

ENGL 487-001 (Fall 2017): Energy/Literature



To what extent does contemporary literature tell the story of energy dependence? From the petrocarbons used in agricultural goods and smart phones to the fossil-fuel-reliant modes of shipping that deliver those goods, the modern world bursts with energy. How then do modern and contemporary modes of literature engage the subject of fossil fuels, nuclear power, or renewable energy? Using emerging critical work from energy humanities and looking at drama, long-form and short-form fiction, travelogue, and poetry, this course will study the indelible impact of energy culture on the development of selfhood, literary culture, and politics in the 20th and 21st century.

Learning Outcomes

To complete this course students will demonstrate their ability to:

1. Interpret novels, poetry, plays, and short stories with a high level of clarity and originality;
2. Demonstrate a critical understanding of assigned journal articles and book chapters;
3. Present compelling, elegantly constructed arguments (both oral and written); and,
4. Write at a level befitting a fourth-year undergraduate seminar (all writing proofread to be error-free with proper grammar and syntax and in MLA style).

Required Texts (available at Campus Bookstore):

Donal O'Kelly, *Little Thing, Big Thing*

Ursula K Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest*

John McGrath, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*

Lisa Moore, *February*

Abdel Rahman Munif, *Cities of Salt*

Juliana Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came*

Selected criticism, poetry, and short stories available online (for a full list see **Appendix A**)

Course Requirements

Evaluation will be based on a combination of major in-class group projects, individual seminar presentations, a research paper, attendance and participation, and a final examination.

Class Schedule

Sensing Oil

Week 1: September 12 and 14

Tuesday: Introduction (in class: De'Ath, "Institutional Critique")

Thursday: Calvino, "The Petrol Pump," LeMenager "Introduction," and Yaeger, "Editor's Column," **Presentation**

Recommended Reading: Macdonald "Research Note"

Week 2: September 19 and 21

Tuesday: Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came*, **Presentation**

Thursday: Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came*, **Quiz 1** (Spahr)

Living with Extraction

Week 3: September 26 and 28

Tuesday: McGrath, *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil*, **Presentation**

Thursday: McGrath, *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil*, **Quiz 2** (McGrath)

Week 4: October 3 and 5

Tuesday: Moore, *February*, **Presentation**

Thursday: Moore, *February*, **Quiz 3** (Moore)

Week 5: October 10 and 12

Tuesday: O'Kelly, *Little Thing, Big Thing*, **Presentation**

Thursday: O'Kelly, *Little Thing, Big Thing*, **Quiz 4** (O'Donal)

Figuring Development

Week 6: October 17 and 19

Tuesday: Marriot and Minio-Paluello, excerpts from *The Oil Road*, **Presentation**

Thursday: Collis, "Reading Wordsworth" and Reilly, excerpt from *Styrofoam*, **Presentation**

Week 7: October 24 and 26

Tuesday: Munif, *Cities of Salt*, **Presentation**

Thursday: Munif, *Cities of Salt*, **Presentation**

Week 8: October 31 and November 2

Tuesday: Munif, *Cities of Salt*, **Quiz 5** (Munif)

Thursday: Ghosh, "Petrofiction" and Hitchcock, "Oil in an American Imaginary" **Presentation**

Science Fiction and Energy Futures

Week 9: November 7 and 9

Tuesday: Miéville, "Covehithe," **Presentation & Research Project Plan due**

Thursday: Bacigalupi, excerpt from *The Windup Girl*, **Presentation**

Week 10: November 14 and 16

Tuesday: Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest*, **Presentation**

Thursday: Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest*, **Quiz 6** (Le Guin)

Week 11: November 21 and 23

Tuesday: Macdonald, "Improbability Drives," **Presentation**

Thursday: Cariou, *Land of Oil and Water* (film) **Research Project Essay**

Week 12: November 28 and 30

Tuesday: Cariou, *Land of Oil and Water*, **Presentation**

Thursday: Szeman, "Energy Futures," **Quiz 7** (Cariou)

Exam: TBA (see **Appendix B**)

Appendix A: List of Short Readings (sent via Email):

Bacigalupi, Palo. "Excerpt from *Windup Girl*." *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*. Editors Dominic Boyer and Imre Szeman, John's Hopkins University Press, 2017, pp. 120-139.

Calvino, Italo. "The Petrol Pump." *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*. Editors Dominic Boyer and Imre Szeman, John's Hopkins University Press, 2017, pp. 82-86.

Clarke, Bruce. "Energy as Capital." *Energy Forms: Allegory and Science in the Era of Classical Thermodynamics*. The University of Michigan Press, 2001, pp. 43-47.

Collis, Stephen. "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands." *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*. Editors Dominic Boyer and Imre Szeman, John's Hopkins University Press, 2017, pp. 86-97.

De'Ath, Amy. "Institutional Critique." *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*. Editors Dominic Boyer and Imre Szeman, John's Hopkins University Press, 2017, pp. 23-25.

Ghosh, Amitav. "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel." *Incendiary Circumstances*, Houghton Mifflin, 1992, pp. 138-151.

Hitchcock, Peter. "Oil in an American Imaginary." *New Formations* 69, Spring 2010, pp. 81-97.

LeMenager, Stephanie. "Introduction: Ultradeep, Petroleum Culture in the American Century." *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*, Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 3-19.

Macdonald, Graeme. "Improbability Drives: The Energy of SF." *Paradoxa* 26, 2014, pp. 111-144.

---. "Research Note: The Resources of Culture." *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 4.2 (August 2013): 1-24. Available at <http://reviewsinculture.com/2013/08/01/research-note-the-resources-of-culture/>.

Marriot, James and Mika Minio-Paluello. "It has to be the Caspian" and "Don't Sleep – Save your Sea." *The Oil Road: Journeys from the Caspian Sea to the City of London*. Verso, 2013, pp. 11-26, 233-243.

Miéville, China. "Covehithe." *theguardian.com*, www.theguardian.com/books/2011/apr/22/china-mieville-covehithe-short-story. Accessed 6 September 2017.

Reilly, Evelyn. Excerpt from *Styromfoam*. *evelynreilly.com*, <http://www.evelynreilly.com/home/work/styrofoam>. Accessed 6 September 2017.

Yaegar, Patricia. "Editor's Column: Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale-Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources." *PMLA*, 126, 6, 2011, pp. 305-310.