

ENG 290: Human Values in Literature

John Felice Rome Center

Spring 2026

Thursday | 10am – 12:30 pm

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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.

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.
- 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

- *Among Grizzlies. Living With Wild Bears in Alaska*, Treadwell, Timothy, and Palovak, Jewel. (ISBN 10: 0345426053 and ISBN 13: 9780345426055)
 - You can either purchase this book on [Amazon.it](https://www.amazon.it) at a reasonable price and with fast delivery options, or you can try to borrow the book from the library (there is a limited number of copies, and they must be returned after use).
 - A digital copy may be available to borrow for free on the Internet Archive; however, the reading quality is poor, and it might not be possible to download the PDF and highlight quotes, thus I do not recommend this choice.
- All additional readings are available on Sakai, and the films can be streamed online through the Loyola library system.

Student 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%
Paper	30%

To successfully meet the learning outcomes of this course, you must fulfill the following requirements:

Course Readings: 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, download the file to your device and annotate by highlighting key quotes (e.g., in yellow) and recording your comments or questions. You will be expected to refer to specific passages in nearly every class.

Sakai: This course relies on the Sakai platform for all materials and communication. You are expected to check Sakai regularly for collective announcements and private email notifications, 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, 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 all students 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: For several reasons that I would like to discuss with you, the use of AI is not permitted in this course, either for generating content or enhancing style. You may use synonym tools, Grammarly suggestions, and other editing applications, provided that the text you submit is entirely your own original work. Using AI for writing the final paper or for any of the assignments will result in an F in the assignment or even an F in the course and might jeopardize the rest of your studies at Loyola.

Participation and Close Reading Responses (20%): This is a seminar-style, discussion-driven course. Your consistent, engaged presence is essential not just for your own learning but for the benefit of the entire class. You are expected to come to class fully prepared on the assigned readings and contribute thoughtfully to discussions using your Close Reading Responses. 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. These responses will form the basis for much of our discussion and for your Participation grade. I will ask you to read or discuss your selected quotes in class, and occasionally you will be required to submit your Responses to Sakai without prior notice. To earn a strong participation grade, you should contribute to class discussions at least once per session. If you have difficulty speaking in class, please let me know at the beginning of the course.

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.

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) will be the analysis of a literary text of your choice, other than the course readings. The paper will show your ability to choose a focused question and thesis to guide your discussion and to follow the conventions for writing about literature. 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.

I expect that all work you produce for this course will be your own and that you will not submit work you have already completed for other courses. Submitting the same Responses as another student will be considered plagiarism. Paraphrasing or otherwise copying the work of another person without citing the source of the words and ideas will be considered plagiarism.

Late and Unsubmitted Assignments

Late assignments will not be accepted without prior authorization from the professor. 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.

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

You can contact me via email at bcastaldo@luc.edu. I typically respond to emails within 24 hours on business days. I do not usually check or reply to work-related emails on weekends or public holidays. 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. Please remember that emails to me, as your instructor, should be written in a professional tone and include a proper greeting as well as the name of the course you are taking.

And finally... Welcome to this class! I find the study of literature both intellectually and emotionally fascinating (as well as a lot of fun), and I look forward to exploring it together. Please do not hesitate to converse with me about the course or the readings throughout the semester. As far as possible, I want to make sure the class meets your own 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 through 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 you are expected to consult the most up-to-date version of the syllabus there before each class.

Unless otherwise noted, you are required to read each assigned novel 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.

Date	Topic
Week 1 Th 1/22	Introduction to the course. The “Book of Nature.” Schedule of presentations.
Week 2 Th 1/29	Aristotle’s <i>Physics</i> (Book II). The Image of Nature in <i>Genesis</i> .
Week 3 Th 2/5	Beginning of project ‘Nature Journal.’ Native American writings on nature. St. Francis, <i>Canticle of the Creatures</i> .
Week 4 Th 2/12	The ancient tradition of ‘pastoral literature’. Virgil’s <i>First Eclogue</i> . The ‘green language’ in modern times: Emerson, <i>Nature</i> ; Baudelaire, <i>Correspondences</i> .
Week 5 Th 2/19	More “green language”: Thoreau.
Week 6 Th 2/26	More “green language”: Keats, Ammons.
Week 7 Th 3/5	Nature Journals due. The myth of the ‘noble savage’ and reflections on the ‘state of nature’. Readings by Montaigne and Rousseau.
Week 8 Th 3/12	Spring Break (March 6-15): no class on Thursday, March 12
Week 9 Th 3/19	The myth of the ‘noble savage’ and reflections on the ‘state of nature’. Readings by Alexander Pope and Melville.
Week 10 Th 3/26	Into the Wild. Readings by Calvino, Krakauer, and McCandless.
Week 11 Th 4/2	The Sublime. Readings by Burke, P.B. Shelley, Leopardi.
Week 12 Th 4/9	Discussion of paper topics. Sublime or supernatural? Readings by Mary Shelley and Melville.



Week 13

Th 4/16

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

Week 14

Th 4/23

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

Week 15

Th 4/30

Final Exam Week.