This seminar examines the relationship between environmental experience and literary representation. It introduces students to significant works of American literature and aesthetics, and it asks about the connections between culture (how meanings, ideas, and beliefs are shaped) and the environment. Through readings and discussion, we will examine the ways American authors have created a world of symbols from life forms. Participants are asked to think critically about the spaces of American literature, beyond the bounded national frame. Students will also assess the ways environment is a dynamic composition of interconnected systems. For these reasons, a special focus will be accorded to critical hemispheric theory and ecocriticism in the shaping of an American literary aesthetics. English 300 is a seminar designed for English concentrators. Course literature is paired with theoretical and critical texts.

**Required Texts:**

*The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Modern Library Classics, 2000)
*Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, James McIntosh ed. (Norton, 1987)
Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World*. Introduction by Edwidge Danticat (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006)
Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, 3rd ed. [BT]

**Additional Texts: Public Source, Electronic Reserve, and Class Handouts**

J. Hector St. John de Créveceur, *Letters from an American Farmer*
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*
Martin Delany, “Political Destiny of the Colored Race, on the American Continent”
Wallace Stevens, *Selected Poems*
Loren Eiseley, “The Star Thrower”

**General:** Your attendance and active participation are highly valued. Since this is a seminar in the major, I am particularly interested in the quality of your contributions. How engaged are you with the class and with your classmates? Do you respond productively to the questions and comments of others? Do you share your insights with the seminar?
**Attendance:** If you are unable to be in class, please notify me by email. You are still responsible for completing any missed work. More than two unexcused absences will negatively impact your participation grade, and will affect your overall ability to do well in this course. Lateness: If you are late, do see me at the end of class so that you are not marked absent. If you develop a pattern of lateness, your participation grade will be lowered and you risk failing the course.

Please let me know during the first two weeks of class if you have a disability that prohibits you from participating in any of the course requirements.

**Course requirements:** Weekly reading assignments in literature, mid-semester paper (6-8 pp), final paper (8-11pp) theory presentation, discussion leadership, reading analysis prompts, final exam, and class participation. All essays should be proofed and submitted to me in hard copy on the due date. Reading analysis prompts (RAPS) are short analysis questions, based on the reading. They are announced in advance. That means you will know when one is scheduled and what will be covered. You can expect at least one of these for each of the class units. If you miss a prompt, you will not be able to make it up. However, I do drop the lowest graded response at the end of the semester. Please note that assignments are subject to change with due notice at the discretion of professor.

**Presentations:** See below  
**Portfolio:** Supplemental handout

**Breakdown:** Presentations and class participation (15%), reading analysis prompts and writing portfolio (20%), midterm essay (25%), final essay (25%), final exam (15%)

**Additional Resources:** A very helpful resource for students at Wake Forest is The Writing Center: 426 ZSR Library; (336) 758-5768; [http://www.wfu.edu/english/wc/](http://www.wfu.edu/english/wc/) to schedule a meeting online. Students interested in revising their work are expected to meet with a peer tutor at the Writing Center. The Learning Assistance Center (LAC) 117 Reynolda Hall is open to all students, with or without a diagnosed disability. The LAC can provide valuable help with study skills, time management, and organizational strategies. Contact:  758-5929.

*A word on plagiarism…*  
All students should have a copy of the Wake Forest policy on plagiarism (found in Academic Writing at WFU). English 175 students are expected to abide scrupulously by the Honor Code. In accordance with Department policy, students found cheating or plagiarizing material will receive a zero for the assignment. For more on plagiarism, see the English Department’s guide to Academic Writing: [http://www.wfu.edu/english/courses/writing_guide.htm](http://www.wfu.edu/english/courses/writing_guide.htm).

**American Environments is structured into four sections:**

I  Foundations of American Environmental Literature /Dark Romanticism  
II  The Black Atlantic  
III  Place Aesthetics  
IV  Comparative Modernities

**Schedule:**

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Section I: Environmental Writing Foundations

W, Aug 29
HMWK: Emerson
W.S. Merwin, “Rain at Night” (432-434) in Literature and Environment” [LE]

Recommended: Bartolomé de las Casas, A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies,
Las Casas Gutenberg link: http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/20321/pg20321.html
Read enough to get a sense of overall themes, author’s devices for making meaning, the nature of the appeal.

F, Aug 31
Topic/Themes: The land of the future with the burden of world history. On extinctions and manifest destiny.
[American Transcendentalism Web Link with useful text notes (Virginia Commonwealth University open site) http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/nature.html]
Also read, Emerson “The American Scholar” [Electronically available in The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Nature addresses and lectures [Vol. 1] (University of Michigan open site) http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/emerson/4957107.0001.001/1:10?rgn=div1;view=fulltext]

W, Sep 5
Topic/Themes: Other Atlantic Currents: Romanticism in Young America
HMWK: Readings from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Collected Tales: “Young Goodman Brown”; “Ethan Brand”; Peter Barry, “Literary theorizing from Aristotle to Leavis” in Beginning Theory [BT] (22-31); “Psychoanalytical Criticism” (92-115) [BT]

F, Sep 7
Topic/Themes: Puritan Extensions: Salem and the Spirits of Nature
HMWK: Hawthorne, “The Ambitious Guest”; “The Artist of the Beautiful”; “Ecocriticism” (239-261) [BT]

F, Sep 14

W, Sep 19
Reading Analysis Prompt today 9/20 on Hawthorne
Rick Bass, “On Willow Creek” in Literature and Environment [LE] (249-258)

F, Sep 21
HMWK: Walden, “Higher Laws” (167-177) and “Conclusion” (253-264)
Recommended reading: Rachel Carson, “Of Man and the Stream of Time” (478-481) [LE]

Section II: Black Atlantic
W, Sep 26
**HMWK:** Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World* (1-47)
**Recommended:** Caroline Levander and Robert S. Levine: “Introduction: Hemispheric American Literary History” Project Muse link:
http://muse.jhu.edu.go.libproxy.wfubmc.edu/journals/american_literary_history/v018/18.3levander.html

F, Sep 28
Sensational Revolutions. Magic, ritual, and the making of Atlantic Romanticism
**HMWK:** *The Kingdom of this World* (48-90) **Recommended:** Martin Delany, “Political Destiny of the Colored Race of the American Continent” [e-reserve]

W, Oct 3
**HMWK:** *The Kingdom of this World* (91-134); “Postcolonial Criticism” (185-195) [BT]

F, Oct 5
**HMWK:** *The Kingdom of this World* (135-180)

W, Oct 10
**Reading Analysis Prompt today 10/11 on Carpentier (135-180)**
Caribbean Epistemes/ Lines of Flight:
**HMWK:** Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!*, “Children of the Sea” (3-29); “Marxist Criticism” (150-165) [BT]

F, Oct 12
**HMWK:** “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” (32-49); “A Wall of Fire Rising” (52-80); Loren Eiseley, “The Star Thrower” [handout]

Section III: Place Aesthetics

W, Oct 17
Unit concluded. **HMWK:** Pam Houston, “A Blizzard Under Blue Sky” (184-188) [LE]; Wallace Stevens “The Snow Man” in [LE]; Stevens handouts: “Six Significant Landscapes”; “To the One of Fictive Music”; “Peter Quince at the Clavier” [handouts]

F, Oct 19 No class-Fall break. We have landed on it.

Topics/Themes: “Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be/ The blood of paradise? And shall the earth/ Seem all of paradise that we shall know?” Stevens discussion cont. Memory, time, place.
**HMWK:** Barbara Kingsolver, “The Memory Place” (200-205) [LE]; Jack Kerouac, “Alone on a Mountaintop” (191-9) [LE]; “Feminist Criticism” [BT] (116-133)
W, Oct 24 Mid-semester paper due today
**HMWK:** Sarah Orne Jewett, “A White Heron” (150-7) [LE]; Jim Dodge, “Living by Life: Some Bioregional Theory and Practice” (230-238) [LE]

F, Oct 26
Interclass workshop with English 302B (Overing). Additional information TBA.
**HMWK:** William Faulkner, *Go Down Moses:* “The Bear” (183-252)

W, Oct 31
**HMWK:** “The Bear” (252-315)

F, Nov 2
**HMWK:** Faulkner, “Delta Autumn” (319-348); “New Historicism and Cultural Materialism” (166-184) [BT]

Section IV: Comparative Modernities

W, Nov 7
Poststructuralism discussed.
**HMWK:** Paul Theroux, *The Mosquito Coast* (1-56)

F, Nov 9
Nature and the Quest Reconsidered **HMWK:** Paul Theroux, *The Mosquito Coast* (57-103); Development Stories: Louise Erdrich, “Line of Credit” (404-413) [LE]

W, Nov 14
Development Stories
**HMWK:** *The Mosquito Coast* (103-152); Barry, “Postmodernism” (78-91) [BT]

F, Nov 16 (Madera in San Juan: ASA)
**HMWK:** Paul Theroux, *The Mosquito Coast* (153-201)
Recommended Martin W. Lewis, “On Human Connectedness with Nature” (392-401) [LE]

Nov 21-25 Thanksgiving Holiday

W, Nov 28
Special class guest: Michelle Stephens (English/ Rutgers) **HMWK:** Paul Theroux, *The Mosquito Coast* (201-253)

F, Nov 30
**HMWK:** Paul Theroux, *The Mosquito Coast* (257-315)

W, Dec 5
**HMWK:** Paul Theroux, *The Mosquito Coast* (319- finish)
Workshop. Writing Portfolios due.

Concluding Dates
F, Dec 7
Last day of classes

**Final paper due** Friday, 12/14 by noon
12pm in Tribble C209

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**Guidelines for Presentations for English 300: Seminar in the Major**

“…art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.” – Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique”

**DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP**

Discussion leadership is something quite basic. Nonetheless, it is an important component of the critical kinds of work you will be doing in this class, and an opportunity for you to contribute to the general success of your classmates.

Each student will select a day to be a discussion leader. On the day you are a discussion leader, please bring to class a brief handout (one page is usually sufficient) with the following information:

Three discussion questions based on the reading. I am interested in the quality of these questions, how well-formulated they are, and how useful they are for generating discussion and analysis. These questions should not ask matters of fact, (“Who does Goodman Brown encounter in the forest?”), but matters of interpretation: (“Why is the fellow traveler so alluring to Brown? What is the nature of the forest seduction?”) Try to frame the questions in a way that might be useful to someone opting to write about a particular text.

Secondly, please provide two significant quotes, based on the reading. Include page numbers. Be able to briefly analyze these quotes and state why they are consequential. Think about how they connect to wider points.

We are a seminar of 13. Please bring handouts for each person.

**READING PRESENTATIONS on Theory**

As a presenter, you and your teammate are jointly guiding a discussion of a selected theory from *Beginning Theory* by Peter Barry. Choices and dates are listed below. You have a total of 15 minutes for your presentation. Please do not exceed this amount of time. These are not exhaustive presentations and you are not covering every point made by the author. The presentation should consist of two parts.
A. Exposition. Bring forward key ideas or basic tenets of the theory you have selected. After having read the Barry selection, what strikes you as most important? Be able to state this to the class, and why it is that you think the points you are highlighting are significant.

B. Apply these ideas to a recent class text (thinking comparatively) or to some form of cultural production (very brief film clip, photography, visual art, news feature). Though you may cite Barry’s own examples, do not reuse them. Generate your own application. An application is not a simple reinstatement of theoretical concepts. Instead, it reflects your ability to think critically about the reading. Again, you are selecting what aspects of a particular theory you think are most useful for assessment and making your own design. Be bold in your interpretation.

Points to Consider
Your own interpretations are usually the most interesting thing for your listeners. This is an opportunity to be creative.

You may build your assessment around any number of focal points / points of interest. You might examine symbolic or formal structures from your class reading, or you might investigate questions of cultural / political / historical / philosophical relevance.

You might choose to consult a text suggested in the “Selected Reading” section at the end of each chapter in Beginning Theory. Please speak to me in advance if you would like further reading suggestions.

When looking at any given theoretical assumption, think about the stabilizing mechanisms for keeping ideas together, how a theory coheres. Conversely, you can challenge any reading or presentation of ideas. It is up to you.

Oftentimes with theory, the points you want to get across can be enhanced through parallel presentation (i.e. a short film clip, visual art, or media selection.) This is welcomed.

Lastly, it is a good idea for you and your partner to read the selection you sign up for at least a few days in advance of the presentation date. Do not wait until the night before to get in touch with me about questions.