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**Department of English**  
**July 31, 2009**

**English 190: Sustainability and Speculative Fiction**

Prior to participating in the Piedmont Project seminar, my original class plan was to retool my contemporary literature course English 348 so as to have students explore fiction and poetry that presented environmental themes, deep ecology, sustainability issues and global awareness of climate change. I proposed a “mutually illuminating dialogue between ecocriticism and environmental literature.” Many of the authors I had in mind—such as A. R. Ammons, Annie Dillard, Clayton Eshelman, Mary Oliver, Charles Olson, Adrienne Rich, Muriel Rukeyser, and Gary Snyder—are fairly well known for their advocacy of living in harmony with the natural world. Participating in the Piedmont seminar both confirmed and shifted my original agenda of engaging students with environmental issues through contemporary literature. The nature walks led by Eloise Carter gave me a new appreciation of the sensuous, vital, and pleasurable dimensions of paying closer attention to the biosphere. Our discussions facilitated by Nathaniel Smith led me to rethink the opportunities for creating sustainable community in Atlanta in terms of its rich traditions of ethnic, racial, and class differences. The presentation by Howard Frumkin—analyzing the blight of cul-de-sac suburban sprawl and the creative challenge of converting obsolete shopping centers and industrial hardscapes into mixed use and ecologically appropriate planned urban communities—struck me as truly innovative in reimagining future living and work spaces on the local, national, and global levels.

Thus, beyond the agenda of environmental conservation that guided my original intent for the course, the seminar made me more aware of the dynamic changes that were possible, and indeed necessary, in rethinking the built environment, urban living space, and newer, more appropriate technologies. Indeed, all of these elements—taken together—suggested potentially dramatic advances in the kind of global society and local communities that we might promote in the near future. Finally, the urgency of dealing with the future in advancing an environmentally sustainable habitat for humanity struck me as pressing indeed. Certainly,

the future crisis in environmental sustainability had already arrived. With no time to lose, the earlier that we could introduce students to the challenge of sustainability, it seemed to me, the better. Consequently, I shifted the course design to a freshman seminar format. I wanted both to challenge first-year students to think critically about their own relation to the future of environmental sustainability and also to spark their imaginations in envisioning radically alternative possibilities to the present status quo. Thus, I redesigned the course: featuring readable essays that would lead students to think critically about environmental sustainability and deep ecology but also adding speculative fiction to the mix that would give them the chance to think outside the box in imagining alternative worlds radically different from our own. Toward that end, I have included classic works such as Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, Kurt Vonnegut's, *Cat's Cradle*, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End*, as well as more contemporary novels such as Octavia Butler's *Dawn*, Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*, Karen Traviss's *City of Pearl*. Finally, to add disciplinary variety to the readings, I have selected several creative authors who write speculative fiction informed by their backgrounds and training in the sciences and social sciences.

## SYLLABUS

### **English 190—Sustainability and Speculative Fiction**

Professor: Walter B. Kalaidjian

Office: 311 N Callaway, Main English Office

Hours: Tu, Th 10:30-11:30 and by appointment

Phone: 727-7992

Primary Texts: Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*

Frank Herbert, *Dune*

Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*

Octavia Butler, *Dawn*

Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End*

Joan Slonczewski, *A Door into Ocean*

Karen Traviss, *City of Pearl*

**Description of the Course:** Our seminar will focus on novels and films that are set in alternative ecological worlds and that present philosophical questions, ethical challenges, and bio-political issues that

bear on environmental sustainability. In particular, we will question how the insights of ecocriticism, deep ecology, and ecofeminism shape literary representations and themes in speculative fiction. Conversely, we will also consider how speculative fiction—science fiction, fantasy, alternative history, utopian, dystopian, and post-apocalyptic fiction—might help us imagine a viable, global future for the planet. In addition, our seminar's readings and discussions of critical theory and literature will also take into account how gender, race, class, and national differences matter in the way we conceive of nature and engage in material, environmental practices.

**Grading:** Your responsibilities for this course will include in addition to the readings: three 3-4 page out-of-class essays (25% each) and a final exam (20%). The remaining 5% percent of your grade will be based on your class participation. In addition, on an S/U basis, you will be writing short response paragraphs each week posted to the course learnlink account. These entries should be a paragraph length of at least 100 words each, posted to the learnlink discussion conference the night before class.

Whenever you have a question about your grade, your writing, or the readings, I encourage you to come in for a conference during my office hours or at some other mutually convenient time.

**Format:** Essays must be typed or word-processor printed and are due at the beginning of the class period of the due date. On all pages after the first, write your last name and the page number in the upper right corner. All writing should be double-spaced, on one side of the page only. If you discover an error as you proofread, you can correct it by drawing a line through the error and neatly writing the correction in the space above. If you find numerous or extensive errors, make a clean copy.

**Other:** You may request an extension for a legitimate reason, but only if you ask for it at least three days before the due date. More than three unexcused absences during the quarter will adversely affect your grade; you may receive an excused absence for illness with a note from your doctor or clinic, and in the case of other, exceptional emergencies.

**Plagiarism is a serious academic offense; all students should familiarize themselves with the Emory College Honor Code: [http://www.college.emory.edu/current/standards/honor\\_code.html](http://www.college.emory.edu/current/standards/honor_code.html)**

Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work, including the work of other students, as one's own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged, unless the information is common knowledge. What is considered "common knowledge" may differ from course to course.

a. A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, opinions, theories, formulas, graphics, or pictures of another person without acknowledgment.

b. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge an indebtedness whenever:

1. Directly quoting another person's actual words, whether oral or written;

2. Using another person's ideas, opinions, or theories;

3. Paraphrasing the words, ideas, opinions, or theories of others, whether oral or

written;

4. Borrowing facts, statistics, or illustrative material; or

5. Offering materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or

collections without acknowledgment.

**Any student who, because of a disability or any other circumstance, may require special arrangements in order to meet course**

requirements should let the professor know and should register with the Office of Disability Services: <http://www.ods.emory.edu/>

Free and confidential counseling services are available from the Emory Counseling Center (404-727-7450): <http://studenthealth.emory.edu/cs/index.php>

### **GRADING STANDARDS**

**A** An *A* paper is one which would move your instructor and the best members of your class to admiration. It implies not only that the theme is virtually free of errors but that it makes its point clearly, logically, and gracefully. An *A* final grade is the product of work of consistently high quality and occasional brilliance.

**B** A *B* paper reveals effective performance of the assignments. The theme is clear and logical but with perhaps some small problems in coherence or development and without the stylistic grace of the *A* paper. It has no more than an occasional error in spelling, sentence structure, diction, usage, or punctuation.

**C** A *C* paper indicates that you have performed the assignment adequately but usually with some problems of clarity, logic, support or documentation, grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Improvement is desirable, but you should remember that a *C* grade does indicate average college work.

**D** A *D* paper reveals a failure to perform the assignment adequately or to overcome some problems pointed out in previous themes. The *D* paper only partially fulfills the requirements of the topic, and it usually has a significant number of errors in spelling, sentence structure, usage, diction, and punctuation. When you receive a *D*, you are being given warning that you must improve.

**F** An *F* paper indicates gross failure at carrying out the assigned topic. An *F* grade may also be given to students who make frequent errors or those who consistently fail to seek out help and correct their indiscretions. It is, of course, a failing grade.

Schedule of Classes

Sept.

Tu 1 Introduction: Ice Breaker

Th 3 Arne Naess, “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the

World”

Tu 8 Arne Naess and George Sessions, “Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement”

Th 10 Gary Snyder, “Re-Inhabitation,” “Ecology, Place, and the Awakening of

Compassion” / Excerpts, *Turtle Island*

Tu 15 Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, & Jorgen Randers, *Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse,*

*Envisioning a*

*Sustainable Future*

Th 17 Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat’s Cradle*

Tu 22 *Cat’s Cradle*

Th 24 *Cat’s Cradle*

Excerpts, Fernández-Arnesto, F. *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*

Tu 29 Freya Mathews, “Conservation and Self-Realization: A Deep Ecology

Perspective”

October

Th 1 Frank Herbert, *Dune* PAPER DUE

Tu 6 *Dune*

Todd McGowan, “Dune and the Path to Salvation”

Th 8 *Dune*

Tu 13 OFF

Th 15 *Dune*

Tu 20 *Dune*

Th 22 Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*

Excerpt, Peter G. Stillman, “*The Dispossessed* as

Ecological Political

Theory”

Tu 27 *The Dispossessed*

Ursula K. LeGuin, “Science Fiction and the Future”

Th 29 *The Dispossessed*

November

Tu 3 Octavia Butler, *Dawn*

Th 5 *Dawn*

Charles H. Rowell, "An Interview with Octavia Butler"

Tu 7 *Dawn*

Rachel Stein, "Gene Trading and Organ Theft in Octavia Butler and

Nalo Hopkinson's Speculative Fiction"

Tu 10 *Dawn* PAPER DUE

Th 12 Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End*

Tu 17 *Childhood's End*

Arthur C. Clarke, "Mother Nature Got There First"

Th 19 Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and

Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century"

Michael E. Zimmerman, "Feminism, Deep Ecology, and Environmental

Ethics"

Tu 24 Joan Slonczewski, *A Door Into Ocean*

Th 26 *A Door Into Ocean*

Joan, Slonczewski and Michael Levy, "*Science Fiction and the Life*

*Sciences*"

December

Tu 1 *A Door Into Ocean*

Excerpt, Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*

Th 3 Karen Traviss, *City of Pearl*

Cheryl Morgan, "Interview: Karen Traviss"

Tu 8 *City of Pearl* PAPER DUE