224-312

(Lawrence Buell, on seasonal structure, “Before Thoreau: Thomson’s Seasons,” “Seasonal Givens, Seasonal Artifacts,” and “Walden’s Seasonal Agenda,” *The Environmental Imagination*, 219-232 and 242-249)


Timothy Clark, “Questions of scale: the local, the national, the global,” *The Cambridge Introduction*, 130-140

(Lawrence Buell, on self-relinquishment in Leopold, *The Environmental Imagination*, 171-175)

**Essay I due at beginning of class**

Week IV: January 29 and 31

T: Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, “Sketches Here and There,” 95-162;


(Fromm, Harold. “Aldo Leopold: Aesthetic “Anthropocentrist.” In *The Isle Reader*. 3-9.)


(Cronon, William. “The Trouble with Wilderness; of, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.”

Week V: February 5 and 7

T: David George Haskell, Preface through April, *The Forest Unseen: A Year’s Watch in Nature*, xi-96; and “Acknowledgments”


Week VI: February 12 and 14

T: David George Haskell, September-December, 164-246

(Glen A. Love, “Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 225-240)

H: **Test I**

Week VII: February 19 and 21


Week VIII: February 26 and 28

T: Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, “What Are We?” and “Where Are We Going?” 195-299
Timothy Clark, “Evolutionary theories of literature,” Chapter 16, *The Cambridge Introduction*
   (Davis, Todd, “The Earth as God's Body: Incarnation as Communion in the Poetry of Mary Oliver,”
   *Christianity and Literature*, 2009 Summer; 58 (4): 605-624.)

H: Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* Introduction and part I, a glance at the Bibliography
   35-45
   (Mitchell, John Hanson. “Terra Nullius” and “Who Really Owns North America?” In
   *Trespassing*. 105-119 and 181-192.)

Spring break: If you have inclination and time, an optional response paper on John Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* (due by March 21)

Week IX: March 12 and 14

T: Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, Part II
   Timothy Clark, “Language beyond the Human, Chapter 4, *The Cambridge Introduction*, 46-54

   55-62
   (Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 3-14; can also be
   found online)

Week X: March 19 and 21

T: Test II


Week XI: March 26 and 28

T: A. R. Ammons, *Garbage*, parts 10-18, [ages 63-121]
   (Vendler, Helen, “The Snow Poems and Garbage: Episodes in an Evolving Poetics.” In
   *Complexities of Motion: New Essays on A. R. Ammons.*)

H: Heather Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow*, Introduction through Chapter 3, 1-77
   (Orr, David W. “Ideasclerosis” and “Ideasclerosis, Continued.” In *The Nature of Design*, 68-82.)

Week XI: April 2 and 4

T: Heather Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow*, Chapters 4 through 9, 79-231
H: Richard Powers, *Gain*, 1-134

Week XIII: April 9 (no class on April 11, though essay due by April 10)

T: Richard Powers, *Gain*, 134-225

Week XIV: April 16 and 18


   Timothy Clark, Chapters 8 and 13, *The Cambridge Introduction*, 87-95 and 120-128

Week XV: April 23