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LIT 373.01: Literature and the Environment - Ideas of Wilderness

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LIT 373 (Fall 2010) – Literature and the Environment: Ideas of Wilderness
Class time: Tues/Thurs. 9:40 – 11am Jeanette Rankin Hall 203
Professor Louise Economides (louise.economides@mso.umt.edu) – Office: LA 227
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs Tuesdays 4-5pm; Thurs. 11:30-1:30pm and by appointment

Required Texts:

Bass, Rick. The Book of the Yaak. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.
DeLillo, Don. White Noise. Viking Critical Edition.
Glotfelty and Fromm. The Ecocriticism Reader. University of Georgia Press, 1996.
Krakauer, Jon. Into the Wild. New York: Random House, 1996.

Course Objectives: In this course, we'll examine wilderness's historical, contemporary and future relevance within western culture by examining its representation in literature. We'll also explore debates about the usefulness of wilderness (and/or the preservation of "wild" areas) as a key component of American environmentalism. Along the way, we'll address the question of whether wilderness is best understood as an actual material state of nature or as a cultural ideal, what critical investments are at stake in wilderness advocacy and the sometimes problematic association of wilderness experience with hegemonic masculinity, misanthropy and/or with anti-modernism. Furthermore, we'll explore the implications of Thoreau's claim that "in wildness is the preservation of the world." Can pragmatic as well as ethical and/or aesthetic arguments be made for the need to preserve wilderness in the future, or is the whole idea of wilderness already untenable, needing to be replaced by some other idea of "nature" (neo-pastoralism, for example)? If, according to Bill McKibben, we already live in at an historical moment that marks the "end of nature," what will the future status of wilderness be? These and other questions will be the focus of our open-ended exploration in this class.

Graded Work:

- 1) **Two major essays** (one focusing upon wilderness's historical representation, the other upon its contemporary and/or future status). Both will be literary analysis papers (please see specific assignments for more details).
- 2) **Group Presentation.** Working with a group of peers, you will lead our class discussion regarding a text on the syllabus. Students are encouraged to be creative with presentations, using a variety of means to spark an interesting discussion on the topic at hand (see "Presentation Guidelines"). A written report, put together collaboratively by your group, will be due no later than one week from the day you present (if you present on 10/4 your report is due by 10/11).
- 3) **Class Participation and Attendance:** Regular attendance (no more than 3 absences beyond those allotted for fall trek) and active participation are vital to your success in this course. If you miss more than 3 classes this semester, you can expect a maximum grade of "C" for your participation grade (less if you failed to meet participation guidelines listed here). "Active Participation" includes 1) coming to class having carefully read and annotated assigned texts 2) sharing your thoughts about the readings during our class discussions 3) asking focused questions concerning the readings, indicating prior preparation 4) responding to questions posed by your peers and/or instructor 5) actively participating in group work 6) coming to office hours to discuss issues we don't have time to cover in class.

Course Policies

- 1) **Class conduct:** In this course, you will be expected to behave respectfully towards your peers and your instructor and, in turn, can expect to be treated this way yourself. Disrespectful or disruptive

behavior (such as chronic lateness, sleeping in class, holding conversations while others are attempting to contribute to class discussions, etc.) will not be tolerated, and you may be asked to leave class with an “absence” recorded for that day.

2) **Plagiarism:** The unacknowledged use of another person’s ideas, words or interpretations in lieu of your own constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of academic honesty. Failure to properly document your sources will result in an automatic “F” for that assignment and may result in your failure of the entire course. If you have doubts or questions about what constitutes plagiarism, see your instructor and/or consult the university’s policies regarding this.

GRADED WORK POINT TOTALS

Essay One	300
Essay Two	400
Group Presentation	200
Participation and Attendance	<u>100</u>
TOTAL:	1000

WEEKLY SCHEDULE (subject to changes) electronic reserves password= WILD
ER= Ecocriticism Reader

WEEK ONE

Tues. 8/31 Course Introduction
Thurs. 9/2 NO CLASS – Fall Trek

WEEK TWO

Tues. 9/7 NO CLASS
Thurs. 9/9 NO CLASS

WEEK THREE

Tues. 9/14 Shakespeare, The Tempest (Acts I and II)
Thurs. 9/16 The Tempest (Acts III, IV and V)

WEEK FOUR

Tues. 9/21 Marx, “Shakespeare’s American Fable” (e-reserves)
Thurs. 9/23 Wordsworth, The Prelude (Conclusion); Shelley, “Mont Blanc” (both on e-res)

WEEK FIVE

Tues. 9/28 Thoreau, from The Maine Woods + “Walking” (e-res)
Thurs. 9/30 Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness” (e-res)

WEEK SIX

Tues. 10/5 Manes, "Nature and Silence" in Ecocriticism Reader -- *Presentation Group #1*
Thurs. 10/7 Orne Jewett, "A White Heron" (e-res)

WEEK SEVEN

- Tues. 10/12 Sue Ellen Campbell, from Bringing the Mountain Home (e-res)
Presentation Group #2
- Tues. 10/14 Silko, "Landscape, History and the Pueblo Imagination" (ER) --
ESSAY ONE DUE

WEEK EIGHT

- Tues. 10/19 White, "Black Women and Wilderness" (e-res) -- *Presentation Group #3*
- Thurs. 10/21 Krakauer, Into the Wild (Chapt. 1-11)

WEEK NINE

- Tues. 10/26 Into the Wild (Chapt. 12-conclusion)
- Thurs. 10/28 Bass, The Book of the Yaak (intro + pages 1-94) -- *Presentation Group #4*

WEEK TEN

- Tues. 11/2 Election day -- NO CLASS
- Thurs. 11/4 The Book of the Yaak (page 95-conclusion)

WEEK ELEVEN

- Tues. 11/9 McKibben, from The End of Nature (e-res) -- *Presentation Group #5* -- **ESSAY ONE revisions due**
- Thurs. 11/11 Veterans Day -- NO CLASS

WEEK TWELVE

- Tues. 11/16 Meeker, "The Comic Mode" in Ecocriticism Reader
- Thurs. 11/18 Hohn, "Moby Duck" (ER) -- *Presentation Group #6*

WEEK THIRTEEN

- Tues. 11/23 Phillips, "Is Nature Necessary?" in Ecocriticism Reader (ER) -- *Presentation Group #7*
- Thurs. 11/25 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY (NO CLASS)

WEEK FOURTEEN

- Tues. 11/30 White Noise -- Part One + Deitering, "The Post-Natural Novel" (ER)
- Thurs. 12/2 White Noise -- Part Two

WEEK FIFTEEN

- Tues. 12/7 White Noise -- Part Three
- Thurs. 12/9 Heise from Sense of Place, Sense of Planet (ER)-- **ESSAY TWO DUE**