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English 254, Winter 2020
20th-c. British Literature
Tuesday 3:10-6:00
120 Voorhies

Empire, Environment, and British Literature, 1900-1940

Brief Description:

This course will approach early-twentieth-century British literature through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism. We will read texts set in London and provincial England as well as texts set in South America, Africa, India, and the Arctic, and we will consider British imperialism in its formal as well as informal registers that extend into histories of investment, infrastructure, and resource exploitation. Our secondary readings will cover topics such as ecological imperialism, environmental racism, the Anthropocene, and global extractivism, as well as critical methods and approaches such as world ecology, modernist studies, literature and science, and the energy humanities. Our primary texts encompass various modes of literary prose, from impressionism and psychological realism to adventure romance, fantasy, and speculative fiction.

Primary texts (available at the UCD bookstore):

H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899; 1902)
M. P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud* (1901)
William Henry Hudson, *Green Mansions* (1904)
Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Sultana's Dream" (1905) [optional Feminist Press ed., or online ed.]
E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops" (1909) [Canvas]
D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (1913)
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927)
Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934)
George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)
J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (1937)

Secondary Readings (available on Canvas):

Listed in the course calendar

Assignments and Expectations

All students are expected to attend seminar, having completed the readings for the day, and to participate actively in discussion. Participation will figure into your course grade. The major assignments for the class will be a presentation and a seminar paper, described below.

Presentation

All students will sign up to present at one of our class meetings. Presentations will last about 10-15 minutes. There are two options for presentations from which you may choose:

- 1) Identify two secondary readings (critical articles from scholarly journals or chapters from scholarly books) that focus on the assigned text for the day, and give a short overview of their arguments, strengths, and weaknesses. What methods does the critic use? What kinds of sources / archives do they draw on? What parts of the text prove most accommodating and least accommodating to their argument? The goal of this presentation assignment is to improve your skills in secondary research and your capacity to evaluate and assimilate criticism.
- 2) Identify a poem, painting, film clip, or other cultural object to introduce to the class in conjunction with the day's reading assignment. If you choose a poem or other text, it should be short enough that we can read it together in class without taking too much of your presentation time; likewise, any film clips should be short. Discuss your chosen text/image/clip in thematic or historical relation to the assigned reading for the day. The goal of this presentation assignment is primarily pedagogical, to help you practice generating critical synergies between texts or between cultural objects.

Seminar Paper

Your paper should be 14-15 pages long (not including bibliography), and will be due by Tuesday March 17th. Papers should be submitted electronically via Canvas. Many of you will be familiar with the general expectations for a graduate seminar paper, but I will take the opportunity here to highlight key aspects of the assignment. The practice of writing a seminar paper should prepare you to write professional criticism in literary studies, thus your paper, like any journal article or dissertation chapter, should develop an original argument based on comprehensive research of related work in the field. (Because we are operating on 10-week quarters, you are only required to write a 14- or 15-page seminar paper for the course, but keep in mind that this is shorter than most articles and all dissertation chapters.) Ideally, a seminar paper should develop out of the critical problems and questions under investigation in the course; this means that normally your paper will focus on a literary text or texts that we studied together and will bear some relation to the major topics of the course. If you would like to write on a topic or text outside of this scope, please feel free to talk to me about it in office hours. I expect your final papers to show evidence of careful research of the issues under investigation in your essay. You may use primary and secondary sources or just secondary sources, but be sure that your argument is grounded in thorough research with reliable materials. Your paper should make an original argument that has not been made about your particular text. It is fine to write on a topic that another critic already discusses so long as your paper takes a different approach or explores different ground.

Calendar

- 1/7 H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)
 Allen MacDuffie, "Charles Darwin and the Victorian Pre-History of Climate Denial"

- 1/14 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899 serial; 1902 book)
Jesse Oak Taylor, “Wilderness after Nature: Conrad, Empire and the Anthropocene”
- 1/21 M. P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud* (1901)
Jennifer Wenzel, Introduction to *The Disposition of Nature: Environmental Crisis and World Literature*
Benjamin Morgan, “*Fin du Globe*: On Decadent Planets
- 1/28 William Henry Hudson, *Green Mansions* (1904)
Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, “‘Green Postcolonialism’ and ‘Postcolonial Green’”
from *Postcolonial Environments*.
- 2/4 Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, “Sultana’s Dream” (1905)
D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (1913)
Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, Introduction to *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*
- 2/11 E. M. Forster, “The Machine Stops” (1909)
D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (1913)
Rob Nixon, Introduction to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*
- 2/18 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927)
Erin James, Introduction to *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*
- 2/25 Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934)
Jed Esty, “Virgins of Empire” from *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and Fictions of Development*
- 3/3 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)
Jason Moore, Chapter 5 to *Capitalism in the Web of Life*
- 3/10 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (1937)
Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category”

Seminar papers due on Canvas Tuesday, March 17th