

ENG 290-A01: Human Values in Literature John Felice Rome Center

Fall 2026

Thursday | 10am – 12:30 pm |

Dr. Barbara Castaldo

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Office Hours: W/Th, By Appointment

Course Description

Nature has been a central theme in literature across all cultures and eras. This course explores a diverse range of texts - including prose and poetry, fiction and non-fiction - as well as imagery, philosophy, and film to examine the human relationship with the natural world. This course invites us to reflect on the dynamic interplay between humanity and the environment, to examine the human values and meanings attached to nature - its significance in literature, philosophy, and art - without forgetting the intrinsic values of nature (it is quite a beautiful natural world!).

We will explore how writers and philosophers have represented nature as an idealized space, a source of inspiration, or a tangible reality. For some, the natural world offered refuge, spiritual affirmation, or harmony with their beliefs. Others approached it scientifically, as a neutral force driving life's transformations, while some depicted nature as an unsympathetic antagonist, indifferent to human suffering.

Through canonical and lesser-known works by authors such as Virgil, Rousseau, Thoreau, Leopardi, Calvino, and poems from Native American traditions, we will trace the profound and varied ways humans have connected with nature.



Wenzel Peter. *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden*. 1800-1829, Vatican Museums.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Interpret significant works of literature that represent humanity's complex and evolving relationship with the natural world.



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- Analyze works of philosophical importance, situating them within their historical, temporal, and cultural contexts.
- Demonstrate knowledge of major literary and philosophical texts, along with key authors and genres in world literature.
- Understand the relationship between literary and philosophical works and the societies, cultures, and traditions that produced them.
- Develop personal and critical engagement with texts by exploring and articulating their own aesthetic, intellectual, and ethical responses.
- Cultivate independent research abilities by engaging with secondary sources and developing original, evidence-based arguments.
- Strengthen critical reading, thinking, and writing skills through the composition of academic essays, research projects, and other written assignments.
- Enhance oral communication and argumentation skills by presenting and defending interpretations in class discussions, debates, and presentations.
- Apply comparative perspectives to recognize and analyze shared themes, issues, and forms of expression across diverse authors, traditions, and works of art.
- Integrate interdisciplinary approaches (such as ecocriticism, philosophy, and cultural studies) to enrich their understanding of literature and nature.

Required Texts / Materials

Assigned readings are posted in the Sakai Resources folder.

Attendance Policy

In accordance with the Rome Center mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, and in compliance with full-time student visa status, all courses adhere to the following attendance policy. Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student and synonymous with academic success. Attendance is mandatory at every class meeting for each course. Lateness or leaving class early will impact the course grade at the professor's discretion. All absences, including medical absences, will be treated the same, unless they are documented long-term conditions or emergencies. Such situations will be evaluated case-by-case by the Academic Affairs office. Once-a-week classes: After 1 absence, a 2% final grade reduction will be applied for each missed class. Missing 3 classes or more will result in an automatic failure (F).

Assessment Components:

Participation and Close Reading Responses	20%
Presentation	20%
Nature Journal	30%
Final Paper	30%

Assignments and Course Expectations

Each required assignment in this course is designed to provide you with 1) a structured opportunity to practice and demonstrate your knowledge, and 2) some flexibility and choice in how you showcase that knowledge. You can choose your presentation and final paper topics, as well as the

timing for submitting your presentation, nature journal, and final paper - all within the final submission deadlines.

Course Readings: Assigned readings are posted in the Sakai Resources folder. Active reading is essential for this course. Whether working with a printed book or a PDF from Sakai, come prepared with key passages marked and ideas noted. For PDFs, you can download the file to your device and annotate by highlighting key quotes (e.g., in yellow) and recording your comments or questions. We will refer to specific passages in nearly every class.

Sakai: Everything for the course will be posted in Sakai, so you will need to be familiar with submitting assignments, accessing collective announcements and private email notifications, accessing feedback and grades, assignment guidelines, and course readings.

Electronic Devices in Class: Technology can be both a helpful resource and a potential distraction. While cell phones are not permitted during class time, I understand that many of you rely on laptops or tablets as important learning tools, so their use is allowed during class. However, I expect you to use these devices responsibly and respectfully, only to support learning and participation. If their use becomes disruptive to you or your classmates, I will ask you to stop using them.

Use of AI: All work submitted in this course needs to be original to you as an author. Any references to other authors must include a citation and quotation marks. The use of AI is not permitted for this course, either for generating content or for enhancing style, because I want you to develop as a writer and critical thinker, rather than simply submitting “perfect” work. You may use synonym tools, Grammarly, or other tools for minor editing or proofreading (not for generating text) - provided that the text you submit is entirely your own original work.

All assignments for this course, including Reading Responses and the Presentation, need to be submitted through Turnitin, which is used to detect the use of AI. Assignments not submitted through Turnitin will not be accepted for grading. Using AI for any portion of the assignments will result in failure of the assignment at a minimum and, potentially, failure of the course.

Participation and Close Reading Responses (20%): This is a seminar-style, discussion-driven course. Your consistent and engaged presence is essential not only for your own learning but also for the benefit of the entire class. For each reading, you will provide a written response choosing two to three quotations from the assigned reading (quotes may be of any length). When questions are provided, respond to one or two of them, again using two to three quotations from the assigned text. Each quote should be accompanied by a brief analysis focusing on both content and style, explaining why you chose that particular quote, what caught your attention, what topics it highlights, what kind of language the author uses, how it connects to the rest of the work, or how it resonates with or differs from other texts. Complete the Reading Response assignment before the beginning of each class session. Occasionally, I will ask that you submit your Responses to Sakai, and I reserve the right to request these submissions without prior notice.

Grading participation and reading responses will be based on two factors: frequency of class participation (at least one contribution at each class session); quality (engagement with readings, attention to others’ ideas, relevance, clarity, depth). If you have difficulty speaking in class, please let me know at the beginning of the course, and we will discuss other options to fulfill the participation assignment.

The participation grade also includes **professionalism and class etiquette:** having your PDF or book in front of you during class discussions; underlined quotes or page number references and notes ready and available at each class; using laptops only for note-taking or course-related work; arriving on time and staying for the duration of class, taking breaks only during the designated times; keeping phones silenced and out of sight.



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Presentation (20%): Each student will give one presentation on a text of their choice from the course readings and will lead a discussion on that text. Detailed guidelines are posted in the *Assignments* section on Sakai.

Nature Journal (30%): You will spend time in nature and write a journal (six pages, double-spaced) that offers a coherent and meaningful reflection on the natural environment as well as your personal response to it. Detailed guidelines are posted in the *Assignments* section on Sakai.

Final Paper (30%): The Final Paper (six pages, double-spaced) is a research-based analysis of a literary text of your choice that engages with the central topic of the course (nature and the human relationship to it). The essay should develop a focused analytical question and a clear thesis, demonstrating your ability to write critically about literature in accordance with academic conventions. Detailed guidelines are posted in the *Assignments* section on Sakai.

Grading

94-100: A	87-89: B+	77-79: C+	67-69: D+
90-93: A-	84-86: B	74-76: C	60-66: D
	80-83: B-	70-73: C-	59 or lower: F

Academic Integrity / Plagiarism

As one of the campuses of Loyola University Chicago, the Rome Center is committed to academic rigor and excellence. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty of any kind are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with Loyola's standards here:

http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml. Students are responsible for complying with the LUC Student Handbook.

Late and Unsubmitted Assignments

In general, late assignments are not accepted. However, extenuating circumstances do arise, so please be in touch with me as soon as possible, and before the submission deadline if the assignment is late. Please note that late assignments will not be accepted without prior authorization from the professor and that unsubmitted assignments will receive a grade of zero.

Accessibility Accommodations

Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center during the first week of classes. Please let me know, too, of any accommodation you may need so that we can work together to make this course successful for you.

Statement on Title IX

The Rome Center follows Loyola's [Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, Retaliation](#), and will comply with those as indicated and instructed.

Emails and Communication

The best way to get in touch with me is via email – bcastaldo@luc.edu. I make every effort to respond to emails within 24 hours. However, I do not usually check or reply to work-related emails

on weekends or public holidays. Please include the name of the course you are taking when you email me.

My office hours are by appointment, so please feel free to contact me to set up an in-person or Zoom meeting.

For questions about course content, feedback on assignments, grades, or other matters that may require extended discussion, it is preferable to meet in person rather than engage in lengthy email exchanges.

Additional Support

I will provide timely feedback on your assignments and direct this feedback to what is going well or what can be improved for the next assignment. If needed, I am happy to share additional resources to help you with the course materials and assignment guidelines.

However, please note that I cannot review assignments before submission or assist during the writing process. The assignments for this course do not follow a step-by-step format where you receive grades after various stages of improvement, but they are designed to be independent tasks. I recommend using Loyola's Writing Center for students needing some assistance with writing. You can learn more or schedule an appointment at <https://www.luc.edu/writing/>.

And finally... Welcome to this class!

I find the study of literature both intellectually and emotionally fascinating (and a lot of fun), and I look forward to exploring it together. Please do not hesitate to discuss the course or readings with me throughout the semester. As far as possible, I want to ensure the class meets your academic goals as well as those I have outlined in this syllabus.

I am dedicated to fostering an inclusive and welcoming classroom for every student. With this goal in mind, the course is designed to explore the material from diverse perspectives. I invite all students to work together with me to cultivate a learning space built on open dialogue, mutual respect, and a strong sense of belonging for all.

Course Schedule and Readings

I reserve the right to modify the reading schedule or assignments in the event of extenuating circumstances. Any changes will be announced on Sakai and posted on the most up-to-date version of the syllabus there before each class.

Unless otherwise noted, you will read each assigned reading in its entirety.

While reading introductions and supplementary critical articles is optional, doing so is strongly encouraged, as they will deepen your understanding of the texts and contribute meaningfully to class discussions.

Friday Class Day: Friday, October 23

Date

Topic

Week 1

Th 9/3

Introduction to the course. The "Book of Nature" and the "Book of God". **Schedule of presentations.**

Week 2

Th 9/10

Aristotle's *Physics* (Book II). The Image of Nature in *Genesis*.

Week 3

Th 9/17

Beginning of project 'Nature Journal.' Native American writings on nature. St. Francis, *Canticle of the Creatures*.

Week 4

Th 9/24

The ancient tradition of 'pastoral literature'. Virgil's *First Eclogue*. The 'green language' in modern times: Emerson, *Nature*; Baudelaire, *Correspondences*.

Week 5

Th 10/1

More "green language": Thoreau.

Week 6

Th 10/8

Nature Journals due. More "green language": Keats, Ammons.

Week 7

Th 10/15

Fall Break (October 9-18): no class on Thursday, October 15

Week 8

Th 10/22

The myth of the 'noble savage' and reflections on the 'state of nature'. Readings by Montaigne and Rousseau.

F 10/23

Friday Class Day: The myth of the 'noble savage' and reflections on the 'state of nature'. Readings by Alexander Pope and Melville.

Week 9

Th 10/29

Into the Wild. Readings by Krakauer, McCandless, and Calvino.

Week 10

Th 11/5

The Sublime. Readings by Burke, P.B. Shelley, Leopardi.

Week 11

Th 11/12

Discussion of paper topics. Sublime or supernatural? Readings by Mary Shelley and Melville.

Week 12

Th 11/19

"Thinking like a mountain" and "calling animals by names:" notions of land and animal ethics. Readings by Leopold, Treadwell, Hearne.

Week 13

Th 11/26

Thanksgiving Break (November 26-29): no class on Thursday, November 26

Week 14

Th 12/3

Final Papers due. Conference on the final papers. Course conclusions.



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Week 15
Th 12/10

Final Exam Week.