

Climate Fiction: Unstable Writing for an Unknown Future



"Our earliest stories about the weather concerned beginnings and endings. What emerged from the cold and darkness of the void will return to it; waters that receded at the origin of the world will rise at its end. It is easy, in grim climatological times, to be drawn to the far pole of these visions."

- Kathryn Schultz, "Writers in the Storm," *The New Yorker*

Location: Lee Honors College, Rm _____
Instructor: Ms. Laura Citino (she/they)

Class meeting time: _____
Email: laura.j.citino@wmich.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

"Climate fiction," or cli-fi, is the name given to a loosely-associated genre of science, speculative, and futurist fiction that directly or indirectly wrestles with anthropogenic, or manmade, climate change. It has existed since before the widespread recognition of our influence on the climate, but takes on vital resonance in contemporary times. In sometimes overt, sometimes allegorical, and sometimes subtle or sideways fashion, writers and artists use cli-fi commentary and our fractured relationship with the natural world as a narrative engine. In this writing-intensive course, we will explore the genre as both critical readers and creative writers. Each week, we will read creative work in a variety of modalities, including short stories, novels, narrative nonfiction, graphic work, films, and poems, alongside accompanying critical writings and relevant reporting. A critical response paper and creative exercise will accompany each unit. The midterm and the final project will take the form of student-produced creative works. Class time will consist primarily of discussion, in-class writings, and workshops.

In this course, students will develop skills in...

- *Literary analysis:* close reading; understanding of literary motifs; application of critical lenses
- *Critical thinking:* ability to connect critical readings and reporting to creative works; ability to interpret and connect texts to each other and to cultural contexts
- *Creative writing theory and practice:* reading texts as writers; literary tools and motifs; applying them to student work in appropriate and experimental ways
- *Critique and feedback:* ability to both self-assess and evaluate the work of others; useful, writer-centered feedback; revision of written works

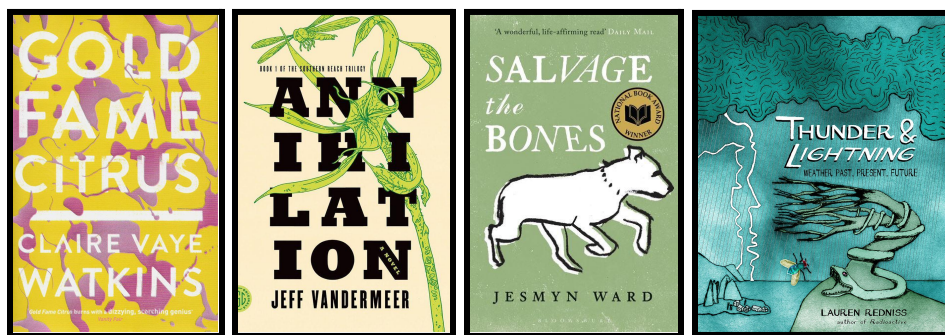
This course satisfies the requirements for WMU Essential Studies, Level II, Artistic Theory and Practice through the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLO):

1. *Increase foundational knowledge of the Social Sciences, Humanities, or the Arts*
 - a. Students will participate in the learning activities of reading novels, short stories, poems, and critical essays as well as significant notetaking and discussion, across a wide range of genres, diversity of authors, and artistic movements.
 - b. This will be assessed through notebook/annotation checks and students' ability to participate robustly, confidently, and productively in class discussion.
2. *Develop creative and critical thinking*

- Students will analyze, imitate, take influence from, and engage in conversation with the authors and artists encountered read in class. They will draw unique connections between and synthesize critical, analytical readings and creative works to form a framework for the cultural utility of climate fiction.
- This will be assessed during the midterm and final project, which will take the form of a creative work. Students will also produce an accompanying critical essay for each project, citing sources/inspiration material from course reading

Required Books and Materials

The following books are required for this course. Library books and eBooks are acceptable, but you remain responsible for completing equivalent annotations. We will read one work per unit, roughly every four weeks.



- Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus* (ISBN-13: 9781594634246)
- Jeff Vandermeer, *Annihilation* (ISBN-13: 9780374104092)
- Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (ISBN-13: 9781608196265)
- Lauren Redniss, *Thunder and Lightning: Weather Past, Present and Future* (ISBN-13: 9780812993172)

You will need a notebook to be used solely for this class, to be brought to class everyday. Digital notes are acceptable if you feel that works best for you, but be advised that they are not an "easy" substitution for physical notes; I expect to see the same annotation and notetaking effort put into either method. Notebooks and/or digital notes will be collected and assessed periodically. You will also need access to word processing, printing, eLearning, and email.

EXPECTATIONS, POLICIES, AND REQUIREMENTS

Professional and Engagement

A major component of this class will be your own contributions. Your success in this class is your primary responsibility, with me providing collaborative support. Specifically, I expect the following:

- Thoughtful, thorough, and timely completion of all assignments
- Close, careful reading of all material
- Energetic participation and respectful attentiveness during class
- Conduct in keeping with university environment
- Professionalism, i.e. willingness to participate, keep notes, help others, arrive on time, be professional in correspondence, and contribute to our positive, scholarly community
- Frequent, consistent, and reliable communication with me and your classmates
- Demonstrated respect for the writers/thinkers we encounter, as well as your fellow classmates

Assignments

Readings: Various levels of difficulty, density, and genre. Besides the books listed for purchase above, all other readings will be provided to you digitally via eLearning. You are encouraged to print out readings whenever possible in order to annotate them for discussion.

Response Papers and Creative Exercises: 2-3 pages (unless otherwise specified), double-spaced, Times New Roman, 1" margins, etc. Responses will help you organize your thoughts for productive discussion; I encourage you to try out ideas within formal essay structure with quotes and textual evidence. Imitation and other creative exercises will help you identify, emulate, and experiment with craft elements from the writers and artists encountered in class. Again, thoughtful experimentation and intention wins the day. You will craft one response and one creative exercise per unit, i.e. four of each during the semester.

Midterm & Final Project: Twice this semester, you will craft a climate fiction premise and explore it in either a short story OR novel chapter/excerpt. The midterm will have a guided prompt, while the final project will be open. Both projects will be workshopped in class and accompanied by a critical essay explaining your influences, inspirations, and intentions.

Course Grade + Homework

Your grade consists of 4 critical response papers (15%), 4 creative imitation exercises (15%), a midterm writing project (20%), a final writing project (25%), and professionalism & engagement (25%).

Grading Scale				
A	4.0	+	94-100%	Distinctive, exceptional work
BA	3.5	✓+	88-93%	Strong, thoughtful work
B	3.0	✓	84-87%	Average, complete work
CB	2.5	✓-	77-83%	Limited, undeveloped work
C	2.0	-	74-76%	Problematic, sloppy work
DC	1.5		67-73%	Unintelligible work
D	1.0		64-66%	Unacceptable work
E	0		Below 64%	Missing work

Missing and/or late work: Should be avoided at all costs. I reserve the right to cap chronically or egregiously late work (i.e., it may not be eligible for a check-plus or an A) or not accept it at all. I am more likely to be amenable to extensions if you let me know beforehand about potential conflicts.

Formatting and submitting work: All written work will be formatted according to MLA guidelines; please see provided sample, chat with me, or give it a Google if you don't know what that means. All written work will be printed in hard copy form and turned in during class and will receive appropriate feedback accordingly.

Attendance

My expectation regarding attendance is that you will show up on time for, attend fully, and stay until the very end of every class period. I will note attendance, including lateness and partial absences, every week. You will be granted one freebie absence; when/if you need to take it, email me a brief, professional message with minimal explanation. After that, your grade will be docked half a letter grade (i.e. A to BA, B to CB, etc.) for each subsequent absence. The same policy applies to lateness; being late once or twice due to extenuating circumstances is fine, but I reserve the right to dock your grade half a letter grade if lateness becomes chronic. It is also true and bears stating that frequent absences and late attendance carry an inherent penalty; if you miss consistently, your grade will naturally suffer due to missing discussion and not participating fully in our scholarly community. I am available to assist absent students in staying caught up only within reason.

If you have special circumstances regarding attendance, please make an appointment to talk to me about in my office or through Teams.

Technology

Cell phones and laptops are, for better or worse, part of our modern lives, and after the last few years we might be even more attached to them than usual. We will aim for brief and utilitarian use of technology in class. You are allowed to use your laptop in class for taking notes, pulling up readings, and researching during discussion, but cell phones will be stowed away while class is in session.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Student Academic Conduct: Students are responsible for making themselves aware of and understanding the expectations in the Undergraduate Catalog that pertain to Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s) If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing.

Civility Statement: WMU is committed to creating and sustaining an environment that honors the inherent dignity and worth of all members of the WMU community. Respectful behavior expressed verbally, textually, visually, and physically should be the norm in all university communications and venues. Each member of our academic community is encouraged to be thoughtful and sensitive in their choice of words and behaviors, and should be aware of how their behavior affects others.

Accommodations for Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact Disability Services for Students. Contact should be made at the beginning of the semester. The office must make a disability determination before the instructor provides any accommodations.



UNIT PLAN AND HOMEWORK/READINGS SCHEDULE

Unit #1: Climate Change and the Anthropocene

Week 1

- Paulo Bacigalupi, "The Calorie Man" and "The Tamarisk Hunter"
- Carolyn Forché, poems from *In the Lateness of the World*
- Elizabeth Kolbert, "The Climate of Man" from *The New Yorker*
- Kathryn Schulz, "Writers in the Storm" from *The New Yorker*

Week 2

- Begin Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus*
- Bill McKibben, "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math" from *Rolling Stone*
- Naomi Klein, "Capitalism Vs. the Climate" from *The Nation*

Week 3

- Continue *Gold Fame Citrus*
- N.K. Jemisin, "Stone Hunger" and "The Empire is the World" from *The Atlantic*
 - Critical Response #1 due

Week 4

- Finish *Gold Fame Citrus*
- Ken Liu, "Seven Birthdays"
- Alan Weisman, excerpts from *The World Without Us*
 - Creative Exercise #1 due

Unit #2: (Re)Connection Between Humans and the Natural World*Week 5*

- Begin Jeff Vandermeer, *Annihilation*
- E.O. Wilson, "The Poetic Species" and "Is Humanity Suicidal?"
- Jedediah Purdy, excerpt from *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*

Week 6

- Finish *Annihilation*
- Elena Passarello, "Arabella" and "Celia" from *Animals Strike Curious Poses*
- Ursula K. LeGuin, "Point of View and Voice"
 - Critical Response #2 due

Week 7

- Brian Evenson, "Solution"
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Skywoman Falling" and "The Grammar of Animacy"
 - Creative Exercise #2 due
 - Midterm projects introduced

Unit #3: Realism & Regionalism*Week 8*

- Begin Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones*
- Nicole Cooley, "Poetry of Disaster"
 - Midterm projects due

Week 9

- SPRING BREAK

Week 10

- Continue *Salvage the Bones*
- Dan Egan, excerpt from *The Life and Death of the Great Lakes*
- Alan Redmonds, "Death of a Great Lake"
- Ben Percy on writing place
 - Response Paper #3 due

Week 11

- Finish *Salvage the Bones*
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Maple Nation: A Citizen's Guide" and "The Sacred and the Superfund"
- Mary Karr on memoir

Unit #4: Eco-poetry, Comics, & Imaginative Genres*Week 12*

- Begin Lauren Redniss, *Thunder and Lightning*
- Excerpt from Jeff Vandermeer, *Dead Astronauts*
 - Creative Exercise #3 due

Week 13

- Finish *Thunder and Lightning*
- Poetry packet
 - Critical Response #4 due
 - Final projects assigned

Week 14

- Choice of film (*Interstellar*; *The Day After Tomorrow*; *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, et al)
- 17776
 - Creative Exercise #4 due

Week 15

- Maggie Nelson, "Riding the Blinds" excerpt from *On Freedom*
- Kate Aronoff, "Things Are Bleak!" from *The Atlantic*
- Charlie Jane Anders, "As Good As New"

Week 16 (Finals Week)

- Turn in final project during exam period



**“When you see beauty in desolation it changes something inside you. Desolation tries to colonize you.”
- Jeff Vandermeer, *Annihilation***