

The Day After Tomorrow:  
Climate Change Fiction from 1850 to the Present



Josh Haner/The New York Times

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We are living in a moment where the reality of massive, human-made global climate change has become unavoidable. In report after report, we are faced with the changes that are already taking place in our world. In response to the oncoming and present disaster there has been a call for literature that explores and imagines this contemporary problem. Article after article describes the rise of “cli-fi” or fiction that deals with climate change, even as critics such as Amitav Ghosh ask “[where is the fiction about climate change?](#)”

While Ghosh’s question is addressed at the immediate literary present, in this class we will be asking it more broadly. As long as the novel has existed, novelists have been recording or imagining changes in their environment. The age of coal and the age of the novel are linked together. The British and American writers of the nineteenth-century were responding to radical changes in their landscapes. In the age of the Industrial Revolution, and the newly vast urban center, the landscape, and the seasons themselves, were quickly becoming unrecognizable. From the smog in London to the loss of the buffalo in the Great Plains, the scale of human-made environmental change was rapidly expanding with the force of industrialization and globalization and novelists were rapidly trying to keep up.

In this class we will be exploring the ways in which writers attempted to represent environmental change in the nineteenth century alongside writers who are attempting to do the same now. Throughout the class we will be asking questions about representation and imagination: how can you write about a world in flux? Is “Cli-Fi” a genre and if it is what does it look like? How does the effect of environmental disaster change depending on your class, or race, or gender, or location? What does it mean to imagine the end of humanity or the end of the world? How do you write narratives about environmental loss? This course aims to familiarize

students with key works in ecocriticism and narrative studies, with particular attention to questions of class, race, and gender.

As this is a junior tutorial, the course will be focused on the writing of a major research paper (20-25 pages). Many of the steps of writing a long paper are built into the syllabus (a prospectus, an annotated bibliography, a full draft). We will also have a class trip to Houghton to explore the resources available through the Harvard library.

#### ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

Attendance and Participation: 20% - Attendance is mandatory and participation in the discussion is expected. In order to aid our discussion we will have small, pre-class assignments before each meeting (except on days when you have other things due for this class). They will sometimes be one to two paragraphs of reflection on a text we are discussing in class that day, or maps of key characters and places, or brief re-writings of scenes, etc. This also includes one fifteen-minute presentation at the beginning of a class introducing the tutorial to a critical essay we are reading that day (you will sign up at the beginning of the semester).

Short Paper: 15% - 5-6 pages. This will be a short close-reading paper on one of the

Prospectus and Bibliography: 5%- a one-page prospectus and a bibliography with at least seven sources due on the same day.

Full Draft: 10 % - one full, 20-page draft of your final paper, due three weeks before the final draft is due, as well as participation in the paper conference.

Final Paper: 40 % - 20-25 pages double-spaced. Please note that the most important requirement of this course is the completion of the junior essay. **If you do not complete the junior essay, you will not receive a passing grade for this tutorial.**

#### REQUIRED TEXTS:

All critical readings will be on the course website, along with the short stories and poems. Feel free to find any copy of these books (online, in the library, from a bookstore, borrowed from a friend), but please do bring a copy to class

Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*  
Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'urbervilles*  
Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem*  
Richard Powers, *The Overstory*  
Zadie Smith, *NW*  
Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones*  
Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Flame Citrus*  
Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*  
Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange*

## SCHEDULE

(readings may change depending on the interests of the students)

### Part One: Origins

- 1           The Pastoral Past: American and English geography and industry at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, introduction to the history of ecocriticism as well as Coral Davenport, "[Major Climate Report Describes a Strong Risk of Crisis as Early as 2040](#)"

I will send these to you over break, please read before the first day:  
Poems by John Clare and selections from *Walden* and Raymond Williams's "Town and Country" from *The Country and the City* and selections from Jonathon Bate's *The Song of the Earth* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*

- 2           Imagining the end of the world:  
Thomas Hardy, phases 1- 5 of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*  
Return to Thoreau reading from break  
    -- Gillian Beer, "Finding a Scale for the Human" from *Darwin's Plots*  
    -- Lawrence Buell, selections from *Writing for an Endangered World*

- 3           *Tess* to end  
Thomas Hardy, "The Darkling Thrush"  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "The Cry of the Children"  
Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" (on website)  
    -- Allen MacDuffie selections from *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination*.  
    -- Sukanya Banerjee, "Who, or What, Is Victorian? Ecology, Indigo, and the Transimperial" from *Victorian Studies*

- 4           Colonialism and the Changing Landscape:  
Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*  
Zitkala-Sa, selections from *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings* (on website)  
    -- Caroline Fraser, "On the Frontier" from *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder*

-- Jodie Byrd, "Introduction" from *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Empire*

**\*\*\*First Short Paper Due\*\*\***

**Part Two: Imagining the end of the world**

**Movie Screening: *Wall-E* (2008)**

- 5 Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*  
-- Timothy Morton, selections from *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*  
-- Donna Haraway, selections from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*

**\*\*\*Abstract with Bibliography Due\*\*\***

- 6 Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Flame Citrus*  
-- Richard Jeffries, selections from *After London*  
-- Richard Crownshaw, "Speculative Memory, the Planetary and Genre Fiction"  
-- Ursula K. Heise, selections from *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*

**Part Three: The Changing Landscape**

**Movie Screening: *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012)**

- 7 Richard Powers, Part I of *The Overstory*  
Selections from *Silent Spring*  
-- Michael Malay, "Why Look at Animals? Creaturely Encounters in Philosophy and Literature"
- 8 *The Overstory* to the end  
-- Peter Wohlleben, selections from *The Hidden Life of Trees*
- 9 Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones*  
-- Wai Chee Dimock, "World History According to Katrina"

-- Christopher W. Clark, "What Comes to the Surface: Storms, Bodies, and Community in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*"

**\*\*\*Full Draft Due**

**Part Four: The Global City**

- 10 Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange*  
-- Chiyo Crawford, "From Desert Dust to City Soot: Environmental Justice and Japanese American Internment in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*."  
-- Ryan Palmer, "Citrus noir: Strange Fruit in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*"
- 11 Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem*  
-- Anne-Lise François, "Ungiving time: reading lyric by the light of the Anthropocene"

**--- Paper Workshop ---**

**Movie Screening: *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004)**

- 12 Zadie Smith, *NW*  
-- Amitav Ghosh, selections from *The Great Derangement*  
-- Stacy Alaimo, selections from *Bodily Natures*

**13 Conference Presentation of Final Paper**

**\*\*\*Final Paper Due (to the department and the tutor). Submit to the dropbox and my mailbox (2<sup>nd</sup> floor Barker) by 5pm \*\*\***

**COURSE POLICIES**

Extensions and late assignments

I will grant extensions, which have been asked for at least 48 hours in advance, as long as I feel it will not hurt the student's ability to complete later assignments. **No extensions for the final paper.** Any late work without an extension will lose a full letter grade per day that it is late.

### Electronic Devices

Laptops may only be used for taking notes and accessing electronic resources directly related to the class (assigned readings, research questions that come up in class etc.) If you are using it to go on Facebook or waste your (and our) time in any way you will be noticed and it will result in a lower participation grade and the loss of your electronic privileges.

### Academic Integrity

You are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic.

It is very important that in all your assignments you properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work and that you distinguish your own analyses from analysis you've derived from printed or electronic sources. (For guidance on how best to engage with other people's thinking and writing, see the Harvard Guide to Using Sources, <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>). Plagiarism—the appropriation without acknowledgment of writing and ideas that are not your own—is a serious academic offence and will be reported to the Honor Council of the College.