Course description:
The scholarly field of Cultural Studies engages cultural events and social relations as texts that can be read and interpreted by a range of theories, from psychoanalysis to queer studies. This course applies cultural studies to writings about nature in order to examine where and how religious words, themes and values affect 19th-20th century understandings of the human relationship to the natural environment. Lectures and discussion will also draw on semiotics, poststructuralism, feminist theory, and political theory to draw out the various cultural and political implications of the religious presumptions used or implied by the texts we read. I want students to examine how words like "nature", "wilderness", and "solitude" come to be held up as paradigmatic sites of so-called ‘spiritual experience’. This examination requires not only that we figure out how a word like ‘nature’ is functioning religiously, but also that we analyze the cultural significance and cultural (personal and political) practices that encompass words like ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’.

Learning Outcomes
Students of this course will explore the motifs of religion, nature, and identity in selected nature writings as these motifs give vent to historical and contemporary forms of personal and collective meaning, practice, and political hope. For example, we will question what forms ‘place’ for these texts; what the terms ‘land’, ‘earth’, and ‘nature’ signify for them; and how these terms generate religious sensibilities, life habits, and socio-political practices.

Expectations and Grading

1. Attendance and Participation (15%) I expect you to come to class on time, having done the reading, and ready to discuss it together. More than two absences will affect your participation grade. Since you must be present to participate, I roll your attendance into your participation grade.
2. Midterm Essay (40%): A take-home essays on 1-2 questions of a synthetic nature, distributed on a scheduled Friday and due the following Friday.
3. Final essay or project (45%).

Required books (I will also provide Blackboard posts).

- Thoreau, Walden
- Leopold, A Sand County Almanac
- Austin, The Land of Little Rain
- Dillard, For The Time Being
- Meloy, Anthropology of Turquoise: Reflections on Desert, Sea, Stone & Sky
- Childs, Soul of Nowhere
- Bass, Winter: Notes from Montana
Official Policies

Academic Integrity
The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu

Disability Statement
Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. In order to obtain authorized accommodations, students should be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498 and have an updated accommodation letter for the instructor. Accommodations and related support services such as exam administration are not provided retroactively and must be requested in advance.” For more information about services and policy, see Office of Disability Services: Address: Syracuse University, Office of Disability Services, 804 University Ave., Room 309, Syracuse, NY 13244-2330 Phone: Voice: (315) 443-4498; TDD: (315) 443-1371 E-Mail: odssched@syr.edu
Syllabus

A. Early voices

Week I: Thoreau

Mon Aug 31 Introductions
Wed Sep 2 Thoreau, Walden, Chapter 1.
Fri Sep 4 Thoreau, Walden, Chapter 1 (cont.), and 2, 5, 11 if you can.

Week II: Whitman

Mon Sep 7 No class: Labor Day
Fri Sep 11 Discussion of Thoreau and Whitman

Week III: Muir

Mon Sep 14 selections from Essential Muir (on Blackboard): “Knowledge and Inventions”; “A Near View of the High Sierras”, and “A Windstorm in the Forest”, and “Yosemite Falls at Midnight”
Wed Sep 16 ibid., “God’s First Temples: How Shall We Preserve our Forests?”, and “The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West”
Fri Sep 18 discussion of 19th century thinkers about earth, self and religion

Week IV: Austin

Mon Sep 21 No Class: Eid
Wed Sep 23 Mary Austin: The Land of Little Rain (This book is also available through Google Books)
Fri Sep 25 Ibid., continued discussion.

Week V: Depression era Documentaries

Mon Sep 28 No Class: Yom Kippur
Wed Sep 30 The Plough that Broke the Plains (Pare Lorentz: 1936)
Fri Oct 2 The River (Pare Lorentz: 1937)

Week VI: Leopold

Mon Oct 5 Selections from Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac
Wed Oct 7 Ibid.
Fri Oct 9 discussion of documentaries and Leopold
VII: Midterm

Mon  Oct 12       current events or debates
Wed  Oct 14       ibid.
Fri  Oct 16       midterm paper due

VIII: Annie Dillard

Mon  Oct 19       Dillard, For the Time Being
Wed  Oct 21       ibid.
Fri  Oct 23       Discussion of Dillard in comparison/contrast with the pre-midterm material.

IX: Ellen Meloy

Mon  Oct 26       Meloy, Anthropology of Turquoise: Reflections on Desert, Sea, Stone & Sky
Wed  Oct 28       ibid.
Fri  Oct 30       Discussion of Dillard and Meloy

X: Craig Childs

Mon  Nov 2        Soul of Nowhere
Wed  Nov 4        ibid.
Fri  Nov 6        Discussion of Dillard, Meloy and Childs

XI: Rick Bass

Mon  Nov 9        AAR
Wed  Nov 11       Winter
Fri  Nov 13       ibid.

XII: Wendell Berry (this week’s essays are on Blackboard)

For Berry and Kingsolver we could substitute selections from The Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology by Sarah M. Taylor.

Mon  Nov 16       “Two Economies”
Wed  Nov 18       “Christianity and the Survival of Creation”
Fri  Nov 20       “The Pleasures of Eating”

XIII: Thanksgiving

Mon  Nov 23       Kingsolver, “A Fist in the Eye of God” (or another essay from Small Wonder; this will be posted on Blackboard.)
XIV: Other perspectives

This week (Nov 30, Dec 2, Dec 4) we either will read essays from the edited collection, *Rooted in the Land* or selections from Bron Taylor’s *Deep Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*

XV: Synthesis and student presentation

This week (Dec 7, 9, 11) we will give over to collaboratively crafted synthesis of the course material from the second half of the semester, and student presentations of their final projects.

Mon Dec 14 Course evaluation forms and final statements.