One does not have to be a prophet to predict that in the coming decades nations will go to war in order to assert their claims to diminishing water resources. Indeed, these contested claims may well become the epicenter of global politics much as oil is at the present time. As is often the case in these conflicts, it will be the poor who will suffer the most as increasingly few global players decide the "market" price of this essential resource. Of course, the centrality of water in human life is nothing new. Throughout history, cultures and civilizations have formed habitations around bodies of water (the Nile, the Euphrates, the Yangtse, the Ganges, and so on); water has also borne important symbolic value, acting as an agent of cleansing, of baptism, of rebirth.

In literature, water has resonated as a central element, reflected in works that deal with river and ocean crossings, islands and castaways, ports and harbors, storms and floods, thirst and baptism, to name a few. Depending on the concerns that are made central in each course, possible texts might include Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat,” George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, Charles Johnson’s *The Middle Passage*, Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*, Jane Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres*, and Vandana Shiva’s *Water Wars*. Water as a context offers the possibility of rich conversations across disciplines (art history, geography, political science, economics, environmental studies, sociology, and theology), as well as an opportunity for students to reflect on a valuable resource and its political, economic, social, and cultural significance.

**Fall 2010 Common Context-Related Events**

**Film Series: Trouble the Water**

Wednesday, September 22
7:00-9:00pm, John Roach Center, 126 Auditorium
2008 Academy Award Nominee for Best Documentary Feature, *Trouble the Water* takes the viewer inside Hurricane Katrina in a way never before seen on screen. As the hurricane begins to rage and the floodwaters fill their world and the screen, Kim Roberts and her husband Scott film their harrowing retreat to higher ground and the dramatic rescues of friends and neighbors. Weaving an insider’s view of Katrina with a mix of verite and in-your-face filmmaking, *Trouble the Water* is a redemptive tale of self-described street hustlers who become heroes--two unforgettable people who survive the storm and then seize a chance for a new beginning.

**Faculty Panel: "Blue Planet: Water in a Global Context"**

Tuesday, October 12
12:00-1:00pm, O’Shaughnessy Educational Center Auditorium
St. Thomas faculty will discuss global water issues within the context of their respective disciplines. Dr. Todd Lawrence (English) will moderate this panel. Participating faculty members include:

- Steven Hoffman (Political Science)
- Kanishka Chowdhury (English)
- Elise Amel (Environmental Studies / Psychology)
- Kaye Smith (Engineering)
- Kevin Theissen (Geology)
**Film Series: Chinatown**
Wednesday, October 13
7:00-9:00pm, John Roach Center, 126 Auditorium

*Chinatown*, Roman Polanski and Robert Towne’s 1974 homage to film noir, features the genre’s usual elements: a private eye and a femme fatale, powerful criminals, and an ever-changing plot. The film, however, is also based on a historical event: the 1904 Owens Valley “Land Grab,” where corrupt Los Angeles city officials attempted to persuade the citizenry of southern California to provide the growing city with greater access to water while profiting financially by controlling water rights in that area. This event becomes the focus of the film: an investigation into the mysterious death of a L.A. water official uncovers what lengths people will go to in order to control water, the most precious commodity of Los Angeles county.

**Faculty Panel: "Water and Literature"**
Thursday, October 14
12:00-1:00pm, O'Shaughnessy Educational Center Auditorium

St. Thomas English Department faculty will examine the themes and issues in specific water-related texts. Paul Lai will moderate this panel. Participating faculty members include:

- Young-ok An
- Alex McEllistrem-Evenson
- Michael Mikolajczak
- Anne Roth-Reinhardt
- Liz Wilkinson

**Spring 2011 Common Context Events**

**Film Series: Tapped**
Thursday, February 24, 2011
7:00-9:30pm, John Roach Center, 126 Auditorium

Is access to clean drinking water a basic human right, or a commodity that should be bought and sold like any other article of commerce? Stephanie Soechtig’s debut feature is an unflinching examination of the big business of bottled water. From the producers of *Who Killed the Electric Car* and *I.O.U.S.A.*, this timely documentary is a behind-the-scenes look into the unregulated and unseen world of an industry that aims to privatize and sell back the one resource that ought never to become a commodity: our water. From the plastic production to the ocean in which so many of these bottles end up, this inspiring documentary trails the path of the bottled water industry and communities which were the unwitting chips on the table. A powerful portrait of the lives affected by the bottled water industry, this revelatory film features those caught at the intersection of big business and the public’s right to water.

Film Series: Water
Thursday, March 31, 2011
7:00-9:30pm, John Roach Center, 126 Auditorium
From the courageous and provocative filmmaker Deepa Mehta comes Water, the profoundly moving and compellingly vibrant story of India’s “widow houses,” where women of all ages are taken to live (even today) apart from society following the deaths of their husbands. Sprinkled with humor, rife with universal emotions and alive with visual excitement, the story of Water follows three widows who dared to stand up for themselves in the liberating time of Mahatma Gandhi.

Film Event: Veins in the Gulf
Wednesday, April 6, 2011
6:30-8:30pm, John Roach Center, 126 Auditorium
Veins in the Gulf (produced, directed, and edited by Elizabeth Coffman and Ted Hardin; 70 minutes) is a documentary that traces the history of rapidly disappearing bayous, the environmental crisis of southern Louisiana, and the international impact of Cajun culture, which is quickly losing ground. Through interviews with fishermen, engineers, poets, and scientists, we bear witness as Louisiana residents confront the mortality of their culture and a community tries to solve its environmental crises. Poet Martha Serpas guides us through the heart of Southern culture to discover where great American literature, music, seafood and oil have come from for the past century. But probably not for the next. We are fortunate to have Coffman, Hardin, and Serpas present at this film screening. This event is being co-sponsored by the Sacred Arts Festival, the Department of English, the American Culture and Difference program, and Faculty Development.

Related UST Events Not Directly Sponsored by the English Department

Poetry Reading: Martha Serpas
Tuesday, April 5, 2011
7:30-9:00pm, O'Shaughnessy Educational Center Auditorium
Martha Serpas is the author of two collections of poetry, Côte Blanche (New Issues) and The Dirty Side of the Storm (W.W. Norton). Her work has appeared in The New Yorker, The Nation, and Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion, as well as in a number of anthologizes, including the Library of America’s American Religious Poems. She has taught at Yale Divinity School and the University of Tampa, where she served as poetry editor of Tampa Review. A native of south Louisiana, she remains involved in efforts to restore Louisiana’s wetlands. Since 2006 she has worked as a trauma hospital chaplain. More information about Serpas can be found on her website: http://www.julietdavis.com/clients/marthaserpas/index.html. This poetry reading is one of the major events of the St. Thomas Sacred Arts Festival.

Other Resources

Waterlife Web Site
The documentary film Waterlife looks at how the Great Lakes are changing due to a variety of environmental and human factors. Check out the Waterlife companion web site at http://waterlife.nfb.ca for some great images, music, and information.