

WRIT 015.36

## WRITING 015: WRITING CLIMATE

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**Nathan K. Hensley**

Fall 2020 / Georgetown University

T/TH 2:00-3:15, online

Zoom Office Hours: T 11am-12pm EST and, given current circumstances, almost anytime by appointment

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*Please note that reserved hours for this course are T/Th, 2:00-3:15 pm, but asynchronous elements may fall out of this window and every class period may not require mandatory synchronous attendance.*

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*Controversial image accompanying NY Times article, "Major Climate Report Describes a Strong Risk of Crisis as Early as 2040," October 7, 2018. Original caption: "Harry Taylor, 6, played with the bones of dead livestock in Australia, which has faced severe drought."*

### ***Required Texts:***

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (U Chicago Press): 978-0226526812

Richard McGuire, *Here* (Pantheon): 978-0375406508

### ***Additional Readings:***

A lot of our reading will consist of our own writing. But a majority of our semester's reading that is not written by us will be posted on our course Canvas site. Readings that are not on our Canvas site are marked (\*). In normal times I would ask that you print our online readings so they can be annotated by hand with a pen; in our emergency situation, I am asking that you please read them online \*with an annotation tool\* of some kind; it is key (as we will discuss!) to read actively rather than passively. Hypothesis is one platform we will experiment with; there are others.

### **Assignments:**

You will complete six writing assignments over the course of the semester. I will provide more details about them as the term progresses. We will be working in different genres, speaking to different audiences, and laboring to understand the act of writing as a communication in a specific situation with a specific set of goals in mind. **Note that assignments marked with an asterisk (\*) will proceed workshop-style.** You will be asked 1) to write a first draft; 2) to discuss your draft in class with your fellow students; and 3) to submit a final version to me after incorporating relevant revisions.

1. **Public Relations close reading assignment** (2-3 pages, double spaced, normal font). For this close reading assignment you will analyze the word choice, rhetoric, and presentational strategy of a piece of climate-related public relations discourse. You might analyze a corporation's sustainability policy, a fossil fuel company's annual report, or an activist group's mission statement.
2. **\*Geographical close reading assignment** (2-3 pages, double spaced, normal font). For this exercise in close reading you will "close read" a place, offering a minute description with attention to the multiple species, timescales, and historical forces convened in your chosen spot.
3. **\*Op-Ed or Cultural Review (1,000-1,250 words)** This assignment has two options: for the first, you will create an op-ed essay for a national newspaper, modeled on those published by the Washington Post. For the "Cultural Review" you will choose a cultural artifact related to the themes of our course, and write a review of that artifact, modeled on the conventions of music, film, and video game reviews found on the website Metacritic.
4. **\*Analytical Essay** (4-5 pages, double spaced, normal font). This is a sustained academic argument. It should draw on specific evidence, elaborate a consequential set of claims, use precise transitions and clear phrasing, and be shined, prosewise, to a glittering polish.
5. **Letter to the Past.** (Length variable, c. 750 words) Write a letter to the past that describes, for an complete stranger, the world you live in now. Your letter can take many forms or genres in the epistolary tradition, from formal letter to business memo to email (or other). Your job is to imagine the rhetorical scenario precisely, and then to intervene into that scenario precisely and effectively.

6. **Letter to the Future.** (Length variable, c. 750 words) Write a letter to the future that describes, for an complete stranger, the world you live in now. Your letter can take many forms or genres in the epistolary tradition, from formal letter to business memo to email (or other). Your job is to imagine the rhetorical scenario and intervene into it with vivid precision.

In addition to the formal written assignments above, you will make periodic posts to our Canvas site, these too varying in genre, function, and style. The below are evaluated under the course participation grade.

**Six Reading Provocations.** (50-100 words) These short micro-essays will be posted to our class discussion section, and can be done at whatever point the in semester you choose, on a reading that particularly interests you or a day you prefer to do it. Your post should introduce us to a specific passage in our reading, make careful and specific observation(s) about that passage, and spring forward into a provocation for further discussion. One format is written: a passage, 2-3 specific and concrete details you notice about that passage, and a question that comes from that work of observation. But up to half of these can be done as video or audio posts, and for these the format is up to you. The job is to advance our collective discussion. Be creative.

**At Least Six Comments on Others' Reading Posts.** (c. 25-50 words) Just what it sounds like. You are asked to be in dialogue with your peers' posts. I expect you to comment regularly as this is part of your participation in the course, and will be evaluated in that segment of the grade. At least three of your comments must be typed in the normal way; the rest can be any format you choose (audio, video, etc).

### **Course Grading Policy:**

Your final grade for this course will reflect the quality of written work you produce; it will also reflect the quality of your participation in the collaborative labor of the course. Thus, your thoughtful responses to the texts, your active participation in class discussions, and your level of commitment to our shared work will all contribute crucially to your final grade. Breakdown:

In-session participation:	20%
Canvas Posts & other out-of-session participation:	20%
Public Relations Close Reading:	10%
Geographical Close Reading:	10%
Op-Ed/Cultural Review	9%
Analytical Essay:	15%
Letter to the Past:	8%
Letter to the Future:	8%

### **A Note on Online Participation**

Participation is the most important part of our work together. We will all be challenged in this new format and our mutual commitment is critical. “In-session participation” refers to your activity during synchronous Zoom sessions. Good participation involves attentive listening, careful preparation, and responsiveness to the teacher and your peers. It does not mean talking all the time, though your thoughtful participation in discussion is always encouraged and welcome. Appropriate “in-session” participation might include verbal speech during our session or chat-board questions or comments while we meet; it can also mean carefully listening and being well-prepared for the class, and posting later to one of our platforms with evidence of your thoughtful engagement. “Out-of-session participation” is all your participation outside of our scheduled live sessions: this includes responses to other students’ posts on Canvas, responses on our Slack channel (if applicable), and your own posts on our Canvas site. Here too the watchword is care, not volume or number: your job is to be a good colleague in our mutual intellectual undertaking. Being prepared, generous, curious and kind – while also rigorous—are the keys.

### **Policy on Late Work:**

We are in a pandemic and we are all doing our best: if you have difficulties with deadlines or workload I hope you will contact me as early as you can so we can be in dialogue about how I can assist you. Still, since much of our work will be collaborative, turning in work late is strongly discouraged: unless arrangements have been made, papers and other assignments will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade for each day beyond their due date, with the first 24 hour period beginning immediately. But again: please talk to me when circumstances arise that affect your capacities in the class.

### **Absence and Tardy Policy:**

Our work this term is an experiment in collective thinking. Being present is a key part of that labor, but we are in unprecedented times. I expect all students to be present in all course meetings to the extent that they are able to do so. *We will be circulating a pact of mutual respect at the start of term*; my expectation is that you will uphold your commitment to our work together. I will be in touch with each of you to discuss circumstances on your side, and we will work together to devise reasonable expectations that balance your constraints with the shared endeavor of our seminar.

### **Values in the Classroom:**

Our class is guided by the principle of mutual respect and an ethic of care. These commitments are particularly important during times of emergency, such as this one, when we will be asked to think carefully about the situations of others and make changes to our own behavior accordingly. We will be called upon to be flexible and kind, and to listen. Our classroom is a space where debate of ideas and substantive disagreement are enabled by the fact that our mutual respect is unquestioned. In keeping with this, I ask that you please inform me of your preferred name and pronouns and I will, of course, use them. Mine are he/him. The Department of English has adopted [a statement of principles](#) that states, in part: “The Department of English at Georgetown University stands united in its commitment to the fundamental equality and inherent dignity of all human beings. These values are the foundation of our work in the humanities and transcend political affiliation.

They are also embedded in our University's mission and the Jesuit tradition of seeking social justice. As humanists we are committed to the practices of principled argumentation, free inquiry, careful consideration of evidence and fact, and sustained, contemplative engagement. A prerequisite for those practices is respect."

### **Plagiarism:**

Do not do it, ever. If you do, you will (at the very least) fail the course. See the Georgetown Honor System website for guidelines about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it: <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. Note that, as suggested above, in all matters I expect you to observe the Georgetown honor pledge: *To be honest in every academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.*

### **Disabilities and Accommodations:**

I'm committed to providing whatever it takes to help you be successful in this course. This is doubly true given the challenges associated with an all-online learning environment. Please talk with me about issues you are facing, whatever the kind, and we will work together to set up a program to help you succeed in the course. This comes from the Georgetown Academic Resource Center: "Georgetown does not discriminate or deny access to an otherwise qualified student with a disability on the basis of disability, and students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable accommodations and/or special services in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAA) of 2008. However, students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not requested an accommodation and adequately documented their disabilities. Also, the University need not modify programmatic, course, or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction." Please consult <http://guarc.georgetown.edu/disability/accommodations/>; and do see me early in the term so we can talk about how I can help.

### **Note on Title IX:**

University policy requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct or gender-based violence to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of *fully confidential* professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence. These resources include: Jen Schweer, MA, LPC / Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention / (202) 687-0323 / [jls242@georgetown.edu](mailto:jls242@georgetown.edu) / And Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist / Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) / (202) 687-6985 / [els54@georgetown.edu](mailto:els54@georgetown.edu). More information about campus resources and faculty reporting obligations can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

### **Guides for Further Study and Research:**

Thinking in interdisciplinary ways across boundaries of science and culture is difficult. For reliable scientific information, please see the NOAA website, the International Panel on Climate Change site, and the climate coverage of, especially the *Guardian* (UK) and the *Washington Post*. The GU Library has compiled a hub for accessing interdisciplinary information about climate change: <http://guides.library.georgetown.edu/climate>. For matters of literary and theoretical terminology, your first line of defense is the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*. Second stop is the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available with a Google search. For matters of literary and cultural history, consult the *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* or the *Columbia Guide to British Literature*. (Links to these are available the library's [19th century resources site](#).) Only after exhausting these options should you bother with Wikipedia. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions about this material. We're in this together. I'm here to help.

## WRITING CLIMATE / Course Schedule

*Please note that the calendar will almost certainly change as we move through the term; it is the structure on which we will improvise together. You will be notified in advance of these changes. Please look on our Canvas site for most up to date schedule. Texts marked with an asterisk are not available on the Canvas site; they were ordered from the bookstore. Please be sure to have these texts (\*) in hard copy. The texts listed on a given day will be discussed on the day they are listed: please prepare carefully.*

### I. PRESENTS

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THURSDAY, August 27: Introductions, embodiment, emplacement. Gena Zuroski, "Where Do You Know From?"

TUESDAY, September 1: *King James Bible*, Genesis 1-2; John Locke, from *Second Treatise of Government*

THURSDAY, September 3: Jeremy Davies, from *The Birth of the Anthropocene*. *Each student posts one (relatively short) climate change case study article that is of interest to them. Please read all posted articles.*

TUESDAY, September 8: David Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth"\* and Michael Mann response; film trailers: *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*. *Each student posts one (relatively short) climate change case study article that is of interest to them. Please read all posted articles.*

THURSDAY, September 10: Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement\**, Part I, "Stories."

TUESDAY, September 15: Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement\**, Parts II and III, "History" and "Politics."

THURSDAY, September 17: Rob Nixon, from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Flip through pictures in Richard Misrach and Kate Orff, *Petrochemical America*. **[PR CLOSE READING DUE]**

## II. PASTS

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TUESDAY, September 22: Check in and review. What is the situation on the ground where you are? In the water? In the air?

THURSDAY, September 24: Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Chapters 1 & 2. “A Fable for Tomorrow” and “The Obligation to Endure.” Powerpoint Slides on “The Great Acceleration.”

TUESDAY, September 29: Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*, selections. *The New York Times*, “The Insect Apocalypse is Here: What Does it Mean for the Rest of Life on Earth?” **[GEOGRAPHICAL CLOSE READING DUE]**

THURSDAY, October 1: Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, selections cont’d.

TUESDAY, October 6: Christina Sharpe, “Introduction” and “The Weather,” from *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being\**. Select documents on slavery and endurance at Georgetown.

THURSDAY, October 8: Contemporary case study TBD: class votes!

TUESDAY, October 13: Workshop day (working on Geographical Close Reading)

THURSDAY, October 15: Workshop day (working on Geographical Close Reading)

TUESDAY, October 20: Richard McGuire, *Here\** **[OP-ED OR CULTURAL REVIEW DUE]**

THURSDAY, October 22: Richard McGuire, *Here\**

TUESDAY, October 27: Richard McGuire, *Here\**

## III. FUTURES

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THURSDAY, October 29: Check in and update. What is the situation on the ground where you are? In the water? In the air?

TUESDAY, November 3: Workshop day

THURSDAY, November 5: Film: *Into Eternity*

TUESDAY, November 10: Film: *Into Eternity*, cont'd.  
**[ANALYTICAL ESSAY DUE]**

THURSDAY, November 12: Ed Yong, “How the Pandemic Defeated America.”  
Jeff Tollefson, “Why Deforestation and Extinctions Make Pandemics More Likely”;

TUESDAY, November 17: Kim Stanley Robinson, “The Coronavirus is Rewriting Our Imaginations”; Voicemails from Futurecoast.org\*

THURSDAY, November 19: Workshop day (working on Op-Eds or Analytical Essays)  
**[LETTER TO THE PAST DUE]**

***[THANKSGIVING RECESS]***

TUESDAY, December 1: Workshop day (working on Op-Eds or Analytical Essays)

THURSDAY, December 3: Pope Francis, from *Laudato Si* **[LETTER TO THE FUTURE DUE; ALL REVISIONS DUE]**

TUESDAY, December 8: Last Day of Class. Wrapup.