

ENGL 565-921: Studies in Environmental Humanities
Vin Nardizzi

Term 1
MTh, 1000 AM - 100 PM

The Plant Seminar

This seminar is an introduction to the multidisciplinary field of “critical plant studies.” Our guiding question may seem simple: ***What is a plant?*** A dictionary can provide us with a quick, text-book answer. You could also point to a tree or flower, and say “That!” So, in this seminar, let’s ask an even more specific question: ***What in the Arts is a plant?*** This ramifies in unexpected ways, and it will be our task in this seminar to trace some of these branches across the Environmental Humanities. We’ll investigate this question from an array of disciplines: philosophy, Indigenous (Potawatomi) storytelling, anthropology, history, landscape design, the visual arts, film, and literary writing (poetry, memoir, short fiction). Along the way, we might find that “the Arts” is a too-limited rubric. And throughout we’ll keep a sharp eye on matters pertaining to gender, sexuality, and queerness.

Expect materials to be set up in nodes that mix disciplinary perspectives:

- Aristotle, Michael Marder, Mel Chen, Andrew Marvell, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and *The Little Shop of Horrors* (Vegetality & Animacy)
- Ovid’s myth of Apollo and Daphne, Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, excerpts from Schiebinger and Swan’s *Colonial Botany*, and Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden (Book)*: (Mobility & Circulation)
- Georges Bataille, Michael Taussig, Shakespeare, Robert Mapplethorpe, *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and Dorothy Allison’s “A Lesbian Appetite” (Reproductivity & Sex)
- Algernon Blackwood’s “The Man Who Loved Trees,” Stevie Wonder’s soundtrack to *The Secret Life of Plants*, Octavia Butler, “Amnesty” and Suzanne Simard’s *Mother Tree* (Communication & Signaling)

Students will deliver a seminar presentation and submit a final essay, which need not focus on a specific plant-text on this syllabus.