ENGLISH 157D: LITERATURE OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

FALL 2022

Wednesday
1:30-4:30pm

3 Credits
WAYS ED & All

Instructor: Sara Michas-Martin
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"Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought."
  -Audrey Lorde

"History tells us what happened, the novel tells us what it felt like."
  -E.L. Doctorow

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We are living in a time of expedient environmental change caused by human influence. This class walks the boundary between science and art to consider how the literary imagination has metabolized the science and psychology of the moment. How do recently published works of poetry and fiction reflect our evolving relationship to animals, natural resources, weather, and the idea of ‘nature’? Can stories and poems as cultural products raise ecological awareness, individually and collectively? Can they present a future that might otherwise seem inaccessible: advance our understanding of the link between social justice and climate justice?

Out of the long history of American nature writing grew environmental writing, which in recent decades has grown rapidly to include marginalized voices and re-conceived categories such as eco-poetry and climate fiction. These moves signal a shift in attitude, the need to recognize how different populations relate to, affect, and are impacted by their environments, and the potential for literature to communicate what articles, reports or empirical evidence cannot.

We’ll engage texts by aesthetically and experientially diverse writers with these questions in mind. Students have the option to respond to readings through short critical papers, creative responses, or proposed action projects. This small, discussion-based seminar aims to foster interdisciplinary exchange—students from across campus disciplines are encouraged to enroll.