

NONFICTION CRAFT SEMINAR

LITERATURES OF SCIENCE: LIFE AS A STORY IN DEEP TIME

Alison Hawthorne Deming

Thursday 3:30 – 6:00 p.m.

POETRY CENTER

This nonfiction craft seminar will explore contemporary works of science writing. My loosely defined sense of the genre includes works that explore physical, biological, social, Native, and “domestic” science. Our goal is twofold: to enhance science literacy and to deepen understanding of what it means to be human. We are creatures not only of history but of eternity, beings in a continuum of coming-into-form that is the story and process of the physical universe. Science gives us a verifiable method to explore the nature of life. Yet most Americans, if you believe the recent Gallup Poll, find the story that science gives us unpalatable. Almost half of our compatriots believe God created humans 10,000 years ago, despite compelling evidence that we developed over time from earlier species of animals. We might as well be educating our citizens to join the last gasp chapter of the Flat Earth Society. And yet we have never needed science more than we do at this time when the great round and fertile Earth is under environmental and political siege. This seminar will focus on works written with both scientific and literary credibility, inviting participants to explore the imaginative possibilities stirred by such convergence.

Because this is a bountiful time for science writing, I have included an “Alternates” list from which you may substitute one or two of the books for one or two on the primary list. Lest this become too confusing for you, me and our companions in this enterprise, I will ask you each to make those decisions by the second class meeting and to slip me a note or email to that effect. I'll adjust the class schedule accordingly, allowing time for you to offer commentary in class on any alternates you chose.

COURSE CONTENT AND WRITING REQUIREMENTS

We will read and discuss twelve books with occasional other materials of interest to be distributed in class. You will be expected to write a brief (one-page) annotation for each of the books we read and to hand it in on the day that book is discussed in class. These should address the author's intent, stylistic devices, and strengths/weaknesses of the work. Annotations will help you build a personal archive of your reading and keep you accountable. These will not be graded.

Each participant in the course is required to write one 15 – 20 page essay that engages the culture of the humanities with the culture of science. This might be a response to C.P. Snow's seminal essay “The Two Cultures”; a portrait of a scientist; a portrait of an artist who engages imaginatively with science; a natural history essay; a persuasive essay on how science and humanities can work together in addressing critical environmental challenges; a personal essay on some aspect of your experience of science education; a meditation on the deep time of mind; a futurist manifesto on the destiny of humankind.

The field is open to your imagination. Your goal is to write a publishable essay for a general readership.

INTRODUCERS

You will also be expected to share the leadership for the seminar by taking a turn introducing one of books on the reading list. We will set up a structure for this on the first day of class.

GRADING

I will **not** give you a letter grade on your weekly annotations, but I will keep a tally. I will base 70% of your grade on the final essay, the other 30% on annotations and class participation. Attendance and weekly annotations are required.

READING SCHEDULE: Books are available at the UA Bookstore.

August 24	1st class Introductions and expectations (hand-outs given on Chauvet Cave)
August 31	Freeman Dyson, <i>Disturbing the Universe</i>
September 7	Paul Martin, <i>Twilight of the Mammoths</i>
September 14	Claude Levi-Strauss, <i>Tristes Tropiques</i>
September 21	John McPhee, <i>The Survival of the Bark Canoe</i>
September 28	Matt Ridley, <i>Genome</i>
October 5	Sandra Steingraber, <i>Having Faith</i>
October 12	Susan Hubbell, <i>Waiting for Aphrodite</i>
October 19	Temple Grandin, <i>Animals in Translation</i>
October 26	Bernd Heinrich, <i>Ravens in Winter</i>
November 2	Frans de Waal, <i>Our Inner Ape</i>
November 9	No class. Hand in proposals for final essay projects.
November 16	M.F.K. Fisher, <i>Consider the Oyster</i>
November 23	HAPPY THANKSGIVING
November 30	Barbara Hurd, <i>Entering the Stone</i> ESSAYS DUE

December 7

LAST CLASS
Summary & Evaluation

ALTERNATES:

Karen Armstrong, A SHORT HISTORY OF MYTH
John Hay, BIRD OF LIGHT
Robin Wall Kimmerer, GATHERING MOSS
David Rothenberg, WHY BIRDS SING
Frank Waters, THE BOOK OF HOPI
Richard Dawkins, THE ANCESTOR'S TALE

OFFICE HOURS

Wednesday, 3:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Thursday, 1:30 – 3:00 p.m.

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