

ENGL 275 – American Literature and the Environment  
Fall 2023, Hendrix College

Dr. Alex Vernon  
office hours: MWF 11-12; TTh by appt (Teams)  
\*I do not hang out on MS Teams...\*

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In the United States there is more space  
where nobody is than where anybody is.  
This is what makes America what it is.

Gertrude Stein, *The Geographical History of America* (1936)



James Henry Beard, *The Circus Announcement* (1866)

## ENGL 275 – American Literature and the Environment (Fall 2023)

1	Wed, 23 Aug	Course Introduction
2	Fri, 25 Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Review syllabus; <a href="#">New York Times online access</a>; <b>WE 1 due</b></li> <li>◇ In-class: Ivens, <i>Rain</i> (1929); Goulish, "On Criticism"</li> </ul>
<b>Roots, Fears, Dominion</b>		
3	Mon, 28 Aug	William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"
4	Wed, 30 Aug	F.W. Murnau, <a href="#">Nosferatu</a> (1922)
5	Fri, 01 Sep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Farago, "<a href="#">The Impressionist Art of Seeing and Being Seen</a>"</li> <li>◇ Assign Essay Transformation</li> </ul>
	Mon, 04 Sep	Labor Day – no class
6	Wed, 06 Sep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ <b>Essay Transformation Due</b> (WE 2)</li> <li>◇ In class: The Bible, Genesis 1-3; Pope Francis, Encyclical</li> </ul>
7	Fri, 08 Sep	H.G. Wells, <i>The Island of Dr. Moreau</i> , Wells/Prendrick "Intro" thru Chpt. 13. <b>Not the intro with Roman numerals!</b> <span style="color: cyan;">A</span> <span style="color: magenta;">B</span>
8	Mon, 11 Sep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ <i>The Island of Dr. Moreau</i>, Chpt. 14 – 22 / end <span style="color: yellow;">C</span> <span style="color: green;">D</span></li> <li>◇ Assign Essay #1</li> </ul>
9	Wed, 13 Sep	Edgar Rice Burroughs, <i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> , Chptrs I – XI <span style="color: magenta;">B</span>
10	Fri, 15 Sep	<i>Tarzan</i> , Chpts XII – XX <span style="color: yellow;">C</span> <span style="color: green;">D</span>
11	Mon, 18 Sep	<i>Tarzan</i> , Chpt XXI – end <span style="color: cyan;">A</span>
12	Wed, 20 Sep	writing day / no class
13	Fri, 22 Sep	draft workshop (bring hard copy; submit Teams copy)
14	Mon, 25 Sep	required individual conferences [Mon- Thurs] / no class
15	Wed, 27 Sep	required individual conferences [Mon-Thurs] / no class
<b>Settling In</b>		
16	Fri, 29 Sep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ <del>Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"</del></li> <li>◇ <b>Essay #1 Due</b></li> <li>◇ In class: Cather, "Nebraska: End of the First Cycle" (1923)</li> </ul>
18	Mon, 02 Oct	Willa Cather, <i>My Antonia</i> , Intro and Book I <span style="color: yellow;">C</span>
19	Wed, 04 Oct	<i>My Antonia</i> , Book II <span style="color: green;">D</span> <span style="color: cyan;">A</span>
20	Fri, 06 Oct	<i>My Antonia</i> , Books III, IV, V <span style="color: magenta;">B</span>
21	Mon, 09 Oct	<i>Yonnondio</i> , chpts. 1-5 <span style="color: cyan;">A</span> <span style="color: green;">D</span>
22	Wed, 11 Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ <i>Yonnondio</i>, to end (plus "fragments") <span style="color: magenta;">B</span> <span style="color: yellow;">C</span></li> <li>◇ Assign Essay #2</li> </ul>
	Fri, 13 Oct	Fall Break – no class

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23	Mon, 16 Oct	writing day / no class	
24	Wed, 18 Oct	draft workshop (bring hard copy; submit Teams copy)	
25	Fri, 20 Oct	required individual conferences [Thurs-Tues] / no class	
26	Mon, 23 Oct	required individual conferences [Thurs-Tues] / no class	
<b>Into the Anthropocene? Back to the Wild? Into the Digitocene?</b>			
27	Wed, 25 Oct	◇ <b>Essay #2 Due</b> ◇ In-class: excerpts from Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" (1977); <i>Bluey</i> 3.18, "Rain" (2021)	
28	Fri, 27 Oct	Susan Griffin, "Matter"	
29	Mon, 30 Oct	Margaret Atwood, <i>Surfacing</i> Part I	D
30	Wed, 01 Nov	<i>Surfacing</i> Part II	A B
31	Fri, 03 Nov	<i>Surfacing</i> Part III	C
32	Mon, 06 Nov	<b>No Class (av away)</b>	◇ James Marsh, <i>Project Nim</i> (2011) ◇ Rupert Wyatt, <i>Rise of the Planet of the Apes</i> (2011)
33	Wed, 08 Nov		
34	Fri, 10 Nov		
35	Mon, 13 Nov	◇ Don DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> , chpts. 1-16 C ◇ Assign Essay #3	
36	Wed, 15 Nov	<i>White Noise</i> , chpts. 17-21 D	
37	Fri, 17 Nov	<i>White Noise</i> , chpts. 22-33 A	
38	Mon, 20 Nov	<i>White Noise</i> , chpts 34-end B	
	Wed, 22 Nov	Thanksgiving Break	
	Fri, 24 Nov	Thanksgiving Break	
39	Mon, 27 Nov	Benh Zeitlin, <i>Beasts of the Southern Wild</i> (2012)	
40	Wed, 29 Nov	Alex Garland, <i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)	
41	Fri, 01 Dec	writing day / optional conferences	
42	Mon, 04 Dec	READING DAY	
	Tues, 12 Dec	◇ <b>Essay # 3 due</b> (Teams) at 10:30 a.m. ◇ Course Evaluation certificate due (email) at 11:30 a.m.	

**Group A:** Henry Burchett, Jude Welky, Carter Hillis, Havin Powers, Corrie Hollewell

**Group B:** Catherine Duncan, Henry Spade, Ethan Eubanks, Chloe Chandler, Sarah Shook

**Group C:** David Kamanga, Jordan Buchanan, Susana Boeyink, Britain Steward, Alyssa Craig

**Group D:** Hailey Zelaya, Cohen Calogero, Grant Howard, Helaina Ballis, Eddie Hoehn-Smith

## ENGL 275 – American Literature and the Environment (Fall 2023)

### **Course Description**

European settlers of the North American continent brought with them old ideas about the natural world, their relationship to it, and thus what it means to be human. Those ideas both directed and were modified by their lives in the so-called new world. We are studying texts by people of European descent because their outlook and legacy have shaped “our” relationship to the natural world—and to each other, in historically racist and gendered ways. The course begins in the late nineteenth century, in the wake of Charles Darwin’s revelations and in the midst of the industrial revolution. The course ends with texts that touch on our present, as we continue to flee nature for the artificial and as nature forcefully reasserts itself.

The purposes of this course are: (1) to use literary expression to explore America’s complicated relationship with the land it inhabits, (2) to introduce you to the reading and interpretation of literature at the college level, and (3) to refine your writing skills for collegiate work.

Because this course introduces you to the reading and interpretation of literature in a more general way, discussion will not always directly concern depictions of the natural world. We will look at narrative technique, structure, literary inheritances, and economics, gender, religion, and racism, sexuality, and violence (all of which, it should be noted, bear on an individual text’s portrayal of its environment). In the end, literature and film are about the human condition across the full spectrum of its glory and ugliness. Treat these subjects with due sensitivity and each other with due respect. I am committed to being mindful that we come together in our studies with different backgrounds, different experiences of the world, different sensibilities and sensitivities. If anything occurs that strikes you as inconsiderate (or worse), please do not hesitate to bring it to my attention.

Active student engagement—with the texts, with classmates, with the instructor, with your own imaginations and critical eye—will constitute the primary course activity. Outside class, you will write three formal essays. My role is to foster your talents and to help you succeed. As this course fulfills the college’s W1 writing requirement and as I am committed to your success, we spend time working on your writing in and out of class, and I am available for additional individual coaching (don’t forget about the Writing Center and other resources). ENGL 275 is a [Literary Studies learning domain](#) course.

As a Writing Level 1 (W1) course, ENGL 258 has the following learning goals: (1) To draw on, engage, and cite the ideas of source texts to lend clarity, insight, and rhetorical force to one’s own writing. (2) To generate insight; to convey significant ideas in writing. (3) To write with organizational purpose, reflecting a coherent and meaningful order, both at the paragraph level and in the essay as a whole. (4) To write effective prose in keeping with standard English patterns of grammar, usage, punctuation, sentence structure, and style. (5) To develop an understanding of how a process of preliminary writings, drafting, and revision can improve an essay’s ideas and shape as well as the writer’s control over written language and prose style. You must receive a “C” grade on one essay to receive a “C” or higher in the course and receive W1.

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### **Requirements and Points (final grade based on 100-point scale)**

- ✗ Class Engagement (10 pts): Based upon attendance and demonstration of preparedness and engagement.
- ✗ Close Reading Prompt (7.5 – 11.25 pts): On assigned days, identify a short passage in that day’s reading that genuinely makes you curious or fascinates you. The point of curiosity or fascination should not be a “what happened” or “what happens” plot point, or not only a plot point. Why is this moment strange? Might understanding it help us understand the whole text? Submit a one-page prompt that (1) retypes the moment of intrigue; and (2) expresses your curiosity/fascination about it. Don’t interpret, but in 2-4 sentences indicate as specifically as possible what about this language grabs your attention. Submit it in the novel’s Teams folder by 11:00 the day we discuss that reading. We draw on these for class discussion. You must do one per novel, so six minimum, at 1.25 points per. You can also do one additional one per novel, on a different day, for up to three novels, for 1.25 each.
- ✗ Writing Exercises (8-10 pts): Low-stakes assignments, graded on completion. The first focuses on your background in literature and writing (2 pts), the second on essay structure (4 pts), the final on a film not discussed in class the week I’m away (2 pts). You can do an extra on the other film that week for 2 more points. See ape week assignment.
- ✗ Essay Drafts (2 pts/each): A full draft for the first two essays.
- ✗ Three Persuasive Essays (15/20/25 pts): Detailed prompts for each are introduced in class. You are not required to do any research, though you are welcome to bring knowledge from other sources or courses to bear. We do in this course what professional writers do—draft, receive feedback, rework, revise. Essays are 6-7 pages, double-spaced. Your best essay will be graded on the 25-point scale, your second best on the 20-point scale, your third best on the 15-point scale.
- ✗ Style Revision (4 pts/each): For your first two essays, I will indicate a prose improvement to do. Revise and resubmit prior to the next writing day.
- ✗ Course Evaluation (2 pts): This is an important reflection opportunity.

SAMPLE GRADES	no extras 75% essay avg	all extras 75% essay avg	all extras 85% essay avg
Class Engagement (10)	8	8	9
CR Prompts (7.5-11.25)	7.5	11.25	11.25
Writing Exercises (8-10)	8	10	10
Drafts (4)	4	4	4
Essays (60)	45	45	51
Revisions (4)		4	4
Course Eval (2)	2	2	2
Final (101.25 / 100)	74.5	84.25	93.25

## ENGL 275 – American Literature and the Environment (Fall 2023)

### **Other Policies**

- ✘ All members of this community are expected to contribute to a respectful and welcoming environment. If you believe you have been the subject of discrimination, contact the Dean of Students Office (Mike Leblanc, leblanc@hendrix.edu 501-450-1222 or the Title IX Coordinator (Allison Vetter titleix@hendrix.edu, 501-505-2901). If you have ideas for improving the classroom experience, talk with me. See the [Hendrix non-discrimination policies](#) and the English [Department's statement on purpose and diversity](#).
- ✘ **Electronic devices:** E-readers for course material are permitted, except for cell phones. A few cautions: (1) Do not use e-readers for convenience at the expense of active reading. You are still expected to take notes, highlight passages, add comments, etc. (2) Laptops/tablets can be used in class as e-readers. Do not abuse this privilege. Keep in mind: You owe yourselves time away from a screen, and nothing is better for active reading than underlining and annotating paper copies, and taking notes by hand.
- ✘ The **syllabus** is subject to revision as the course progresses.
- ✘ **Disabilities:** Hendrix College accommodates students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law. Students should contact Julie Brown in the Office of Academic Success (505.2954; brownj@hendrix.edu) to begin the accommodation process. Any student seeking accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the instructor as soon as possible.
- ✘ **Your Well-Being:** Many students face mental and/or physical health challenges. If your health status will impact attendance or assignments, please communicate with me as soon as possible. If you would like to implement academic accommodations, contact Julie Brown in the office of Academic Success (brownj@hendrix.edu). To maintain optimal health, utilize campus resources like Hendrix Medical Clinic or Counseling Services (501.450.1448). Your health and wellbeing are important. **Eat well, get sleep, and exercise!**
- ✘ **Email:** Email will be used to contact the entire class for communicating changes to the syllabus and other matters. Check your Hendrix account daily.
- ✘ **Academic Integrity:** High standards of honesty and fairness in academic pursuits are central to intellectual inquiry, character development, and community integrity. Familiarize yourself with the [statement of Academic Integrity](#). Frequently, errors in documentation and attribution are not deliberate attempts to pass off another's ideas and words as one's own, but rather misunderstandings of how to give that other person sufficient credit. Consult with me on potential confusion so we can avoid problems.
- ✘ **Late essays:** For Response Papers, you lose ½ point for every day one is late. For Writing Exercises and essay drafts, it is a full point. Essays #1 and #2 lose two points per day. The Final Essay cannot be late. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must consult me at least one week prior to the due date (except in the case of actual emergencies, of course).

## **AI-Assisted Writing**

AI-assisted writing is new for all of us! On the one hand, I discourage its use. I don't believe it can produce the kind of original work I'm asking you to achieve; I don't believe it can think the way your unique mind thinks or capture your voice. Our goal is to foster your creative critical abilities and your craft talents. We are creating knowledge based on personal encounters with texts; we are not repackaging information. On the other hand, I recognize that AI is upon us, and that it might prove a useful learning tool.

If you choose to use AI, you must adhere to academic standards for attribution, validation, and transparency. This means that you must (1) fully document all material that you did not generate [using MLA guidelines](#), (2) check information generated by AI and take full responsibility for its accuracy, (3) identify where and how you used any AI tools, and (4) **reflect in writing** on how it contributed to your work. You will thus need to append a page or two of additional work. The key word here is "reflect."

Assessment of your work might include how you improve on and surpass the initial contributions of the AI.