

The University of Houston, Department of English
ENGL 7396: Selected Topics in Environmental Studies / Spring Semester 2015
Postcolonial Ecocritique

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Office Hours: 2:30-4:00 Thursday and by appt



Image: A.V.C. Fielding, *View in the Island of Ceylon, from the Residence of Sir Alexander Johnston*, 1830. Courtesy British Library.

Course Description

“Topics in Environmental Studies: Postcolonial Ecocritique” will explore bridges that have been recently constructed between the two fields of ecocriticism and postcolonial studies. This course will investigate the recent cooperation of these two fields through a sampling of fiction, critical readings, and other selections. It features fiction published by British, Anglo-Indian, and Indo-Anglian writers in an arc reaching from the later nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first. This timeframe corresponds to the period following the First War of Indian Independence (1857) to the present day, an era of colonial disintegration and dissolution and (post)colonial critique. The course will raise a variety of questions. For example, how are the concepts of “nature” and “the natural” represented in our literary texts? What forms of environmental degradation emerged from global colonialist activity, as represented in our texts? How do the texts address these issues? How are borders variably drawn between different species in these texts? Or how are variable species shown to be related or connected? Are current modes of environmental and postcolonial discourse adequate to identify and address the issues raised in these texts? Writing assignments include three short papers and one final seminar paper.

Required Texts

Primary

- Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable* (1935).
Conrad, Joseph. *Typhoon* (1902).
Forster, E.M. *Howards End* (1910).
Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies* (2008).
Gunasekera, Romesh. *Reef* (1994).
Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Books* (1894).
Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things* (1997).
Wells, H.G. “Aepyornis Island” and “The Treasure in the Forest” (1895).

Secondary

- Arora, Anupama. “‘The Sea is History’: Opium, Colonialism, and Migration in Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*.” *Ariel* 42.3-4 (2012): 21-42.
Gimenez, Eric Holt. “Of Myths and Men: Mark Lynas and the Intoxicating Power of Technology.” *HuffingtonPost.com* 3 Feb 2013: n.pag.

- Hegglund, Jon. "Region: Geddes, Forster, and the Situated Eye." *World Views: Metageographies of Modernist Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. 55-82.
- Hotchkiss, Jane. "The Jungle of Eden: Kipling, Wolf Boys, and the Colonial Imagination." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29.2 (2001): 435-49.
- Huggan, Graham. "'Greening' Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives." *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.3 (Fall 2004): 701-33.
- Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. "Green Postcolonialism." *Interventions* 9.1 (2007): 1-11.
- Lynas, Mark. Lecture to Oxford Farming Conference. marklynas.org 3 Jan 2013: n.pag.
- Mehan, Uppinder S. "Transgressing Bodies in Postcolonial Fiction." *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 24.1-2 (2001): 1-13.
- Nixon, Rob. "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism." *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Ed. Ania Loomba et al. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005. 233-51.
- Roos, Bonnie, and Alex Hunt. "Narratives of Survival, Sustainability, and Justice." *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*. Ed. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010. 1-13.
- Sen, Malcolm. "Bones of Corals Made: Ecology and War in Gunesekara's *Reef*." *Textual Practice* 27:3 (2013): 479-98.
- Shiva, Vandana. "The Green Revolution Myth." *Resurgence & Ecologist* 285 (July/August 2014): 16-17.
- . "Seeds of Truth: A Response to *The New Yorker*." vanadanashiva.com 26 Aug 2014: n.pag.
- Specter, Michael. "Seeds of Doubt." *The New Yorker* 25 Aug 2014: n.pag. *New Yorker.com*.
- Vadde, Aarthi. "The Backwaters Sphere: Ecological Collectivity, Cosmopolitanism, and Arundhati Roy." *Modern Fiction Studies* 55:3 (Fall 2009): 522-44.

Schedule

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| Thu | Jan 22 | Introduction to Course
Shiva, "The Green Revolution Myth"
Specter, "Seeds of Doubt"
Shiva, "Seeds of Truth"
Lynas, Lecture to Oxford Farming Conference.
Gimenez, "Of Myths and Men" |
| Thu | Jan 29 | Lecture: Gayatri Spivak, "Lessons from My Travels"
University Theater, Student Center, Room 103
5:30-7:30 (approximately) |
| Tue | Feb 3 | Think Pieces for February 5 must be posted on Blackboard by Tuesday at 5pm |
| Thu | Feb 5 | Huggan, "'Greening' Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives" (Burns, Zhang, Lucke)
Nixon, "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" (Christopherson, Eom)
Huggan and Tiffin, "Green Postcolonialism" (Fairbanks, Hash, Miller)
Roos and Hunt, "Narratives of Survival, Sustainability, and Justice" (Landrey, Penzien, Velasquez)
H.G. Wells, "Aepyornis Island" and "The Treasure in the Forest"
<i>Think Pieces</i> : everyone |
| Tue | Feb 10 | Think Pieces for February 12 must be posted on Blackboard by Tuesday at 5pm |
| Thu | Feb 12 | Kipling, <i>The Jungle Books</i>
Hotchkiss, "The Jungle of Eden"
<i>Think Pieces</i> : Hash, Penzien, Zhang |
| Tue | Feb 17 | Think Pieces for February 19 must be posted on Blackboard by Tuesday at 5pm |
| Thu | Feb 19 | Forster, <i>Howards End</i>
Hegglund, "Region: Geddes, Forster, and the Situated Eye"
<i>Think Pieces</i> : Hash, Miller, Landrey |

Thu	Feb 26	Conrad, <i>Typhoon</i> Davis, <i>Late Victorian Holocausts</i> : read chapter one (“Victoria’s Ghosts”). The preface is also included, which you may read if you want to. Guest Seminar Leader: Jen Hill, University of Nevada, Reno
Tue	Mar 3	Think Pieces for March 5 must be posted on Blackboard by Tuesday at 5pm
Thu	Mar 5	Anand, <i>Untouchable</i> Mehan, “Transgressing Bodies in Postcolonial Fiction” Booth, et al., <i>Craft of Research 1</i> and 2 <i>Think Pieces</i> : Burns, Christopherson, Lucke, Penzien
Tue	Mar 10	Think Pieces for March 12 must be posted on Blackboard by Tuesday at 5pm
Thu	Mar 12	Gunesekara, <i>Reef</i> Sen, “Bones of Corals Made” Booth et al., <i>Craft of Research 3</i> <i>Think Pieces</i> : Burns, Eom, Lucke, Zhang Discuss final paper topic with Lynn Voskuil by today
Thu	Mar 19	No Class: Spring Break
Tue	Mar 24	Think Pieces for Mar 26 must be posted on Blackboard by Tuesday at 5pm
Thu	Mar 26	Roy, <i>God of Small Things</i> Vadde, “The Backwaters Sphere” Booth et al., <i>Craft of Research 4</i> <i>Think Pieces</i> : Eom, Fairbanks, Landrey, Velasquez
Tue	Mar 31	Think Pieces for April 2 must be posted on Blackboard by Tuesday at 5pm
Thu	Apr 2	Ghosh, <i>Sea of Poppies</i> Arora, “The Sea is History” Booth et al., <i>Craft of Research 5</i> <i>Think Pieces</i> : Christophsen, Fairbanks, Miller, Velasquez
Thu	Apr 9	Ghosh, <i>Poppies</i> No critical reading
Thu	Apr 16	No Class Booth et al., <i>Craft of Research 6</i>
Thu	Apr 23	Paper Workshops
Thu	Apr 30	Paper Workshops
Fri	May 8	Final draft of Final Paper due



Grading

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| ○ Think Pieces: 10 percent each for three | 30 percent |
| ○ Class Participation: faithful class attendance with texts prepared for discussion | 20 percent |
| ○ Final Seminar Paper | 50 percent |
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Writing Assignments*Think Pieces: 900-1000 words each*

The “think pieces” are brief, exploratory papers that reflect on, examine, or otherwise think through the critical and theoretical texts assigned for a given class session, or the ways in which the secondary text uses the primary text. Each of you will be required to complete three of these during the semester. Because we are sampling the intersection of two complex fields, I want to be sure that you distill useful ideas and principles from the assigned critical readings, even if you don’t have significant background in postcolonial or ecocritical studies. To that end, these brief papers are designed to enable you to digest and use the critical readings in ways that I hope will be helpful to you. I am thinking of these papers as tools to help you do some intellectual (as opposed to scholarly) work. Here are the kinds of questions you might ask yourself; you are not limited to these, but you may certainly use them to stimulate your thinking:

- What central principles or ideas does the author try to advance?
- Does s/he apply them to primary texts in useful ways? How would you describe those ways?
- Is the author’s primary interest political, aesthetic, or both? That is, is s/he trying to make a political point (about postcolonialism, environmentalism, or both)? Or is s/he trying to explicate a text in order to underscore its aesthetic or historical values?
- Do you find the critical texts useful or helpful? Describe how they are useful or helpful.
- What principles or ideas do you think you might be able to use or draw on to understand the primary texts better? Or in your final paper?

While these pieces should be written as clearly and thoughtfully as possible, you may make them quite reflective by emphasizing yourself in conversation with the text(s). In other words, you may foreground your confusion, your pleasure, or your irritation, if you wish, and you need not think of them as finished arguments. If you’re having trouble getting started, you may even explicitly pose one (or more) of the questions listed above, and then answer them. Please do give each think piece a title, however, paginate them, and be sure to include your name.

The think pieces will be due two days before the class period in which we discuss the assigned texts, and you will be required to post them on our Blackboard site so that everyone can read each other’s pieces before class time. The idea is to share our thinking and reflection with each other and thereby enable collective forms of understanding.

All of you will be required to complete a think piece on one of the critical readings assigned for February 5. In succeeding weeks, you will be required to complete a think piece as assigned on the first day of class.

Final Seminar Paper / 4500-6000 words / Final draft due Friday, May 8

The most important assignment for this course is the final seminar paper; its length is approximately equivalent to an article you might publish in a scholarly journal. The text and topic are for you to determine, but you must discuss your ideas with me no later than March 12. Readings from *The Craft of Research*—a book that addresses the construction of compelling arguments—should help you not only figure out your topic but also construct your argument. We will discuss drafts of your papers during the final several weeks of the semester; everyone will receive a thorough workshop discussion, which should help you with your final draft. We’ll discuss the workshop format later in the semester, closer to the time your drafts are due.
