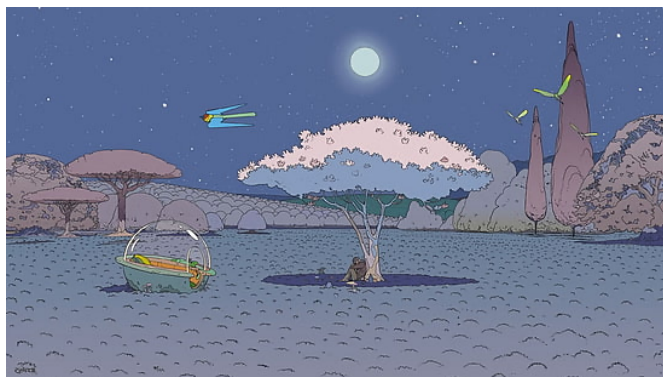


Emily Balch Seminar: Fantastic Fiction and the Environment

Section 025: T/Th, 1:10-2:30 p.m.

Section 026: T/Th, 2:40-4:00 p.m.

Fall 2026, English House 1



Instructor: Dr. W. DiPasquale (she/her)

E-Mail: wdipasqual@brynmawr.edu

Office Hours: English House 214, T/Th, 4:00-5:00 p.m. & by appt.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Required Texts:

Callenbach, Ernest. *Ecotopia*. Banyan Tree Books, 2014.

Short stories will be posted to Moodle, as well copies of critical articles written by academics, activists, and genre authors. These copies are provided to allow you to interact with your reading by underlining important concepts and making annotations, all techniques that will improve your reading comprehension and recall. If possible, please print your readings and annotate. You should also have a separate notebook to take notes in during class. We will also watch a few films during class, and these films should also be thought of as course texts. [Writing with Sources](#) will also be available online.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Description: Despite dragons, spaceships, and alien encounters, fantasy and science fiction stories are “a means of understanding,” claims author Ursula K. Le Guin, and “a mirror of the real.” How, then, do we reconcile the imaginary landscapes presented in these stories with our actual and pressing environmental crises? What value does fantasy have, if it not as simply “escapist” or “untrue” stories? In this seminar, we will explore current environmental concerns through the dual lens of news media coverage of environmental issues and genre fiction, specifically science fiction and fantasy literature and film. We will investigate how the alternate views of the environment presented in works of fantastic fiction encourage us to rethink our assumptions regarding the human-made problems affecting our environment today. We will also use these works to examine our personal relationship towards the environment and consider the duty we have, if any, to help preserve and protect the world around us. Can fantastic stories spur real world action? We attempt to answer this question by applying several different eco-critical themes—deep ecology, feminist ecology, ecological utopias/dystopias, environmental racism—and reading excerpts from news media, eco-critical scholars, and fantastic fiction (*The Lord of the Rings* and works by Ursula K. Le Guin, Paolo Bacigalupi, and Ray Bradbury, among others). We will

also watch several visual works, including the films *Soylent Green* and Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*. Students will complete a series of analytical writing assignments, reflections on course readings, and student-led discussions.

Course Goals:

- To study and practice the craft of college writing, with particular emphasis on the thesis-driven essay
- To understand the act of writing as a process; to reflect upon one's own process and to discover ways to vary or improve it
- To develop skills of critical analysis in academic writing and discussion
- To refine reading and writing techniques
- To learn how to use sources

Course Requirements:

Attendance Policy—This class is based on a seminar model, which means most of what we will be doing involves discussion, exchange of ideas, and hands-on work. This means that attendance is critical to your success. Therefore, I expect you to arrive to class on time, prepared, and ready to participate. Repeated late arrivals will count as absences, as will leaving during class time. Please make arrangements for any personal breaks before or after class time. **If a student misses more than 2 class meetings, their final grade will be lowered by a half letter (B+ to B, for example) for each subsequent absence. 2 late arrivals (more than 5 min. after class starts) to class meetings=1 absence. Regular personal breaks will also count as an absence.**

Participation—You are expected to complete all reading/viewing assignments on time; help your classmates learn by your responses to their writing or other class work; make thoughtful contributions to the conversation that reflect analysis and synthesis of readings and/or prior discussions; demonstrate respect for the views and learning of fellow students; attend all required conferences; and actively engage in activities and learning assignments. Please remove earbuds, headphones, hoodies, etc. to indicate engagement. **Any sleeping, texting, unapproved use of electronic devices, doing homework for your other courses, or any other off-task behavior will count as an absence.**

Conferences—Students must meet with the instructor for conferences at least four times during the semester. Conferences may also be scheduled throughout the semester as needed.

Use of Electronics and Generative AI—To promote your learning as well as those seated around you, our default learning in this class is to not use computers, tablets, and phones in class. There will be some days when we will use electronics, but they will be limited to specific activities. You should bring any notes and readings you need to access for discussion and class work in print form to class; we can use the shared class computer to project any sections of text for collective analysis. **Unapproved use of electronics will count as an absence.**

You are not permitted to use AI in this class. I understand that some people find it useful in the brainstorming process, but just as you cannot build physical muscle if the machine lifts the weights for you, you cannot build your intellectual muscles if you let the machine brainstorm and think for you. In addition, generative AI can never be used as a source. It cannot provide a reference for your reader to trace back. **Any AI use will be considered as plagiarism** and treated accordingly.

Discussion Assignment—Each student will sign up to facilitate 1 brief in-class discussion on a reading/topic of their choice. More guidelines will be distributed in class regarding the discussion assignment.

Informal Writing—Informal writing assignments will consist of regular (weekly) 250-350 word journal responses, writing activities, and/or Moodle posts. These assignments will primarily include students' reflections on the assigned readings, but they can also include connections to class discussions. Writing activities will serve as starting points for discussions and for the formal papers.

Essays and Revisions—Students will complete a series of formal essays with particular attention paid to the process of generating and organizing ideas, drafting, receiving feedback, and implementing substantial revisions to those essays. More guidelines will be distributed in class regarding each essay assignment.

Submitted Work—All submitted formal work should be typed in 12pt Times New Roman font, double spaced; name, course, instructor, assignment title, and date must be in the upper left corner of the first page. Each page must include a header with the student's last name and page number. Submitted work must conform to current MLA format requirements. **Late submissions of informal writing are not allowed and cannot be made up. Essays submitted past the due date will receive a 2-pt. deduction per day.**

Assignments & Grading:

Participation	15%
Discussion Assignment	5%
Informal Writing	20%
Essays	60%
Total	100%

The assignments in this class are specifically designed to provide you with instruction and practice with academic and reflective writing. There may be more writing than you are used to in this class, so please be prepared for this. I am available to speak with you about any concerns or needs for additional help you may have so that you can be successful in this class.

Grading Standards, Written Work:

"A" work is substantial, complete, and well organized. A technically clean paper (one with no major structural or mechanical problems) without substance or evidence of deep engagement with the topic will not receive an "A." A "B" paper is competent, complete, and clean. The ideas are clearly presented and show evidence of thoughtful engagement with the topic. "C" work is satisfactory and complete. It is adequately written and clear. It shows some thought and effort. "D" work is marginal and/or incomplete. It is poorly designed and executed.

OTHER NOTES

The Writing Center:

Professional writers and published scholars routinely seek feedback on their work from trusted peers. In addition to the feedback that you receive from your classmates and me, the advice of tutors at the Writing Center will prove invaluable to you this semester and for the rest of your career at Bryn Mawr College. To jumpstart the habit of seeking feedback, I require you to visit the Writing Center at least twice during the semester. Please ask the tutor to send a copy of her report to me so that I am aware of your hard work and initiative. Appointments may be made online at www.brynmaur.edu/writingcenter.

Access and Accommodations:

"Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Access Services Director, Deb Alder, or

email her at dalder@brynmawr.edu to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>)”

Bryn Mawr’s Title IX Policy:

“Bryn Mawr/Haverford College is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive living and learning environment where all can feel secure and free from harassment. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic violence, and dating violence are violations of Bryn Mawr/Haverford’s policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Bryn Mawr/Haverford faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination, harassment, or violence, know that help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Bryn Mawr/Haverford employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the Bi-College Title IX Coordinator. Information about the College’s Sexual Misconduct policy, reporting options, and a list of campus and local resources can be found on the College’s website: [Bryn Mawr Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)”

Honor Code:

I take the Bryn Mawr [Honor Code](#) very seriously, and I trust that you do too. We will go over proper ways to use and cite sources in class, but the student bears primary responsibility for understanding the nature of academic honesty and avoiding plagiarism. If you have any questions at any time about the proper etiquette of using source material, please contact me immediately.

Course Schedule

Please note that this course schedule may be revised at any point during the semester. If you are absent, please contact a classmate or your instructor to keep apprised of any changes.

Unit 1: Defining Ecocriticism

Week 1

9/1 T Discussion of students’ current knowledge about fantastic fiction and the environment. Review of course syllabus. Discussion of expectations for critical reading, note-taking. Discussion of informal writing/journal responses.

- Due next class:
 - Read excerpts from Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* & from the article “Rachel Carson’s Ecological Critique.”
 - Journal #1

9/3 Th Introduction to Ecology, Literary Theory, & Ecocriticism

- Due next class:
 - Read “The Peace of Wild Things” and “The Dream” by Wendell Berry & “For All” by Gary Snyder.

- Read “It’s Genre, Not that There’s Anything Wrong with It!” by Arthur Krystal & “Literary Fiction vs. Genre Fiction” by Steven Petite

Unit 2: The SF/Fantasy Genre

Week 2

9/8 T Interpreting Literature through an Ecocritical Lens; What is Genre Literature? What Do We Know About Fantastic Fiction & How Those Genres are Defined?

- Due next class:
 - Read the article “The Role of Science Fiction” by Ben Bova (pp. 3-14) and “Prophets and Mirrors: Science Fiction as a Way of Seeing” by Ursula K. Le Guin
 - Journal #2

9/10 Th The Goals & Purposes of Science Fiction & “A Fable for Tomorrow”

- Due next class:
 - Read excerpts from *Science Fiction* by Adam Roberts (pp. 6-7 and 19-27) and *A World Without Us* by Alan Weisman

Unit 3: Science Fiction and the Environment

Week 3

9/15 T Science “Faction”

- Due next class:
 - Read the short stories “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury and “Time Capsule Found on a Dead Planet” by Margaret Atwood.
 - Read news articles about nuclear war and testing, TBD.

9/17 Th Silent Earth Stories. Introduction to Critical Paper 1

- Due next class:
 - Read writing resources
 - Writing Activity 1 & 2

Week 4

9/22 T Writing Instruction

- Due next class:
 - Watch [*Soylent Green*](#)
 - Digital streaming [link](#) available on Tripod; use your Bryn Mawr login to access
 - Read writing resources
 - Writing Activity 3 & 4

9/24 Th Eco Thrillers & Ecotastrophies: The Dystopian World of *Soylent Green*.

- Due next class:
 - Read the “The People of Sand and Slag” and “The Calorie Man” by Paolo Bacigalupi.
 - Read news articles about water, oil, and plastic pollution, TBD.

Week 5

9/29 T Critical Dystopian Futures in Paolo Bacigalupi’s Short Stories

- Due next class:
 - Read *Ecotopia*
 - Journal #3

10/1 Th Utopian Environmental Science Fiction: *Ecotopia* and the Hope of Deep Ecology. Class Participation Check-in & Self Reflection.

- Due next class:
 - Read *Ecotopia*
 - **Paper 1 Final Draft due Sunday, 10/4, 11:59 p.m.**

Week 6

10/6 T Utopian Environmental Science Fiction, cont. & Introduction to Critical Paper 2.

- Due next class:
 - Read *Ecotopia*
 - Writing Activity 5: Tentative thesis & list of quotations from SF work for Paper 2

10/8 Th Utopian Environmental Science Fiction, cont. & Critical Paper 2: Class Activities.

- Due next class:
 - Read excerpts from “Fantasy: Recovering What was Lost.”
 - Journal #4
 - Writing Activity 6: Introductions

Week 7

10/13 T **Fall Break—No Class**

10/15 Th **Fall Break—No Class**

Unit 4: Fantasy and the EnvironmentWeek 8

10/20 T Mythopoeic Fantasy

- Work on Paper 2
- Due next class:
 - Read excerpts from Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (pp. 1-18 of PDF #1)
 - Read news articles about chemical and industrial pollution, TBD.
 - Journal #4

10/22 Th Tolkien’s Ecological Vision: *The Lord of the Rings*

- Due next class:
 - Read excerpts from Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (pp. 19-36 of PDF #1)
 - Journal #5

Week 9

10/27 T Tolkien’s Ecological Vision: *The Lord of the Rings*, cont.

- Due next class:
 - Read excerpts from Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (pp. 1-18 of PDF #2)
 - Bring draft of Paper 2 for peer workshop

10/29 Th Tolkien’s Ecological Vision: *The Lord of the Rings*, cont. & Paper 2 peer workshop

- Due next class:
 - Read excerpts from Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (pp. 19-36 of PDF #2)
 - **Paper 2 Final Draft due Sunday, 11/1, 11:59 p.m.**

Week 10

11/3 T Tolkien’s Ecological Vision: *Lord of the Rings* cont. Writing Instruction & Introduction to Critical Paper 3

- Due next class:
 - Read “She Unnames Them” and “The Author of the Acacia Seeds” by Ursula K. Le Guin.
 - Online discussion

11/5 Th Feminist Ecology and Ursula K. Le Guin (online discussion) and Library Visit

- Due next class:
 - Read “May’s Lion” and “The Wife’s Story” by Ursula K. Le Guin.
 - Read news articles about animal welfare, TBD.
 - Read “Ecological Feminism” article

- Journal # 6

Week 11

- 11/10 T** Feminist Ecology and Ursula K. Le Guin, cont.
- Work on optional revision for critical paper 2 (due)
 - Due next class:
 - Watch/stream *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*
 - Read LoZ article
 - Writing Activity 7: Tentative thesis and list of quotations from fantasy work for Paper 3

11/12 Th Mythopoeic Fantasy Video Games. Critical Paper 3: Class Activities

 - Due next class:
 - Watch *Princess Mononoke*
 - Read “Nature Vision” article
 - Journal #7

Week 12

- 11/17 T** The Ecological Vision of Hayao Miyazaki: *Princess Mononoke*.
- Due next class:
 - Develop Paper 3 Draft for peer workshop
 - Writing Activity 8: Conclusions

11/19 Th Critical Paper 3: Peer Review Workshop

 - Due next class:
 - Read news article about deforestation, TBD.

Week 13

- 11/24 T** The Ecological Vision of Hayao Miyazaki: *Princess Mononoke*, cont.
- Due next class:
 - **Paper 3 Final Draft due Monday, 11/30, 11:59 p.m.**

11/26 Th **Thanksgiving Break—No Class**

Unit 5: You and the Environment: Synthesizing the Course

Week 14

- 12/1 T** Identifying Course Themes & Introduction to Final Paper.
- Due Next Class:
 - Read news articles, TBD.
 - Writing Activity 9: Tentative thesis and list of quotations/evidence for Final Paper

12/3 Th Final Paper: Class Activities

 - Due Next Class:
 - Read news articles, TBD
 - Final Paper Draft

Week 15

- 12/8 T** Final Paper Workshop and Peer Review; Surveys and Course wrap-up
- Due next class:
 - Read news articles, TBD

12/10 Th Final Paper Workshop

Final Paper Due on Moodle or via email by 12/17, 11:59 p.m.