

**English 358 – American Environmental Expression:
Literature, Culture, and Nature
MWF, 1–1:50, Wall 415**

Professor Ethan Mannon

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Office Hours: MWF 10am-noon; TR 1:30-2:30; and by appointment



Course Description:

To refer to America as “Nature’s Nation”—as literary critic Perry Miller did in 1967 with a book by that title—hints at the way the nonhuman environment defines so much of America’s history and culture. When nonnative explorers and adventurers first sighted “the green breast of the new world” (that’s novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald), they were astonished by the wealth of natural resources they encountered. Their writings read like catalogues of abundance: here, they said, were to be found superfluities of fur, fish, and timber. Several centuries later in 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner argued in his Frontier Thesis that America was defined by its relationship to the natural world, and to the existence of free land in particular. The frontier which was now closed, he boldly announced, was responsible for American democracy and the American character in general. Finally, according to filmmaker Ken Burns and the folks at PBS, “America’s Best Idea” was its National Parks system. And they may be right: the protection of wildness (and wilderness) in this country set a global precedent.

All of which is to say that a course on the American Environment seems appropriate. In this class we’ll examine a vast array of environmental expression: poetry, nonfiction, landscape paintings, photographs, and even “music” from a wide range of artists who were contemplating the relationship between humans and the water they floated on, the land they walked across and worked upon, as well as the plants and animals with which they shared space.

We’ll also pay attention to the scholars and critics who study the nonhuman environment and environmental writing by keeping several questions in mind: How has the meaning of *nature* changed over time? What counts as “environmental writing”? How has the field been organized, and what are the problems and limitations of these systems?

Student Learning Objectives for Ideas and Innovations: US Courses:

- 1) Students will investigate an idea or innovation that illuminates the past, present, or both. (CT)
- 2) Students will evaluate information about an idea or innovation using a variety of appropriate methods. (IL/CT)
- 3) Students will analyze an idea or innovation from multiple disciplinary perspectives. (PS)
- 4) Students will communicate knowledge of an idea or innovation using oral and written methods. (WC/OC)

Texts*:

- Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*. ISBN: 0385486804.
- Ron Rash, *Saints at the River*. ISBN: 0312424914.
- Sue Hubbell, *A Country Year*. ISBN: 0395967015.
- *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. ISBN: 9780393946345.

*I will also provide PDF essays, poems, and excerpts from several authors— Thomas J. Lyon, Captain John Smith, Thomas Jefferson, Richard White, Louis Bromfield, Wendell Berry, among others—to supplement our course texts. All readings not found in the *Norton Book of Nature Writing* or one of the other required texts are indicated with asterisks in the Calendar of Readings below.

Assessment:

15% -- **Midterm:** based on readings and lectures from the first half of the course.

15% -- **Final Exam:** based on readings and lectures from the second half of the course.

10% -- **Response Essay***

20% -- **Issue Paper***

30% -- **Commonplace Book***

10% -- **Quizzes:** unannounced; questions based on readings and/or lectures and **Active Course Participation:** Students will need to demonstrate determined engagement with the course material through their contributions to class discussion and/or exchanges with their professor via email or during office hours.

*I will provide detailed assignment sheets for those items marked with an asterisk

Policies:

1) Attendance: Regular attendance is required and will be taken at the beginning of every class meeting. Each student is permitted 4 absences (10% of course). Mandatory university-sponsored extracurricular activities that cause a student to miss an ENG class do not count towards the four absences. (These must be communicated to the instructor in advance.) For every absence after that, the student's final course grade will be reduced by 5 percentage points. Three tardies equal one unexcused absence. Any student with more than 10 absences for any reason over the course of the semester will automatically fail the course. Students with regularly-scheduled extracurricular activities that conflict with the class are advised to switch sections.

2) Honor Code: We the students of Mars Hill University, pledge ourselves to up-hold integrity, honesty, and academic responsibility in and out of the classroom.

3) Honor Pledge: On my honor, I have neither given nor received any academic aid or information that would violate the Honor Code of Mars Hill University.

4) Academic Integrity: When there are possible violations of academic integrity, the MHU Academic Integrity Guidebook outlines procedures for: 1) classifying the violation into one of three possible categories (minor, standard, and major), 2) reporting possible violations, 3) appealing reports of violations, and 4) how reported violation records will be kept. See the MHU Academic Integrity Guidebook for full descriptions of these procedures.

5) Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. It is intellectual theft. It includes not only obvious instances, such as intentionally submitting under your name work done by someone else (for example, copying an essay, or parts of an essay, from the Internet or a print source, or turning in an essay

written by another person), but also less overtly intentional acts, such as presenting someone else's ideas or words as your own without citing all sources.

Any clearly provable** instance of plagiarism may result in an immediate grade of F for the class. The suspicion of plagiarism (without clear proof), intentional or possibly unintentional, may result in a grade of zero for the assignment and the possibility of other class penalties (e.g., lowering of the class participation grade, etc.). ALL cases of plagiarism are reported to the student's academic advisor and the Assistant Vice President for Student Development.

**clearly provable = the faculty member finds all or part of the plagiarized text in another source authored by someone else.

6) Privacy: Due to privacy concerns, students may not record (photography, audio, or video) any portion of the class meeting without prior permission from the course instructor.

7) Assignment Formatting: Papers should be printed in black ink, and double-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12 point Times New Roman font. Place your name, the date, and my name in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Number all of the pages, except page 1. Fasten the pages with a staple. Format all citations and your Works Cited page according to MLA standards.

8) Late Work: To receive full credit, hard copies of assignments must be handed in at the beginning of class on the due date. A late penalty of 10% will be assessed for each business day past the due date. For example, an assignment handed in on Friday that was due on Tuesday could earn no higher than a 70%; the same assignment handed in on the following Monday could earn no higher than a 60%. I will make exceptions to the above policy at my own discretion.

9) Nondiscrimination: Mars Hill University does not discriminate on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, sex, age, or disability.

10) Accommodation: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities.

If you have an Academic Accommodation Plan (AAP) issued through MHU Disability Services, please arrange a time to present your plan and to discuss your specific accommodation needs. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation and do not have an approved AAP please contact please contact Cassandra Pavone (cpavone@mhu.edu).

11) Gender Pronoun: I will refer to you using any pronoun that you prefer, as long as you make me aware of your preference via email.

Calendar of Readings, Assignments, and Exams

***Readings designated with an asterisk are available on Moodle as PDFs**

Unit 1: Explorers and Transcendentalists; Surveying and Sauntering

W, 22 August: Syllabus,

Course Introduction,

*Thomas J. Lyon, "A Taxonomy of Nature Writing"

F, 24 August: *Captain John Smith, from *A Map of Virginia* (pages 80-100)

M, 27 August: William Bartram, from *Travels* (64-76)

W, 29 August: Ralph Waldo Emerson, from *Nature* (140-44)

F, 31 August: Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" (168-69; 180-205)

M, 3 September: John Wesley Powell, from *Explorations of the Colorado River* (230-36)

→Commonplace Book I

Unit 2: Wilderness, Parks, and Recreation

- W, 5 September: *Thomas Jefferson, from *Notes on the State of Virginia*: “Query V,”
Thoreau, from *The Maine Woods* (205-11)
- F, 7 September: John Muir, “A Wind Storm in the Forests” (250-58),
Aldo Leopold, “Marshland Elegy” and “Thinking Like a Mountain” (376-82)
- M, 10 September: Wallace Stegner, “Glen Canyon Submersus” & “Coda: Wilderness Letter”
(504-19)
- W, 12 September: Jon Krakauer, from *Into the Wild*, Author’s Note, Chapters 1-4 (3-37)
- F, 14 September: Jon Krakauer, from *Into the Wild*, Chapters 5-7 (38-69)
- M, 17 September: Jon Krakauer, from *Into the Wild* Chs 8, 10, & 13 (70-85, 98-102, 127-32)
- W, 19 September: Jon Krakauer, from *Into the Wild*, Chapters 14-15 (133-156)
- F, 21 September: Jon Krakauer, from *Into the Wild*, Chapters 16-Epilogue (157-203)
- M, 24 September: *Richard White, “Are you an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a
Living?”
→ **Commonplace Book II**
- W, 26 September: Evelyn White, “Black Women and the Wilderness” (1062-67),
Terry Tempest Williams, “The Clan of One-Breasted Women” (1091-98)
- F, 28 September: **Review for Midterm**
→ **Krakauer Response Essay Due**

M, 1 October: **MIDTERM**

Unit 3: Farms, Gardens, and Labor

- W, 3 October: Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, from *Letters from an American Farmer* (51-54,
59-63)
- F, 5 October: Susan Fennimore Cooper, from *Rural Hours* (163-68),
Mabel Osgood Wright, “The Story of a Garden” (299-304)
- M, 8 October: *Louis Bromfield, “The Return of the Native,” “Up Ferguson Way,” and
“Gardens and Landscapes”
- W, 10 October: Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” (382-97); * “February” and “November”
- F, 12 October: Wendell Berry, “The Making of a Marginal Farm” (728-36); *Poetry
- M, 15 October: FALL BREAK
- W, 17 October: Jamaica Kincaid, “Alien Soil” (1015-22),
*bell hooks, “Touching the Earth”
- F, 19 October: Michael Pollan, “Weeds Are Us” (1078-90)
→ **Commonplace Book III**
- M, 22 October: Ron Rash, *Saints at the River*, Prologue, Chapters 1-3 (pages 3-65)
- W, 24 October: Ron Rash, *Saints at the River*, Chapter 4 (67-98)
- F, 26 October: Ron Rash, *Saints at the River*, Chapter 5 (99-123)
- M, 29 October: Ron Rash, *Saints at the River*, Interval, Chapters 6 & 7 (127-180)
- W, 31 October: Ron Rash, *Saints at the River*, Chapters 8-10 (181-237)

Unit 4: Domesticated, Wild, and Working Animals

F, 2 November: Ernest Thompson Seton, from *Wild Animals I Have Known* (305-12),
Luther Standing Bear, "Nature" (326-31)

M, 5 November: Annie Dillard, "Living like Weasels" (867-68, 876-79),
Rick Bass, from *The Ninemile Wolves* (1114-19),
Farley Mowat, from *Never Cry Wolf* (561-66),
W.H. Hudson, "My Friend the Pig" (269-74),
Noel Perrin, "Pig Tales" (644-50)

W, 7 November: Faith McNulty, "Mouse" (554-60),
Trudy Dittmar, "Moose" (850-62),

→ **Rash Response Essay Due**

F, 9 November: PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION, (NO CLASS)

M, 12 November: Alice Walker, "Am I Blue" (863-67),
Vicki Hearne, "Calling Animals by Name" (1034-38)

W, 14 November: *Wendell Berry, Poetry

F, 16 November: Sue Hubbell, *A Country Year*, Foreword and SPRING (xiii-32)

M, 19 November: Sue Hubbell, *A Country Year*, SUMMER (33-84)

→ **Commonplace Book IV**

W, 21 November; F 23 November: THANKSGIVING BREAK

M, 26 November: Sue Hubbell, *A Country Year*, FALL (85-126)

W, 28 November: Sue Hubbell, *A Country Year*, WINTER (127-174)

F, 30 November: Sue Hubbell, *A Country Year*, SPRING (175-221)

M, 3 December: **Review for Final Exam**

→ **Issue Paper**

FINAL EXAM: Thursday, 6 December, 2:30-4:30