

**COURSE SYLLABUS – LLCU230
2023-2024 – WINTER SEMESTER**

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**LLCU 230
ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATIONS**



Landscape II, Landscape Series, Levi Van Veluw, 2008
<http://www.levivanveluw.nl/work/landscapes#2>

Course Description

In the 1970s, French environmentalist René Dubos calls for “thinking globally and acting locally.” However wise and well-intended, this saying glosses over another level at which environmental concerns and beliefs play out. Even if many environmental problems are discussed at international summits and often regulated by transnational agencies, our relationships to the planet continue to be imagined, discussed, and given meaning in specific linguistic and cultural contexts. Despite the effects of globalization, cultural contexts differ widely from one community to another. The way we imagine nature and the environment is embedded in the languages we speak, the books we read, the films we watch. In short, environmental imaginations vary greatly. Literature is an excellent window into these different environmental imaginations because it both reflects and subverts the cultural context in which it emerges.

In this class, we will focus on environmental imaginations that grapple with the long and violent history of Western thought. Our analysis of literary texts from East Germany, Italy, Quebec and Turkey will allow us to

examine some of the broader issues that are at the heart of human interactions with the non-human world. Our approach falls under the larger umbrella of the environmental humanities, a field that examines how critical thinking, cultural approaches, philosophical and political arguments, in short, the methods of the humanities, can help us understand and respond to the environmental crisis.

The last few weeks of class will be devoted to recent developments in the environmental humanities that harness digital technologies and methods to create new communities of concern, critique and care in response to climate issues. This section of the course is built around the pedagogical objectives of a research grant awarded by the McGill Bieler School of the Environment (for more information, see www.dig-eh.org).

Instructional Method

Given that this is a seminar-style course, you will be expected to contribute to class discussions regularly. I will introduce new topics and theories, but you will give shape to the course content through your questions, critiques, and discussions. The subject of environmental issues lends itself well to debate but can also be controversial. Please come to class with an open mind, prepared to respect perspectives that may be in opposition to your own.

Participation and attendance are key to a seminar-style course. I realize that not all students feel comfortable raising their hand to ask questions and those that do can dominate discussion. With this in mind, I will integrate different forms of participation in the class structure: think-pair-share exercises, small-group discussions, short writing activities, on-line discussion forums, etc. I will also create as open and inclusive environment as possible in the classroom.

Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Define and explain critical terms and ideas related to the environmental humanities such as realism, apocalypse, narrative perspective, climate fiction (literary terms); environmental justice, the commons, non-human rights (ethical and political terms); extinction, risk, time, gender (theoretical terms);
- Analyse thematic and formal differences in the representations of nature, non-human and human relationships in the literary texts studied in class;
- Investigate and summarize relevant cultural and linguistic differences that shape discourses and experiences of nature and representations of the environmental crisis;
- Identify and critique the experiences, cultural texts, tropes and ideas that have shaped your own environmental imagination;
- Communicate critical ideas in written (response papers, online discussion board) and oral form (regular in-class discussions and group work);
- Collaborate with peers, share ideas, and exchange feedback to advance understanding of one aspect of the digital environmental humanities.

Required Readings

Fiction

Calvino, Italo. *Marcovaldo, or The Seasons in the City*. Originally published in Italian (1963), translated by William Weaver (1983).

Tekin, Latife. *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills*. Originally published in Turkish (1983), translated by Ruth Christie and Saliha Parker (1993).

Wilhemy, Audrée. *White Resin*. Originally published in French (2019), translated by Susan Ouriou (2021). House of Anansi Press.

Wolf, Christa. *Accident: A Day's News*. Originally published in German (1987), translated by Heike Schwarzbauer and Rick Takvorian (1989).

* All novels are available at the Paragraphe Librarie/Bookstore, located at 2220 McGill College.

Theory

Cohen, Jeffrey and Stephanie Foote. *The Cambridge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. Cambridge UP, 2021.

Nelson, Melissa K. "Getting Dirty: The Eco-Eroticism of Women in Indigenous Oral Literatures," in *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*. Ed. Joanne Barker. Duke UP, 2017. 229-260.

* The chapters from this e-book are available on the McGill Library website.

** I will occasionally assign additional articles that will be posted as PDFs on the MyCourses website.

Evaluation and Course Elements

Attendance, participation	10%
Student-led discussion	15%
Short response papers	20%
Group project	15%
Take-home final exam	40%

Attendance and participation (10%)

You are expected to come to all classes and participate regularly. Please arrive a few minutes before class starts and do not leave before the end of class, as this can be distracting for other students. You will be penalized **1% per class** for unexcused absences to **a total of 10%**. If you miss more than ten classes, you will automatically fail the course.

Class participation means that you come to class with the readings done, questions prepared, interesting passages underlined, comments and critiques noted in the margins. We will regularly break into small groups so that you will have a chance to discuss your questions with your peers.

Student-led discussion (15%)

With one or two other students, you will lead a short 15-minute discussion about one of the chapters we will be reading in the *Cambridge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. After briefly presenting two of the main ideas in the chapter in your own words (5 min), you will then illustrate one of these ideas by using an example of your

own choice from contemporary culture (5 min), followed by questions for students for the final 5 minutes. You may also choose to sprinkle your questions throughout the presentation rather than leaving them until the end.

Dates/chapter choice: TBD (second week of class)

Short response papers (1 x 5% + 2 x 7.5% = 20%)

Over the semester, you will write three of four **500-word short response papers** using prompt questions that will be posted online two weeks before the paper is due. These papers will give you the chance to develop further your own critical framework for analysing environmental imaginations. You will post these responses on the *MyCourses* discussion board before the due date. Late papers will be penalized 10% per day.

Due dates: Jan23 (T), Feb20 (T), Mar12 (T), April 4 (Th)

Group project (15%)

The group project will allow you to explore one aspect of the emerging field of the digital environmental humanities. You will present your findings in a poster format that the entire group will be responsible for creating and organizing. You will work closely with one of the two research assistants that are developing the website and pedagogical tools for the Digital Environmental Humanities website (see www.dig-eh.org for more information). A more detailed description of the group project will be made available on *MyCourses*.

Group poster presentations: April 9 (T)

Take-home final exam (35%)

The take-home exam will be an eight- to ten-page, double spaced text (2500-3000 words), organized around a set of definitions, short answer questions and long essays. You will be required to develop your own critical concepts, apply theoretical ideas used in class, and interpret passages from the course material. If plagiarism is suspected, I will ask you to produce previous drafts of your answers as well as photocopies of all your sources. You will submit your take-home exam on *MyCourses*. No late submissions will be accepted.

Date: TBD

Policies & Additional Statements

- The learning platform *MyCourses* will be used to post Keynote presentations, date changes, assignment descriptions, additional readings, etc. You are expected to check the site regularly (at least twice a week) for any changes or updates.
- Assignments will all be submitted online. You will be penalized 10% for late submission the day of the assignment and an additional 10% for each day after that.
- Laptops are permitted in class if all students agree that they are essential to taking notes. No other work should be done at this time.
- Email will be answered Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm and not on weekends or evenings.
- Please turn off mobile phones and any other devices that might make noise during class.
- Please email me if you would like me to refer to you by a different name than the name indicated in your student record or to inform me of your pronouns.
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, you may submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Please be aware that impeccable grammar is required whether you choose to write in French or in English. // *Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue.*
- McGill University is on land which long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

LLCU230 – Environmental Imaginations Course Content & Schedule

* Please be aware that this schedule may change if we need to spend more/less time on particular texts. More details about readings will be posted on *MyCourses* after class so be sure to check the Announcements section of the class website Tuesday and Thursday after class. (T = Tuesday; Th = Thursday)

Week 1 – Introduction to Environmental Humanities

Jan4 (Th)

Watch excerpts from “Developing the Environmental Humanities”

(<http://vimeo.com/38246572>)

Read Chapter 1 “Introduction: Climate Change/Changing Climates” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*

Module 1 – Endings, Apocalypse, Disenchanted Nature

Week 2 – The end(s) of nature

Jan9 (T)

Read Wolf, *Accident: A Day's News* (first half of the novel)

Jan11 (Th)

Read Chapter 9 “Apocalypse/Extinction” in *The Cambridge Companion*

Week 3 – Nuclear disaster, science & gender

Jan16 (T)

Read Wolf, *Accident: A Day's News* (second half of the novel)

Jan18 (Th)

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 20 “Risk” in *The Cambridge Companion*

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 5 “The Nature of Gender” in *The Cambridge Companion*

Module 2 – Returns, (Post)Pastoral, Re-enchanting Nature

Week 4 – Urban (climate) changes

Jan23 (T)

Read Calvino, *Marcovaldo, or the Seasons in the City* (first half of the novel)

Jan25 (Th)

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 8 “Climate Fictions” in *The Cambridge Companion*

FIRST SHORT RESPONSE DUE – Jan 23

Week 5 – Storying non-humans

Jan30 (T)

Read Calvino, *Marcovaldo, or the Seasons in the City* (second half of the novel)

Feb1 (Th)

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 10 “Multispecies” in *The Cambridge Companion*

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 19 “New Materialism” in *The Cambridge Companion*

Module 3 – (Re)Cycles, Tales, Disenchanting Nature

Week 6 – Urban spaces, toxic bodies

Feb6 (T)

Read Tekin, *Berji Kristin: Tales from Garbage Hills* (first half of the novel)

Feb8(Th)

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 2 “The Commons” in *The Cambridge Companion*

Week 7 – Reimagining waste, environmental justice

Feb13 (T)

Read Tekin, *Garbage Hills* (second half of the novel)

Feb15 (Th)

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 3 “Rights” in *The Cambridge Companion*

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 17 “Waste” in *The Cambridge Companion*

SECOND SHORT RESPONSE DUE – Feb13

INTERLUDE – Cinematic Environmental Imaginations

Week 8 – Gleaning, ecological practices

Feb20 (T)

Watch Agnes Varda’s *The Gleaners and I*

Feb22(F)

Watch Agnes Varda’s *The Gleaners and I*

Module 4 – Origins, Myth, Re-enchanting Nature

Week 9 – Place & plants (as) protagonist

Feb27 (T)

Read Wilhelmy, *White Resin*

Feb29(F)

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 12 “Plants” in *The Cambridge Companion*

READING WEEK

March 4 - March 8

Week 10 – Rethinking (climate) times

Mar12 (T)

Read Wilhelmy, *White Resin*

Mar14 (Th)

Student-led discussion – Read Chapter 4 “Time as Kinship” in *The Cambridge Companion*

THIRD SHORT RESPONSE DUE – Mar12

Week 11 – Embodied entanglements

Mar19 (T)

Read Wilhelmy, *White Resin*

Mar21 (Th)

Read Nelson “Getting Dirty: The Eco-Eroticism of Women in Indigenous Oral Literatures”

Module 5 – Urgencies, Digital Ecologies

Week 12 – Digital Environmental Humanities

Mar26 (T)

What is DEH? Overview of the field – DEH community & landscape

Mar28 (Th)

DEH tool box – mapping, visualizing, text analysis

Week 13 – Project development

April 2 (T)

April 4 (Th)

FOURTH SHORT RESPONSE DUE – April 2

April 9 (T)

STUDENT POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Class discussion and review

FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM

(Date TBD, submitted online, *MyCourses*)