

Instructor: **Jolene Mathieson, MA**
 Title: **Fiction in the Time of Climate Change**
 Course: **Seminar II**
 Number: **53-546**
 Time: **Tuesdays, 12-14**
 Room: **Phil 1263**
 Starts: **13.10.2015**



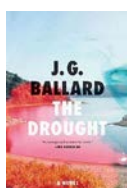
Bjargey Olafsdottir, *Red Polar Bear*, Organic water-colour on Glacier Langjökull, Iceland. Photo© Christopher Lund

This seminar is interested in examining the role literature plays in the age of the so-called ‘Anthropocene’. The Anthropocene refers to our current geological epoch in which human activity is taken into account as a veritable geological force within the planetary Earth System. In fact, Earth scientists are currently proposing to formalise the Anthropocene within the Geological Time Scale. Anthropogenic climate change, then, refers to human-induced alterations in the Earth’s ecosystems (via perturbations in the chemical composition of the Earth’s soil, oceans and atmosphere) that contribute to ocean acidification, species invasions, mass extinction and global warming.

Now, literature has always functioned as *the* preeminent social and cognitive tool for exploring, expressing and understanding ourselves as human beings, in all of our (in)glorious and profound complexity, both in times of peace and great upheaval. However, the sheer scale of anthropogenic climate change, in terms of space, time and complexity, has proven difficult to comprehend much less represent in a socially meaningful way. We will hence read excerpts from a handful of theoretical texts that re-examine received ideas on nature, ecology and homo sapiens’ place within the natural environment. And within this framework we will then scrutinise a handful of literary projects that offer specific epistemic mechanisms for defining who we are and the quality of our ecological embeddedness. We will read a couple of poems, two short stories, and three climate change novels, all of which are remarkably short yet breath-taking in scope, and which employ distinct generic strategies for representing that which may or may not be beyond the bounds of representation.

Requirements: The stated goal of this seminar is to critically engage with these texts as vested homo sapiens, that is, with a scholarly and inherent interest in the subject matter. Ergo, the *Studienleistung* will consist of thorough preparation of all reading material, completion of weekly homework assignments and one academic essay. The *Prüfungsleistung* consists of a 12-to-15-page research paper.

Texts: Each of you must purchase the ‘Seminar 53-546’ Reader at Cobra Copy (Von-Melle-Park 5, 20146 HH). You also need to purchase the following novels in these editions:



J.G. Ballard. *The Drought*.
 [1964]. New York: W.W. Norton, 2012.
 ISBN-10: 9780871404015= €15,00



Jeanette Winterson. *The Stone Gods*.
 London: Penguin, 2008. ISBN-10:
 014103260X = €11,00



James Bradley. *Clade*.
 This novel will be made available at a
 later date

