

Western University
Department of English and Writing Studies
English 9155: Animals and the Environment in Early Modern Literature
Fall 2026

Western University is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, L̓naap̓éewak, and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.

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Course Description

This course engages with the current critical interest in animal studies, ecocriticism, and climate studies to investigate the poetry, prose, and drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Texts include: Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *As You Like It*; country house poems such as Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst"; and Margaret Cavendish's anti-hunting poems and her early sci-fi prose work, *The Blazing World*, which depicts a land peopled with human/animal hybrids. Living through the era of climate change known as the Little Ice Age, the early moderns, like us, confronted ecological challenges such as war, population growth, famine, and early industrialization, all of which likewise affected human/nonhuman relationships. To help us draw analogies between past and present experience, this course will integrate critical, historical, and contemporary theoretical approaches.

Enrolment Restrictions

Enrolment in this course is restricted to graduate students in English as well as any student who has obtained special permission to enrol in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

Course Objectives

Learn about the fields of early modern ecocriticism, animal studies, and climate studies
 Explore relationships between past and present
 Engage critically and creatively with canonical and non-canonical literature through discussion, writing, research, and practice
 Deepen skills of critical analysis (oral and written)
 Communicate with clarity, respect, and care in class discussions and written work

Course Ethos

Our class will honour the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We will use each other's preferred and chosen names and pronouns; we will engage in respectful and generous conversation with each other; we will avoid language that is hurtful, violent, or exclusive. We will also acknowledge that we may make mistakes, and that learning from each other and questioning ourselves is part of the EDI process.

Required Texts

Available at the bookstore

Margaret Cavendish, *A Description of the Blazing World* (Broadview, 2016) \$23.45

Thomas More, *Utopia* (Broadview, 2010) \$19.65

William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (Simon and Schuster 2019) \$12.99

William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (Simon and Schuster 2015) \$12.99

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Simon and Schuster 2013) \$13.00

Students are welcome to purchase or use second hand or alternative editions of these texts.

[ENG 9155 Custom Link](#)

Secondary and selected primary readings available on OWL.

Evaluation

Participation: 15%

Weather Extremes mini-paper 10%

Seminar: 25%

Proposal 10%

Final Paper: 40%

Fine Print

Technology Use

We will likely often be reading from laptops in this class. If you wish to use your computer for notetaking, that's fine too. Phones must be put away, and no surfing, social media, emailing, texting, is permitted while we are in class. If you are dealing with a crisis and need phone access, please let me know.

Email

I check email on a regular basis Monday to Friday, and will respond to emails within 24-48 hours. Please do not expect an immediate response from me on weekends.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

Scrupulous accuracy in the quotation and citation of all sources and references is expected.

AI Technologies

In this course, the use of AI (such as automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT, Claude, etc.) is **prohibited at any stage** of the writing process. Using these tools will be considered to be in violation of Western's Academic Integrity Policy. If AI use is suspected, I will ask you for notes, rough drafts, outlines, and any other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered.

To put it more positively: I value *your* thoughts, research, and writing. A primary goal of this class is to support and encourage you to strengthen those critical and creative skills through in-class participation and written assignments. AI can introduce mistakes, make up sources, and reinforce stereotypes. It is harmful to the environment, sucking up land and water and energy. It scrapes data, including from creative works, without consent. It creates writing that is void of personality and that is antithetical to the intellectual process and practice. *Your* perspectives are unique. The AI is a derivative machine. Don't hand your agency to think, write, and assess over to AI. I am always happy to meet with you to chat about your ideas and your writing. Please talk to me, not Chat GPT!

Statement on Gender-based Sexual Violence

Western is [committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/index.html>

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Graduate Course Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. For example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/index.html>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Accessible Education

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education (AE), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AE and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations may include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.