

Religion 358: Religion and Nature Writing                      Tu/Th 12:30-1:50; HL 214  
Prof. M. Gail Hamner  
512 Hall of Languages; [mghamner@syr.edu](mailto:mghamner@syr.edu)  
Office hours: Tuesdays 11 a.m.-12 noon, and by appointment

T.A. Jill P. Adams  
Email: [jpadam02@syr.edu](mailto:jpadam02@syr.edu)  
Office hour: Tuesdays 2pm-3pm and by appointment, HL 514 (TA office)

### **Course description:**

In U.S. popular culture, “Nature” and “wilderness” are often held up as the paradigmatic sites of spiritual experience. We hear said, or feel ourselves, that being in the woods, on a mountain top, or at the beach is “very spiritual.” Indeed, sometimes experiences of nature are felt to transmit “the divine” much more palpably than more regular expressions of religious devotion such as participating in an institutionally-based service, ritual, or tradition. How and why do natural, especially ‘wild’ environments produce (or at least evoke) holiness? What is vacated when we vacation? Is the mere break in routine enough to call forth religious experience? Do we encounter nature differently from persons who lived before our media-saturated world? These are some of the questions we will set out to explore this semester.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students of this course will explore questions of religion, place and identity as these are articulated in nature writing. We will question what forms ‘place’ for us; what ‘land’, ‘earth’, and ‘nature’ signify for us; and how these terms are coded religiously. The Department of Religion has articulated four major goals that shape its teaching and its expectations of what students in its courses and programs may expect to gain from this study.

### **Expectations and Grading**

- **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.
- **Responses (40%)** I expect you to come to class with a 250-500 word critical response on the reading for the day. There are 22 responses, but three of them will be construed as practice drafts for your take-home exams (collected but not graded). Of the other 19 responses, I will let you omit or drop the grade of 3 of them. The remaining 16 responses are each worth 2.5 % of your final grade. \*\*
- **Essays (45%)** Three take-home essays on 1-2 questions distributed on a scheduled Thursday and due the following Tuesday. (1<sup>st</sup> = 10%; 2<sup>nd</sup> = 15%; 3<sup>rd</sup> = 20%, for a total of 45%).
- **Late responses** receive F’s (better than a zero). Late papers will be lowered two letter grades per day. **No emailed responses or papers will be accepted.**

## Required books

1. John Muir, *Essential Muir*.
2. Mary Austin, *Land of Little Rain*
3. Aldo Leopold, *Sand Country Almanac*
4. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*
5. Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*
6. Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm*
7. Linda Hogan, *Dwellings*
8. William Vitek and Wes Jackson, ed.s, *Rooted in the Land: essays on Community and Place*

Course pack of readings available at the Copy Center in Marshall Square. This is listed as "cp" below.

## Syllabus

### Part I. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century

#### Week 1

- Tuesday Jan 15 Introductions and in -class writing assignment  
Brief introduction to 19<sup>th</sup> century American Transcendentalism (For two of my accessible sources you may read the Albanese selection in your cp: "Wildness and the Passing Show" or peruse the wonderful VCU website: <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/>)
- Thursday Jan 17 Read: Emerson, "Nature" (1836) (cp)

#### Week 2

- Tuesday Jan. 22 Read: [being reading Thoreau for Thursday]  
John Gatta's pages on Emerson (cp)  
Bube, "From Monoculture to Polyculture" (RL)  
Brueggemann, "'Placed' between Promise and Command" (RL)
- Thursday Jan 24 Read: Thoreau, "Sunday", from *A Week on the Concord & Merrimack Rivers* (1849) (cp)

#### Week 3

- Tuesday Jan 29 Read: John Muir, *Essential Muir* (1890s; selections)  
Gatta's pages on Muir (cp)
- Thursday Jan 31 Attend: Keynote address for the "Focus the Nation Program: Global Warming Solutions for America": **Donald Brown**, "Turning Up the Volume about The Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change." Eggers 220  
<http://enspire.syr.edu/FTN/FTNprogram.htm#program>

#### Week 4

- Tuesday Feb 5 Read: John Muir, *Essential Muir* (selections), and Shrader-Frechette, "Biological Explanations and Environmental Expectations" (RL)

Thursday Feb 7 Read: Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain*  
Gatta's pages on Austin (cp)

**Week 5**

Tuesday Feb 12 Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden" (cp). Your response on Merchant will not be graded.  
Thursday Feb 14 Merchant and/or Albanese will be the basis and guide for an in-class review. A take home exam will be passed out at end of class.

**Part 2: The Development of Conservation**

**Week 6**

Tuesday Feb 19 **Take home essay due.**  
In class we will screen Pare Lorenz's *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936, 27 min.) and *The River* (1937, 32 min.) and discuss them. This video, #7671, is on reserve at Bird now through Feb. 29

Thursday Feb 21 Read: Aldo Leopold, *Sand Country Almanac* (1948), Foreword and Part I  
Gatta's pages on Leopold (cp)

**Week 7**

Tuesday Feb 26 Read: Leopold, Part III (*then* try to read Part II, but be certain to read "Thinking Like a Mountain")  
Thursday Feb 28 Read: Scott R. Sanders, "The Common Life" (RL)  
Linda Hasselstrom, "Addicted to work" (RL)  
Franklin A. Kalinowski, "Aldo Leopold as Hunter and Communitarian" (RL)  
Gregory Cooper, "Aldo Leopold and the values of the Native" (RL)

**Part 3. The Development of Environmental Activism**

**Week 8**

Tuesday Mar 4 Read: Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962; selections)  
Thursday Mar 6 Read: Carson, selections  
Gatta's pages on Carson (cp)

**Week 9: Spring Break**

**Week 10**

Tuesday Mar 18 Read: Ed Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (1968), selections  
Thursday Mar 20 Read: Abbey, continued; selections, and Slovic's pages on Abbey (cp)

**Week 11**

- Tuesday Mar 25 Read: Alfonso Lingis, selections from *First Person Singular* (cp). Your response on Lingis will not be graded.
- Thursday Mar 27 Read: Lingis will be the guide and basis of a review. Take-home essay questions will be passed out in class.

**Week 12**

- Tuesday April 1 Read: **Take home exam due.**  
In class we will screen segments of Pollacks' *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972), Birmingham's *Tully* (2000), and Andy Goldsworthy's *Rivers and Tides* (2002), and discuss.

**Part 4. Literary responses to environmentalism**

- Thursday April 3 Read: Wendell Berry, "Conserving Communities" (RL)  
Deborah Tall, "Dwelling: making peace with space and place" (RL)  
Albanese's pages on Dillard (cp)

**Week 13**

- Tuesday April 8 Read: Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* (1977)  
Thursday April 10 Read: Linda Hogan, *Dwellings* (1995), 11-76

**Week 14**

- Tuesday April 15 Read: Hogan, 76-159

**Part 5. Social and political contexts to land use and personal identity**

- Thursday April 17 Read: Kline, "An Amish Perspective" (RL)  
Vitek, "Community & the Virtue of Necessity" (RL)  
Selznick, "In Search of Community" (RL)

**Week 15**

- Tuesday April 22 **mayfest: no classes**  
Thursday April 24 Read from RL: Paige, "Leave if you can"  
Zencey, "The Rootless Professors"  
Sullivan, "A Public Philosophy for Civic Culture"  
Orr, "Re-Ruralizing Education"  
Kittredge, "CSA: Rediscovering Community"

**Week 16**

- Tuesday April 27 Read: Peter Cannavo, "The Crisis of Place." Your response on Cannavo will not be graded.

Cannavo will be the basis and guide for an in-class review. A take home exam will be passed out at the end of class. This exam will be due Tuesday, May 6, by **5 p.m.** either to me personally, or to my box in 501 HL. No exceptions.

**\*\* A note on your responses**

- A critical response is not a summary. The point is not to repeat the reading, but briefly to state its main argument and then to respond to that argument.
- You may use the first person in your writing, and you may draw upon personal experiences; however, the use of “I” and of your experience needs to be drawn into a larger argument or position vis-à-vis the readings (as is often demonstrated in the readings themselves).
- If more than one reading is assigned, the challenge will be to step back from the details of the specific arguments and formulate how the readings reframe, supplement, or contradict the primary text we’ve been discussing. For example, on January 22, what arguments do Gatta, Bube, and Brueggemann make that reshape, supplement, or contradict our discussion of Emerson’s *Nature*?

## **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](mailto:odssched@syr.edu)