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ENG 3300-001: Seminar in English Studies

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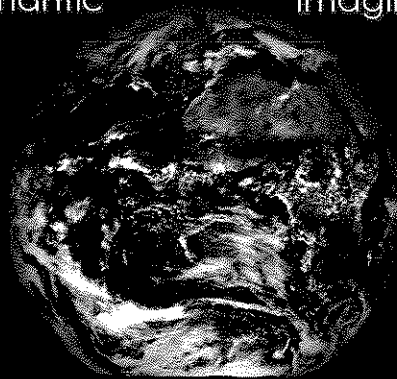
Natural Hazards:

Seminar in
English Studies

english 3300

Spring 2016

Environment, Catastrophe, and the Romantic Imagination



"He walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. . . The crushing black vacuum of the universe. . . Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it."

—Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Photo taken by Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (NASA) Oct. 15, 2015

Texts

B. Kingsolver, **Flight Behavior**
(2012)

E. Mandel, **Station Eleven**
(2014)

C McCarthy, **The Road**
(2006)

Other Readings (via D2L)

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Office Hours:
M, W 9-10:30
T 12-1:30
& by appointment

Course Description

In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate (a well-known scholar of Shakespeare and Romantic literature) asserts that "poetry is the place where we save the earth." Can this be true? Can literature (the arts) play a role in sustaining or improving our natural world—with environmental challenges, natural disasters, and species extinction?

Requirements

3 Writing Projects	50%
Presentations	10%
Minor Writings	15%
Final Exam	10%
Participation	15%

In this seminar we will interrogate Bate's assertion about the importance of the literary imagination in both depicting and responding to our hazardous relationship with nature. To pursue this goal, we will read an array of writers (across several genres) from the late 18th century to the present, including such writers as Rousseau, Defoe, Malthus, Mary Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, Darwin as well as contemporary writers like Margaret Atwood, Naomi Klein, Bill McKibben, Cormac McCarthy, J. M. Coetzee, and Barbara Kingsolver.

(continued)

human—and their ongoing collision—but also a foundation for understanding contemporary debates about climate change that pervade our culture. Responding to troubling matters of climate change and natural disasters raises difficult questions no doubt for scientists and politicians, but equally important are how such questions are answered by writers, philosophers, artists, filmmakers, and students of literature.

Seminar Format

This course is designed as a seminar, which essentially means seminar participants share the responsibility of presenting material (usually your own writing projects and research) and facilitating class discussion.

“Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language Any full history of the uses of nature would be a history of a large part of human thought.”

—Raymond Williams

It's very likely that this course format will be very new to most of you—but it's designed that way to help you develop further your critical thinking and writing skills and prepare you for the challenges you will face after you leave EIU.

Here are some specific goals for the course:

- to develop advanced research skills (in using a variety of databases, verifying information, learning various research formats);
- to develop skills in deploying that research for use in both academic and popular writing;
- to sharpen critical thinking skills (in reasoning, close reading, data analysis);
- to increase proficiency in writing skills (for different audiences, in different formats);
- to gain more confidence in public speaking (through facilitating discussions, presenting research, collaborative learning).

Assignments

You will complete **three major writing projects**—a project where you will use historical databases/archives for in-depth research; a grant proposal; and a final project (for which you will be designing the shape, scope, and format in consultation with me).

You will also complete **several minor writing projects**, which can vary from response papers to smaller research projects—all of which are designed for use in class discussions or to give you some experience (or practice) in using a new research method or analyzing a complex topic.

You will also be making **presentations** in the class — a lot! Some of these are informal but others will ask you to be more formal (in preparation and presentation). All seminar members will be required to present at the English Studies Conference (in April). More on that later.

Attendance Policy

You need to attend every class session. It's especially important in seminars where so much of what we do is collaborative and discussion-based. I generally allow two absences—no questions asked. On the third absence—and for every absence thereafter—I will deduct 5% from your final grade. Six or more absences equate to an automatic "F" for the course. For any day that you are not in class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered, new assignments given, changes in the syllabus, or any homework due for the next meeting.

Classroom Etiquette

You're welcome to bring your notebook computer/tablet to class. However, I ask that you observe common rules of etiquette and decorum when you use it. In brief, you may use it to take notes or complete an in-class writing activity. You may not use it for anything not directly related to class work. Also, please turn off (or mute) cell phones. Out of respect for the class and the integrity of class activities, absolutely no text messaging during class is allowed.

Conferences

The nature of this course will allow for a great deal of in-class conversations about your research and projects. However, it is vital that you work with me closely (and often) on your work. I am in my office many other hours besides the posted office hours and I urge you to get in the habit of talking to outside of class.

Electronic Writing Portfolio

This course is a writing-centered course and, as such, your papers satisfy the requirements for the Electronic Writing Portfolio. If you plan on using work from this course for your EWP, I ask that you complete this before the last two weeks of the semester.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.