English 4350: Film and Literature

NATURE, ENVIRONMENT, AND ANIMALS
IN FILM AND THEORY

PH 100
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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11 and 2-3.
(Note: although I will usually be in my office during those times I may have to attend meetings, graduate student defenses, etc. Please email me to confirm that I will be in my office or to arrange an appointment.)

Course Description
This course will examine a wide range of films and introduce significant ideas, concepts, and questions within ecocriticism, green cultural studies, environmental studies, and animal studies. We will analyze the following films: Deliverance, Brokeback Mountain, Thunderheart, Congo, The Birds, Twelve Monkeys, Winged Migration, The Lion King, Princess Mononoke, Silkwood, Safe, The Lion King, Everything’s Cool, Being Caribou, Grizzly Man, Sharkwater, and Tree-Sit the Art of Resistance. We will discuss the environmental, ethical, political, and philosophical ramifications of the way these films represent nature, animals, and humans. Along with watching the films, we will read theory, criticism, and cultural studies. Although I will present several short lectures, the course emphasizes student participation and independent thought. Class time will consist of lecture, discussion, presentations, and small group work. Requirements will include daily class participation, presentations, one final project, a mid-term exam, and a final exam.

Please note: This is an advanced English course that requires a great deal of reading and
writing. Everyone in this class should have already successfully completed English 2350, which is the prerequisite for all advanced English courses.

**Warning:** This course is rated “R”! Some of the films we will be watching for this course will contain violence, explicit sexual content, and language that some may find offensive: if this will be a problem for you, please drop the course.

**Course Objectives**

1) To introduce students to the most significant concepts, questions, and ideas in ecocriticism, green cultural studies, and environmental studies, and animal studies.
2) To introduce students to the methods of film analysis.
3) To improve students’ skills, more generally, in reading, writing, researching, and public speaking.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Students should demonstrate an understanding of a wide range of ideas, questions, and concepts in environmental theory, environmental studies, animal studies, green cultural studies, and ecocriticism.
2. Students should demonstrate their abilities to think critically about the theories and films in the course, using application, analysis, interpretation, comparison, contrast, argument, critique, and evaluation.
3. Students should be able to analyze the films using methods of film analysis and by applying the concepts, texts, questions and paradigms contained in the lectures and readings.
4. Students should be able to perform independent research, using the MLA bibliography and other methods, and to incorporate that research into an original scholarly essay and a group presentation. (Or if doing a multimedia project for the final project, students should incorporate their research and their arguments in an effective, organized, substantial work of multimedia. No Powerpoints will be allowed.)
5. Students should be able to formulate original, illuminating, and persuasive ideas about all the texts and films in the class. These ideas should reflect an understanding of the content of the course.
6. Students should be able to express their ideas in clear, logical, organized, concise, and persuasive ways, in both written and oral forms.

**Special Requirement outside of regular class hours:**
All students must attend at least one talk presented at the Hermanns’ Lecture Series **Friday, October 16th** and hand in a one-page response to the talk. This is required to pass the class.

**Required Textbooks and Other Course Materials**

Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*
Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film*
A stapler.

Purchase or rental of all the required films for the course and other films for your research paper is required. You may want to watch the films with other people in the course to offset the cost. I recommend that you join Netflix or the equivalent (all the films you are responsible for viewing on your own are available from Netflix except for Being Caribou which you must order at their website.) It is your responsibility to watch the films before class (unless otherwise noted.) The UTA library or your local public library may have copies of some of the films, but you will need to obtain the others by purchasing them online or by signing up for Netflix.com or an equivalent film rental service. Do NOT rely on your local video store for the films—they probably won’t be there. You may also want to purchase films through Amazon.

Requirements
You must complete all the required work in order to obtain credit for the course.
Participation: 10%
Individual Presentation: 10%
Group Presentation: 5%
Mid-Term Exam: 20%
Final Project: 25%
Final Exam: 30%

Exams
There will be one mid-term exam and one final exam. The exams may contain some identification and short-answer questions, but most of the points will be from essay questions. The final exam will be comprehensive. Bring bluebooks and pens for the exams.

Final Project
You will have the option of writing an 8-page research paper analyzing a topic in two or three films of your choice or creating a video or multimedia project having to do with environmentalism, sustainability, or animal studies.

Presentations
Two presentations will be required: one individual presentation and one small-group presentation. Your group presentation will be collaborative but it will also emerge from your final project.

The individual presentation analyzes and interprets the film we are discussing that day, by way of the theories of the class. Your presentation should contain 3 parts—theory, interpretation, and support/analysis: 1) explain the overarching theoretical/ethical/political/interpretive questions, concepts, or problems that you are bringing to the film; 2) explain your own significant thesis about the film: discuss your interpretation of the film, in terms of how it addresses the overarching questions or
theories with which you began; 3) support your thesis with specific examples from the film, including an analysis of one specific scene. You will be graded on the quality of the content, meaning how informed, substantial, rigorous, and illuminating the ideas are (25 points for theory; 25 points for interpretation; and 25 points for support/analysis) and the performance (25 for clarity, organization, effectiveness, and impact). Try to conclude with a discussion question for the class.

Do not merely retell the plot of the film or describe what happens—we have already read it and will not learn anything from a summary. The presentation should last exactly 13 minutes, including 3-4 minutes of film clips. Practice showing your film clips ahead of time.

**Participation**
Your active, informed participation is crucial to the success of the course. Carefully prepare for each class period by doing the reading and watching the films in a rigorous and inquisitive manner. You may have to watch the films two or more times before you are prepared for class. Make sure to apply the ideas from lectures and readings to the films and to compare and contrast the films to other films (before you get to class.) Keeping your own journal or notebook would be very helpful. Every day that you come to class you should have something valuable to say.

**Attendance/Punctuality**
I will grade on actual participation, rather than on mere attendance. However, if you miss class four times, I will lower your course grade and if you miss five classes you will fail the course. Everyone gets three absences; use them wisely. You do not need to tell me why you were absent—that is your own private business—just don’t miss more than three classes. If you come in after I have marked the rolls, that will count as an absence—so come to class on time.

**RESOURCES:**

**Librarian:** Rafia Mirza is the librarian for the English Department. You can contact her at (817) 272-7428 or at rafia@uta.edu. She also has a web page at: http://libguides.uta.edu/profile.php?uid=5641. She is going to create a “Subject Guide for Film” on the library’s website.

**Library Data Bases:** Use the MLA International Bibliography for most of your research; it is the essential bibliographic tool for English Studies. You may find full text essays on Project Muse.

**The Writing Center:** The Writing Center offers free help with your papers at any stage of the writing process. They are located in the Central Library, room 411. You can just walk in with your paper or you can make an appointment: http://www.uta.edu/owl/appointments.htm. They even offer an online lab: http://www.uta.edu/owl/. They also offer a helpful list of online resources: http://www.uta.edu/owl/resources.htm.
The English Department’s web pages:
http://www.uta.edu/english/undergrad/index.html

The OneBook web site: http://www.uta.edu/uac/one-book/?c=ONE-BOOK-2009-10
The OneBook is devoted to “Sustainability” this year; there will be many talks and events pertinent to this course.

Excellent web sites for our course:
http://www.netflix.com/ [Film rentals]
http://www.asle.umn.edu/ [Association for the Study of Literature and Environment]
http://www.biblioserver.com/asle/ [ASLE’s Online Bibliography]
http://www.greennuseum.org/ [Online “museum” of environmental art—excellent site!]
http://www.greencine.com/list?action=viewList&listID=1803 [Green Cine list of “ecofilms”.]
http://www.earthfilms.org/index.html [Earth Films cite, activist films.]
http://www.wsu.edu/~amerstu/ce/ce.html [Cultural Environmental Studies--excellent resource]
http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/ [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, includes videos.]
http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/ [Environmental Justice Resource Center]
http://www.scorecard.org/ [Scorecard Pollution information site.]
http://www.kstrom.net/isk/poca/pocahont.html [Native Opinions on Disney Film Pocohontas]
http://www.vectorsjournal.org/index.php?page=7&projectId=82 [Blue Vectors Journal, see “Redressing New Orleans in Katrina’s Wake.”]
http://trinityrivertexas.org/ “Living with the Trinity” by KERA.
http://www.blueearth.org/index.cfm Blue Earth Alliance: photography that makes a difference. [extraordinary photo collections with a purpose.]
http://www.eartotheearth.org/php/listen_sample.php [Ear to the Earth: a worldwide network of environmental sound art]
Also, of course: youtube.

Recommended Books [for final projects or just because you are interested]:
Bouse, Derek. Wildlife Films.
Chris, Cynthia. Watching Wildlife.
Haraway, Donna. Primate Visions.
Hochman, Jhan, *Green cultural studies: nature in film, novel, and theory.*
Wilson, Alexander. *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to Exxon Valdez.*
Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy.*
James Gustave Speth, *The Bridge at the End of the World: Capitalism, The Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability*

Finally, if you’d like to become an environmental filmmaker or new media artist: consider the summer Blue Horizons Environmental Media Initiative at UCSB:
[http://www.cftnm.ucsb.edu/Programs/EMI/Teaching/BHSplash.html](http://www.cftnm.ucsb.edu/Programs/EMI/Teaching/BHSplash.html)

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**Respect your fellow students, respect the classroom:**

1. **TURN OFF** all pagers, beepers, cell phones and other electronic devices! You may not have these devices turned on while in class. You may not text message or read email or engage in any other electronic activities during class. You may not use laptops in class.

2. Arrive to class **ON TIME.** It is distracting to both the professor and the students to have someone come in late. If you come in late, you will be marked absent.

3. Always arrive **PREPARED** to work. Every day we will have work to do in class. Some days we will work in small groups. If you are not prepared then you will not be able to contribute to the class or to your small group. You may be asked to leave class if you are not prepared. Also, remember that for English classes you **MUST BRING** whatever **TEXTS** we are discussing that day to class.

3. Treat your classmates with **RESPECT.** Learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We will often discuss controversial, volatile topics, so everyone needs to learn how to disagree with someone’s views, beliefs, or perspectives while maintaining a sense of civility. This is a rare skill in our culture, but a skill that is necessary for an educated, humane, democratic society.

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**Official UTA Policies**

**Grade Grievance Policy:** If you have a grade grievance first contact the instructor of the course. If you cannot resolve the issue with the instructor contact the English Department’s Grievance committee (ask the office staff for the name of the person chairing that committee.)

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw/ It is the student’s responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.**
**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).* All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Academic Integrity:** It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. According to the UT System Regents' Rule 50101, §2.2, "Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts."

**Student Support Services Available:** The University of Texas at Arlington has established a variety of programs to help students meet the challenges of college life. Support to students includes advising, counseling, mentoring, tutoring, supplemental instruction, and writing assistance. For a complete list of academic support services, visit the Academic Assistance resource page of the Office of Student Success Programs, [www.uta.edu/uac/studentsuccess/academic-assistance](http://www.uta.edu/uac/studentsuccess/academic-assistance). To help students address personal, academic and career concerns, individual counseling is also available. For more information, students are encouraged to contact Counseling Services [www.counseling.uta.edu](http://www.counseling.uta.edu) at (817) 272-3671 or visit a counselor in 216 Davis Hall.

**Electronic Communication Policy:** The University of Texas at Arlington has adopted the University “MavMail” address as the sole official means of communication with students. MavMail is used to remind students of important deadlines, advertise events and activities, and permit the University to conduct official transactions exclusively by electronic means. **Students are responsible for checking their MavMail regularly.** Information about activating and using MavMail is available at [http://www.uta.edu/oit/email/](http://www.uta.edu/oit/email/).

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**Syllabus**

David Ingram, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema.* [GS]
Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*  [FEC]
Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film*  [AF]
Packet=  [P]
Handout = [HO]

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**Introductions**

**Week One. August 25 & 27.**
Tuesday: Introduce class, introduce ourselves.
Thursday: [Read the following books or chapters from books as noted and be prepared to discuss in class. Bring all these books to class.]
Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film.*
Lawrence Buell, “Preface” “The Emergence of Environmental Criticism,” “Glossary” [FEC].
Jonathan Burt, “Prologue” [AF].
David Ingram, “Preface,” and “Introduction” [GS]

The Trouble with Wilderness: Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality

Week Two. September 1 & 3.
Tuesday: Film: *Deliverance* (John Boorman) 1972.
David Ingram, “Wilderness in Hollywood Cinema”
William Cronon “The Trouble with Wilderness” (HO)

Lawrence Buell, “The Ethics and Politics of Environmental Criticism” and “The Future of Environmental Criticism” [FEC]

Week Three. September 8 & 10.
Tuesday: Film: *The Lion King* (Disney) 1994.

Thursday: Film: *Princess Mononoke* (Hayao Myazaki) 1997.

Picturing the Invisible

Week Four. September 15 & 17.
Tuesday: Film: *Silkwood* (Mike Nichols) 1983.
David Ingram, “Risks of Nuclear Power” [GS]
Phil Brown, “When The Public Knows Better: Popular Epidemiology Challenges the System” [P].


Environmental Justice

Also watch: *Our Land, Our Life* (about Western Shoshone and mining. 25 min. on youtube)
Read: “The Principles of Environmental Justice” and “Environmental Justice Timeline” [P]
[Review sections on environmental justice in Buell FEC.]
Thursday: Film: *Trouble the Water* (Carl Deal, Tia Lessing) 2008.
Also look at “Blue Velvet” new media project on Vector Journals.org (about Katrina)
Read online before class: Julie Sze, “Toxic Soup Redux: Why Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Matter after Katrina” and Neil Smith, “There’s No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster” at “Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences.”
http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/

[Recommended, not required: Majora Carter’s inspiring talk on TED, videos on youtube about “environmental justice.”]

**Week Six. September 29 and October 1.**
Tuesday: **Mid-Term Exam**

### Animals I: The Horrific, the Postmodern, and the Hybrid

Stacy Alaimo, “Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films” [P].
David Ingram “Introduction” to Section II: 69-72 [GS].

**Week Seven. October 6 & 8.**
David Ingram, “African Wildlife from Safari to Conservation” [GS]


### Animals II: Real Animals

**Week Eight. October 13 & 15.**
Tuesday: Film: *Winged Migration* and “The Making of Winged Migration” (watch both!)
Jonathan Burt, “Vision and Ethics” [AF]

Thursday: No class. Time off to attend the Hermann’s Lectures.

**Friday October 16th:** The Hermann’s Lecture Series: “The Greening of English Studies.”
Please attend at least one talk, if not more; the talks at 11:00 and 2:00 are especially pertinent for our class.

**Week Nine. October 20 & 22.**
Tuesday: Film: *Grizzly Man* (Treadwell and Herzog) 2005.
David Ingram, “Wolves and Bears” [GS]

Thursday: Film: *Being Caribou* (Leanne Allison and Diana Wilson) 2005.
(You’ll need to order the film through:
http://www.beingcaribou.com/necessaryjourneys/film.html.)

**Activist Films**

Week Ten October 27 and 29.

Tuesday: Film: *Everything’s Cool* [Daniel B. Gold and Judith Helfand.]
Bill McKibben, “After Growth” and “Afterword” from *Deep Economy* [P]
James Gustave Speth, “Looking into the Abyss” [P].

Thursday: Watch *Texas Gold* in class.

**Week Eleven. November 3 & 5.**
[Dr. Alaimo will be at the University of Minnesota; Mathew Lerberg will teach the class.]

Tuesday: Film *Sharkwater* (Rob Stewart) 2006.

Thursday: Watch *Tree-Sit: The Art of Resistance* (James Ficklin) in class.

**The Blue Horizon: Adventure Science, Aesthetics and the Sea**

Week Twelve. November 10 & 12.
Tuesday: Film: *Open Water*
David Ingram, “North American Ocean Fauna” [GS]

November 12:
Thursday: Open office hours for extra help with papers, class readings, etc.
Conclusions

Week Thirteen. November 17 & 19.
Tuesday: Day off to finish papers! I will be in my office during class time and during my office hours. Come see me if you need help!

Thursday: Final Projects Due at the start of class. Plan group presentations in class.

Tuesday: Group Presentations.

Thursday: No class. Thanksgiving Holiday.

Week Fifteen. December 1 and 3: Dead Week.
Tuesday: Group Presentations

Thursday Group Presentation (if we need the time). Course and instructor evaluations. Discuss Final Exam.

Final Exam: Tuesday, December 8, 11:00-12:20
Bring pens, loose paper, and bluebooks.
Dr. Alaimo

Reading Nature

Literature
1. Is Nature a mere “setting,” or is it more like a “character?” In other words, does it serve as a mere background for the human events or is it a sort of being or actor in its own right? Is it central to the theme or plot? I.e. does it influence what happens or inspire ideas?
2. Analyze the structure, the diction, the voice, the tone, the narrative perspective, the plot, and the imagery or symbols--keeping in mind the questions and concerns that follow.

Rhetoric
3. Who is the audience for the text? Does the text try to persuade the audience to think or do something? If so, what? Most importantly, how does the text try to persuade its audience and do you think it is effective?

Aesthetics
4. Does the text allude to, emerge from, develop, or transform a particular aesthetic of “nature?” Does it present nature as beautiful or not? Why? What sort of beauty is it? Is the aesthetic of the text itself similar to or different from that of the nature it represents?
5. How are the aesthetic dimensions of nature related to literary, epistemological, ethical, and political issues?

Epistemology
6. Does the text seek to see, know, and represent nature as it really is? Or, does nature serve as a symbol for something human or cultural? Does the text represent the effort to “know” nature as a difficulty or struggle? If so, why is it difficult to understand nature?
7. Does the text mark off the limitations of human knowledge, or does it assume we can know and understand nature in a complete and unbiased way? Why is this important?

Ethics
8. Within the text, does nature reveal any ethical ideals to humans? How?
9. Conversely, what does it mean, within this text, for humans to act toward nature in an ethical manner?
10. On what does the text base such an ethics--e.g., ultimate human self interest, the value of nature itself, sympathy toward natural creatures, the beauty of the landscape, the rights of animals or nature, the value of preservation, the importance of biological diversity, sustainability, the ideal of wilderness, the ideal of “the wild”?

Politics
11. How is the concept of nature related to particular human groups, such as women, African Americans, Native Americans, the lower classes, etc.? If nature is associated with a
particular group of humans is that a good or bad thing? Analyze whether the text promotes any specific human political agenda by linking it with nature.

12. Does the text promote environmentalist activism or politics? How?

13. If the text succeeded, would individual readers think or act differently? If so, explain how. If the text succeeded, what would American culture be like?

Film

14. What qualifies, do you think, as “nature” in the film? Does the film represent something identifiable as a ‘realistic’ form of nature or does a monster or other sort of creature symbolize nonhuman nature?

15. Consider how various genres evoke different expectations of nature—e.g., documentaries, realism, fantasy, children’s cartoons, horror films, action films. How is nature represented differently within these genres? Do some films play with, contradict the expectations of their genre? How? Why?

16. Analyze the perspective or POV of various shots and scenes: is nature shot from above, at eye level, or below? How are close ups, pans, crane shots, and film speed used? How does the perspective embody a particular attitude, ideology, ethics, or politics?

17. Is nature given a perspective in the film? Do we see through the eyes of the animals or other creatures? Is this supposed to be realistic or not? What effect does this have?

18. What do you make of the differences—which are sometimes vast—between how the animals are represented within the film and how they were treated in the making of the film? (Consider The Birds and Winged Migration).

19. What strategies, structures, and perspectives do you think are particularly effective or ineffective for activist films?

20. Consider how particular films negotiate the demand for scientific accuracy and authority on the one hand and many viewer’s desire for a more personal or more narrative perspective. How do the “objective” and the “subjective,” the scientific and the political, the expert and the activist perspectives work with or against each other in various films?