

English/ Environmental Studies 122LE: Literature and the Environment: “Speculative Ecologies”

Instructor: Zach Horton

Meeting Time and Place: MW 3:30PM-4:45PM; Girvetz 1112

Office Hours and Location: W 2:30pm, or by appointment, South Hall 2509 (Transcriptions Studio)

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Introduction:

As a knowledge practice that uncovers strange interdependencies, complex food webs, and bizarre niches for even more bizarre creatures, ecology unsettles us with the alienness of the environment around us. Nonetheless, as a scientific endeavor, ecology is usually framed as a passive gathering of information, an uncovering of relationships that will enable a more complete description of a particular environment. This course asks what happens when ecology becomes a speculative and creative endeavor, an exploration not of a pre-existing system that we can already experience as an environment, but a radically new world. The speculative works that we will examine create imaginative worlds that are experientially alien to us, yet treat them as complex ecological systems. In these novels, films, and other works, ecology becomes more than another layer tacked on to everyday experience. It becomes the primary experience itself: uncovering the hidden interdependencies of a new environment may well be a matter of survival. We will consider ecosystems that have been radically altered by an alien intruder, alien worlds visited by humans who must adapt or die, imaginative reconfigurations of Earth dynamics in a post-petroleum world, and real emergent ecosystems that are hybrids of anthropogenic technology and natural systems. Imaginative encounters with these category-defying environments will challenge us to think critically about what constitutes an ecosystem, and the implicit boundaries and limitations of ecology as we practice and experience it today.

Required Texts:

Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Steven Barnes, *The Legacy of Heorot* (novel)

Frank Herbert, *Dune* (novel)

Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Dispossessed* (novel)

Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Wind-Up Girl* (novel)

“Waking Mars” (mobile game) (www.wakingmars.com)

Grade Breakdown

Attendance and Participation: 20%

Quizzes/Responses: 20%

Paper #1 (ecological lit report): 15%

Final Paper/Project: 20%

Final Exam: 25%

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Please note the following:

- More than **one absence** requires a documented excuse
- More than **two unexcused absences** will result in a failing participation grade

- **Four or more absences** may result in being dropped from the course
- Every **three “lates”** will amount to one absence; you will be counted late if you are not present when attendance is taken at the beginning of each class

In the event of an unavoidable absence, please contact me before class. You are responsible for whatever material you miss, including handouts, assignments, and announcements.

Papers and Late Work

All papers and assignments are due—in *hard-copy* format as well as an emailed digital copy—on the specified due dates indicated in the schedule below. Any work submitted after this time will be considered “late.” Late work will be accepted up to 5 days after the original due date, with a 1/3 letter-grade-deduction per day late.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, of all kinds, is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes the failure to acknowledge all secondary sources in your work, passing off another person’s work as your own, or submitting a paper written for a previous class. Plagiarism can be obvious or subtle, intentional or a careless mistake. Take your work and documentation seriously: keep track of your sources as you read and take notes; document quotes and paraphrases as you write, not when you are finished, scrambling to find who said what and where. If you are ever in doubt about when and how to acknowledge a source, please ask! At the very least, plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and a mark on your academic record, and may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion.

Schedule

Weeks 1-2: Invasive Species

Week 1

Monday, September 28

Course Introduction

Wednesday, September 30

Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Steven Barnes, *The Legacy of Heorot* [chapters 1-4]
 Mark Lewis, *Cane Toads: An Unnatural History* (documentary film) [in class]

Week 2

Monday, October 5

The Legacy of Heorot [chapters 5-13]
 Robert Wise, *The Andromeda Strain* (film) [in class, finish at home]
 AFTER CLASS SCREENING (optional)

Wednesday, October 7

The Andromeda Strain [discuss in class]
The Legacy of Heorot [chapters 14-18]

Weeks 3-6: Other Worlds I

Week 3

Monday, October 12

The Legacy of Heorot [to end]

Wednesday, October 14

Frank Herbert, *Dune*, through p. 59 (big) / 37 (small)

Week 4

Monday, October 19

Dune, through p. 204/126

Wednesday, October 21

Dune, through p. 324/199 (end of Book One)

Week 5

Monday, October 26

Dune, through p. 465/288

“Waking Mars” (mobile game) (www.wakingmars.com)

Wednesday, October 28

Dune, through p. 587/362 (end of Book Two)

Jenova Chen, “fLOw” (online game) (<http://jenovachen.com/flowingames/flowing.htm>)

Week 6

Monday, November 2

Dune, through p. 725/447

Hayao Miyazaki, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (anime film) [in class viewing]

Wednesday, November 4

Dune, through p. 809/489 (end of novel, plus Appendix I)

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind [in class viewing]

Weeks 7-10: Other Worlds II: Wastelands

Week 7

Monday, November 9

Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Dispossessed* (novel) [through Chapter 5]

Wednesday, November 11

HOLIDAY, NO CLASS

PAPER #1 DUE

Week 8

Monday, November 16

The Dispossessed (novel) [through Chapter 9]

Wednesday, November 18

The Dispossessed (novel) [to end]

Week 9

Monday, November 23

Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Windup Girl* (novel) [through Chapter 8]

Wednesday, November 25

The Windup Girl [through Chapter 19]

Week 10

Monday, November 30

The Windup Girl [through Chapter 33]

Wednesday, December 2

The Windup Girl [to end]

Saturday, December 5: Final Paper or Project due (at 12pm, noon)