

INTO THE GREAT WIDE OPEN

NORTH AMERICAN NATURE WRITING

FROM HENRY DAVID THOREAU TO CORMAC MCCARTHY

Course number: ENP.01028UB · **Lecturer:** Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt

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Location: <https://unimeet.uni-graz.at/b/bra-xyo-8tf-vcp> (UniMeet)

Description: Early in T.C. Boyle's novel *A Friend of the Earth* (2000), we learn that the first-person narrator, a self-declared environmentalist and "Earth Forever!" activist named Tyrone Tierwater, considers himself an "animal man." Despite its apparently postmodernist and partly surreal composition, Boyle's novel seems typical of a long tradition in North American literature that has – since its beginnings – capitalized on issues of nature and survival. This course deals with various historical phases and (sub)genres of U.S. American and Canadian 'eco literature' ('ecolit'), from transcendentalist visions of American identity (Emerson's essay "Nature," 1836, and Thoreau's study *Walden*, 1854) as well as turn-of-the century nature writing (e.g., Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known*, 1898, and Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, 1903) to modernist and postmodernist reflections (e.g., Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," 1925; Margaret Atwood's feminist treatise *Survival*, 1971, and Cormac McCarthy neo-Western narrative *All the Pretty Horses*, 1992). Analyses and close readings of these texts will be embedded into the theoretical frameworks of Ecocriticism and Animal Studies.

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block. The experts will upload their Moodle discussion questions 6 days in advance!

Aims: The course aims at examining the cultural paradigms and patterns of North American nature writing (including fiction/non-fiction written in the USA and Canada).

Assessment: **A.)** regular attendance (*no more than 2 absences!*) and active in-class participation, as well as *nine* (!) substantial entries in the discussion forum (1/3); **B.)** presentation as part of an expert session plus 3-page handout and online questions (1/3); **C.)** research proposal (2 pages) and final paper (12-15 pages) (1/3). You need to pass each section to pass the course.

Deadline for Final Papers (including declaration of honesty): Monday, July 19, 2021. You need to upload a digital version on Moodle and create a link to a version on GoogleDocs. There is no extension of this deadline. Please indicate when handing in your final paper if you would like detailed feedback!

GUIDELINES AND UNIMEET ETIQUETTE

Set your screen name

Make sure to set your screen name to the name you want to be addressed by, typically your first and last name, so that your instructor and your fellow students can refer to you by your proper name in discussions. If you want to, you can also add your preferred pronouns (he/she/they) in parenthesis so others know how to refer to you.

Use your webcam

All of us constantly communicate via facial expressions. Being able to communicate with one another is an important aspect of your online learning experience. A puzzled look tells your instructor to spend more time explaining a particular point; nodding can move the discussion to the next issue. In order to

have a functioning and communicative seminar atmosphere, participants will thus be expected to have their webcams on.

Mute your microphone (when not in use)

Switch your microphone to mute whenever you aren't talking – especially if you are in a noisy environment or if you are working in a particularly large group. If everybody does so, the background noise of the digital classroom will be drastically reduced.

Presenting your Project

As a presenter you will gain full rights to moderate the session and share your screen. On UniMeet, you can share video clips externally (e.g., via YouTube).

Indicate questions in the chatroom (as a participant)

Indicate questions in the chat forum. The course instructor and/or the presenter can then ask you to step in and formulate your question with your audio on.

ASSESSMENT:

A.) Regular attendance (no more than 2 absences!) and active participation (1/3);

B.) Expert Session (incl. uploading of material onto Moodle course site) (1/3);

C.) 2-page research proposal plus max. 15-page thesis in a nutshell (including title page, table of contents, and bibliography). Please use templates on Moodle! (1/3).

You need to pass each section to pass the whole course

A.) REGULAR ATTENDANCE, CLASS PARTICIPATION, AND MOODLE DISCUSSION FORUM

Regular attendance and **active participation** in class sessions are crucial to the success of the course. *Absences* must be explained in writing, preferably prior to class. No more than two absences are allowed. You are expected to be present in our digital meeting not only having read the assigned material, but also prepared to fully engage with the material, ask questions, offer perceptive interpretations, and even argue for your way of reading the text at hand. Note: There might be **pop quizzes** (i.e., unannounced online tests at the beginning of a session) to check whether you have read the materials.

You need to **post at least nine substantial entries** in the **Moodle discussion forum**. Make sure you are well informed *before* answering the three discussion questions: Read the required text. Conduct some **additional online research** according to your own research interests. When making an entry, refer to useful materials you found on the internet (clips, articles, etc.). Ideally, you would also **respond to other entries** already uploaded by other students.

B.) EXPERT SESSION

As an expert you will prepare **three short questions** for the discussion forum (to be uploaded 6 days in advance), potentially together with links to **clips** or **images**. Show your discussion questions to me 1 week before your session (or send them to me via email)!

In class, you can start with some **essential information** on the topic (look at the keywords on the syllabus first), then pose questions to trigger a **lively discussion**. Choose **examples** related to the topic of the session that you can discuss in class (for example, in group work; use the format of the 'breakout rooms'). Be **interactive**. Show images and clips, launch a game, pick up questions. Do not stick to your schedule *too much*!

Revise your presentation carefully after the session and **upload it** together with a **handout** (3 pages) on Moodle within a week after the session!

C.) RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND FINAL PAPER

A **research proposal** (2 pages) is due around mid-term. Look for the exact dates in the course agenda below. The form for the research proposal is available on Moodle.

The **final paper** (max. 15 pages, including title page, table of contents, and bibliography, 4,000 –5,000 words) should be typed (Times New Roman, 12pt, 1.5-spaced, using one side of the sheet only, pages numbered). The paper should show your name, your student email address, the course title, the instructor's name, the date of submission, and the number of words. Primary and secondary sources need to be cited according to the Uni Graz guidelines for style and format.

The **deadline** for submission of the final paper is **Monday, July 19, 2021**. Keep in mind: A good paper is a finished paper. There is **no extension** of this deadline.

SYLLABUS

- 10 March Introduction – North American Nature Writing**
Basic texts:
Lawrence Buell, from *The Environmental Imagination* (1995).¹
Greg Garrard, from *Ecocriticism* (2012).
Keywords: Ecocriticism; Environmental Imagination; Nature/Culture; Nature Writing; Pastoral.
- 17 March Academic Writing – Preparing the Right Questions, Developing the Right Thesis**
Lecture by Prof. Brandt (will be uploaded on Moodle).
Additional text (optional):
Janet E. Gardner, from *Reading and Writing about Literature – A Portable Guide* (2013).
Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing* (2012).
Keywords: Argument; Conclusion; Introduction; Research Questions; Structure; Thesis; Titles.
- 24 March Transcendentalism I – Emerson and the Transparent Eyeball**
Main text (reading required):
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (1836).
Additional text (optional):
Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric," from *Leaves of Grass* (1855).
Keywords: Beauty; Solitude; Spirituality; Transcendentalism; Transparent Eyeball; Universe; World.
- 14 April Transcendentalism II – Thoreau and Self-Reliance in the Woods**
Main text (reading required):
Henry D. Thoreau, from *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (1854) and "Walking" (1862).
Additional text (optional):
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (1841).
Keywords: 'Man as part of nature'; Meditation; Self-Reliance; Simplicity.
- 21 April Animal Writing and Anthropomorphism**
Main text (reading required):
Ernest Thompson Seton, "Bingo My Dog," from *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898).
Additional text (optional):
Ernest Thompson Seton, "Lobo," from *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898).
Keywords: Anthropomorphism; Darwinism; Dog Imagery; Evolution; Primitivism.
- 28 April Naturalism and Evolutionary Theory**
Main text (reading required):
Jack London, "To Build a Fire" (1908).
Additional text (optional):
Jack London, excerpts from *The Call of the Wild* (1903).
Keywords: Determinism; Dog/Wolf; Naturalism; Survival of the Fittest.

¹ All print texts are available on Moodle.

5 May **Modernism and the Lost Generation**
Main text (reading required):
Ernest Hemingway, "Big Two-Hearted River, Pt. I & II" (1925).
Additional text (optional):
T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land" (1922).
Keywords: Iceberg Theory; Lost Generation; Nihilism; Swamp
Image; River Imagery; Symbolism; War.

12 May **Independent Study Unit- Research Proposal**
No class! Create a 2-page research proposal for your final paper.

19 May **Biology and Nature Philosophy**
Main text (reading required):
John Steinbeck, excerpts from *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1941/1951).
Additional text (optional):
John Steinbeck, excerpts from *Of Mice and Men* (1937).
Keywords: Biology; Holistic View; Non-Teleological Thinking; Social Anthropology.

26 May **Countercultural Poetry**
Main text (reading required):
Gary Snyder, from *Turtle Island* (1975).
Additional text (optional):
A. James Arnold, "Animal Tales and American Identities" (1996).
Keywords: Beat Generation; Counterculture; Coyote Image; Hippies; Native American Folklore.

2 June **Canadian Nature Writing**
Main text (reading required):
Margaret Atwood, from *Survival* (1972); ch. 1-3.
Additional text (optional):
Margaret Atwood, ch. 21, 24.27 from *Survival* (1972) & Introduction to *Strange Things* (1995).
Keywords: Arctic; Canadian Identity; Garrison Mentality; Malevolent North; Survival; Victim.

9 June **Indigenous Canadian and U.S. Fictions about Nature**
Main text (reading required):
Thomas King, from *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993).
Additional text (optional):
N. Scott Momaday, excerpts from *House Made of Dawn* (1968).
Thomas King, "A Coyote Columbus Story" (1993).
Keywords: Cherokee; Coyote Image; First Nations; Hawkeye; Indigenous Writing; Trickster; Water.

16 June **Nature and the Neo-Western**
Main text (reading required):
Cormac McCarthy, excerpts from *All the Pretty Horses* (1992).
Additional text (optional):
Gretel Ehrlich, from *The Solace of Open Spaces* (1985).
Keywords: Cowboy Myth; Frontier; Individualism; Masculine Ethos; Mexico; West.

23 June **Climate Fiction and the (M)Anthropocene**
Main text (reading required):
T.C. Boyle, excerpts from *A Friend of the Earth* (2000).
Additional text (optional):
Cormac McCarthy, excerpts from *The Road* (2006).
Keywords: Anthropocene; Climate Change; Environmentalism; Global Warming; Manthropocene.

30 June **Life Writing and Self-Discovery**
Main text (reading required):
Cheryl Strayed, excerpts from *Wild* (2012).
Additional text (optional):
John Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (1997).
Keywords: *Bildungsroman*; Escapism; Identity; Self-Discovery; Wilderness.



DUE DATE
RESEARCH PROPOSAL



FINAL PAPER
DUE DATE: July 19, 2021