

Notes on assigned readings:

[The Green Children of Woolpit]

- Set in medieval England, a recounting of strange occurrences related to nature and their peculiarities. The author describes the 'green children' as the most notable strange occurrence, and questions how and why the event happened.
- The 'green children' were a pair of children found during harvest time (Fall) in a ditch/wulfpitte near East Anglia. The children had green bodies and wore clothes of unusual color and unknown appearance. They were taken to a nearby village and given food, which they initially denied until given beans (which they ate). Both children were then baptized and taught the local language. When asked where they were from, the green children said they were people of St. Martin's land, a Christian country with a different solar cycle. The male child later died, while the female child lived a normal life. The author considered this event the most remarkable and unusual of those listed.
- William was a member of the Augustinian friars at Newburgh Priory in the English Midlands. He is one of the most important and well-respected historians of the 12th century.
- Considered easier to assimilate a girl into their culture, as a woman can marry into the community.
- William still considers all events he mentioned as natural, even the 'green children'.

[Williams, "Nature"]

- A discussion on the origins of the word, nature, and how its meaning has been redefined over time through its various usage. The author identifies three senses of the word nature: (i) the essential quality and character of something, (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both, (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings.
- Nature comes from *natura/nasci*, meaning to be born.
- *human nature*, the essential quality and characteristic of human beings to behave or act a certain way
- *abstract/singular nature*, nature as an all knowing/surrounding force, defining God as primary and nature as his deputy/instrument of which to enforce his will.
- *nature-lover and nature poetry*, nature being used to describe things untouched from humankind,
- *natural selection*, nature being used in a scientific context, "nature shows/teaches", used to describe nature as a hidden scientific order between organisms and their environments
- Williams argues the meaning of nature changes as humans are included/excluded from its usage and definition.
- Personification of nature as a medieval queen.
- Questions on the degree of independence between nature and God.
- Nature evolves to a lawful process ('human nature') during the scientific revolution (18th/19th century). 'Nature stops being a ruler, and starts being a lawyer'.
- Williams argues nature is always created in our own image, as reflected by the

changes in its usage over time.

[Buell, "What Is An Environmental Text?"]

- A reflection on the presence and development of the natural environment throughout many popular works of American literature. The author notes four main checkpoints often contained in environmental texts: (i) The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history, (ii) The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest, (iii) Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation, (iiii) Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.
- Author notes the vast importance of environmental literary works, such as Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the environmental nonfiction of Celia Thaxter, Mary Austin, and John Burroughs.

Notes From Lecture:

- Environment is used more often than nature in institutional settings, though nature used to be the dominant term.
- 'Environment' was not used as a synonym for "the natural world or physical surroundings in general" until the twentieth century. Environment encompasses the built as well as the natural landscapes. Environment comes from the medieval french verb, 'environner', or 'to surround'.
- Throughout the middle ages, nature took the following meanings: constitution, character, the creative power governing the world, the physical world itself, the

natural course of things, genitals.

- The meaning of nature has narrowed over time, while the meaning of environment has broadened.