

English 378
Lewis 201
T,Th, 3:00-4:15

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LITERATURE, WILDERNESS & THE HUMAN IMAGINATION

Texts:

The Epic of Gilgamesh, tr. and ed. N. K. Sandars (Penguin)
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, tr. & ed. Keith Harrison (Oxford)
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness & Other Tales* (World's Classics)
Robert Frost, *Selected Poems* (Grammercy Books)
William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (Vintage)
English 378 Course Packet, available from English Department
Office, Rice130.

Note: You need this immediately. Some copies exist, others will have to be made. I will explain during our first class session.

This course is a highly selective survey of the ways in which literature has engaged the problem of the human relation to the natural world. To the extent that concepts of wilderness and the wild have been used to represent this relation as an opposition, or a tension, various treatments of "wilderness" in relation to "civilization," and of "nature" in relation to "culture" will be our particular focus of study. The first half of the course explores the European context, beginning in antiquity, and the second half explores the American context, focusing on the American reaction to the New World wilderness and finishing in the present.

To get broad coverage, we'll need to maintain a brisk pace and accept a necessarily sketchy treatment of works and issues that could clearly occupy us at more length. One way to introduce depth into all this breadth is for you to develop your own plan for what you would particularly like to get out of the course. I will divide you into two groups, with rotating responsibilities, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, for "position papers," responses to the reading that we will use to shape and focus our discussion. From those papers, four in each half of the course, you may wish to evolve your longer "projects" for the first and second half. I use the term "project" to cover the norm -- an 8-10 page paper treating some aspect of our work for that half of the course in depth -- and to admit exceptions, substantial pieces of writing (personal essay, short story, group of poems) and other projects that depart from the

norm but produce an equivalent response in terms of depth, concentration and educational value. Such exceptions need to be negotiated and agreed upon in advance with me. You need to be thinking ahead to these projects/papers as you go, and you are urged to consult with me about them as they take shape, so that we can agree on their scope, focus, methodology, etc. A prospectus is due one week ahead of the actual date the paper/ project is due. This can be as substantial as a first draft or as brief as an outline, but it should help ensure that we both understand the nature and value of what you propose to do. You can also link your two projects together, if you wish, to make one large enterprise.

Schedule of Assignments:

Tues. Feb. 4: Introductory

Thurs. Feb. 6: Oelschlager, **The Idea of Wilderness**, Chapter 1, pp. 1-30. (In course packet.) Note the summary table on page 12. What's our evidence for this? Is Oelschlager idealizing our origins? Is this another version of the Fall? How do we incorporate this information into our own world, if at all?

Tues. Feb. 11: Antiquity: Oelschlager, **The Idea of Wilderness**, Chapter 2, 31-67. **Gilgamesh**, sections 1 & 2. *First position paper for Tuesday group.*

Thurs. Feb. 13: Finish **Gilgamesh**, including Introduction. Harrison, **Forests: the shadow of civilization**, ix-xi, 1-18 (course packet) *First position paper for Thursday group.*

Tues. Feb. 18: The Greeks and the Romans. **Forests**, 19-58 (course packet).. *2nd pos. paper: You might choose a Greek or a Roman example to explore, using the available myths.*

Thurs. Feb. 20: Early Christianity: review Oelschlager, 60-67, esp. the table on p. 66. *2nd pos. paper: You might choose something from the Bible to explore.*

Tues. Feb. 25: **Gawain**, the first two "fitts." **Forests**, "Shadows of the Law," 61-81. *3rd PP*.

Thurs. Feb. 27: **Gawain**, The third and fourth fitts. Oelschlager, 68-76 (course packet). *3rd PP*.

Tues. March 4: The Enlightenment and Romanticism. Oelschlager, 76-96. **Forests**, 107-133. Susan Stewart, "The Forest" (course packet) *4th pos. paper*.

Thurs. March 6: Edmund Burke, selections from "On the Sublime." Blake, "*The Tyger*," "*London*" (course packet) *4th pos, paper*

Tues. March 11: The Wordsworths. William, "*Lines Composed...*" and the selection from **The Prelude**. Dorothy, journal selections. (course packet)

Thurs. March 13: Percy B. Shelley, "*Mont Blanc*," and Keats, "*To Autumn*" (course packet) . ***First half project descriptions due.***

Tues. March 18: Joseph Conrad, **Heart of Darkness**.

Thurs. March 20: **Forests**, 133-144.

FIRST HALF PROJECTS ARE DUE BY FRIDAY, March 21 , 4:30 p.m.

S P R I N G B R E A K

Tues. April 1: Nash, **Wilderness and the American Mind**, Prologue and first two chapters (course packet)

Thurs. April 3: David Abram, **The Spell of the Sensuous**, first two chapters (course packet)

Tues. April 8: Henry David Thoreau, Journal selections, March, 1854, and "Walking" (course packet). 5th *pos. paper*.

Thurs. April 10: Robert Frost, **Selected Poems**, "Ghost House," "The Vantage Point," "The Mountain," "The Wood-Pile," "An Old Man's Winter Night," "Hyla Brook," "The Oven Bird," "Birches," "Putting in the Seed." 5th *pos. paper*

Tues. April 15: Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning," (course packet) and "The Idea of Order at Key West" (handout) 6th *pos. paper*

Thurs. April 17: Marianne Moore, "An Octopus" (course packet) 6th *pos. paper*

Tues. April 22: John Muir, "The Water Ouzel" (course packet). 7th *pos. paper*

Thurs. April 24: Henry Beston, "Night on the Great Beach" (course packet) 7th *pos. paper*. Note: The assignments for this week are light so that you can get started on the Faulkner readings, which are not.

Tues. April 29: William Faulkner, **Go Down Moses**, "The Old People." "The Bear," "Delta Autumn." 8th *pos. paper*

Thurs. May 1: Annie Dillard, "Nightwatch," 8th *pos. paper* **Second half project descriptions due.**

Tues. May 6: Robinson Jeffers, Theodore Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, poems in course packet.

Thurs. May 8: Randall Jarrell, Gary Snyder, and Charles Wright, poems in course packet.

SECOND HALF PROJECTS ARE DUE BY 4:30 ON MAY 12

Reserve Books:

(An asterix (*) denotes multiple copies)

*Oelschlager, Max, **The Idea of Wilderness**

*Harrison, **Forests: the Shadow of Civilization**

*Abram, **The Spell of the Sensuous**

*Buell, **The Environmental Imagination**

*Nash, **Wilderness and the American Mind**

*Lyon, **This Incomperable Lande**

Ferry, **Gilgamesh**, A New Rendering in English Verse

Bate, **Romantic Ecology**

Kroeber, **Ecological Literary Criticism**

Keith, **The Poetry of Nature**

Foster, **The Civilized Wilderness**

Marx, **The Machine in the Garden**

Elder, **Imagining the Earth**

Burroughs, **Accepting the Universe**

Snyder, **The Practice of the Wild**