

# EN9ZE-20 Critical Environments

**26/27**

**Department**

English and Comparative Literary Studies

**Level**

Taught Postgraduate Level

**Module leader**

Nicholas Lawrence

**Credit value**

20

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

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## Description

### Introductory description

Critical Environments introduces key topics, concepts, methodologies and theoretical debates in the emergent field of environmental humanities, with special attention to its interdisciplinary origins. It allows students to navigate their own subsequent pathways through the MA in Environmental Humanities, depending on individual research interest.

### Module aims

To provide a core foundation in the study of the environmental humanities, a cross-disciplinary field bringing the theoretical and methodological frameworks of humanistic study to the investigation of environmental questions and concerns.

### Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: Introduction: Ecology and the Environmental Humanities

Rachel Carson, "Flood Tide," *Under the Sea-Wind* [1941] (Penguin, 1996)

Aldo Leopold, "Land Ethic," *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford UP, 1949)  
Winona LaDuke, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Environmental Futures" (1994)

#### Week 2: Questioning environments

Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature" *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (Verso, 1980)  
Kate Soper, from *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1995)  
Ramachandra Guha and J. Martinez-Alier, from *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (Earthscan, 1997)

#### Week 3: Anthropocene: A new approach to the humanities?

Rachel Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow" and "The Obligation to Endure," *Silent Spring* (Penguin, 1962)  
Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "The Meaning of the Anthropocene," *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (Pelican 2018)  
Françoise Vergès, "Racial Capitalocene," *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (Verso, 2017)

#### Week 4: Commodity fictions

Sylvia Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation" (1971)  
Jason Moore, from *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (Verso, 2015)  
Sidney Mintz, from *Sweetness and Power* (1985)

#### Week 5: Ecologies of empire and slavery

Walter Johnson, from *River of Dark Dreams* (Harvard, 2013)  
Alfred Crosby, from *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge, 1986)  
Christina Sharpe, "The Weather," from *In the Wake* (Duke, 2016)

#### Week 6: Extractivist imaginaries

Ken Saro-Wiwa, from *A Forest of Flowers* (Pearson, 1995)  
Dominic Boyer and Imre Szeman, "Introduction: On the Energy Humanities", *Energy Humanities: An Anthology* (2017)  
Alice Mah, from *Industrial Ruination, Community and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline* (2012)

#### Week 7: More than human: species studies and extinction

Vicki Hearne, from *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name* (Simon and Schuster, 1986)  
Ashley Dawson, from *Extinction: A Radical History* (OR Books, 2016)  
Thom van Dooren, from *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (Columbia, 2014)  
Anna Tsing, from *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, 2013)

#### Week 8: Ecomodernism, indigeneity, degrowth

Ted Steinberg, "Down, Down, Down, No More: Environmental History Moves Beyond Declension," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (2004): 260–66

Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 71-84

Joshua Shuster, "Where is the Oil in Modernism?" in Szeman, Carlson and Wilson (eds.), *Petrocultures* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2017)

Jason Hickel, "Degrowth: A theory of radical abundance," *Real-World Economics Review* 87 (2019): 54-68

Week 9: Eco-poetics on and off the page

Cecilia Vicuña, *Poetry in Space*

Margaret Ronda, "Mourning and Melancholia in the Anthropocene" (

<https://post45.org/2013/06/mourning-and-melancholia-in-the-anthropocene/>)

Simon Ortiz, *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land* (Institute for Native American Development, 1980)

Week 10: Eco-praxis: borders and migration

Yuri Herrera, *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, trans. Lisa Dillman (*And Other Stories*, 2015)

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Articulate an informed perspective on the concept of the environmental humanities in its ecological, political and literary-cultural aspects
- Refine a sense of the theoretical, methodological and interpretive stakes of research in the environmental humanities
- Develop a focused understanding of the literary challenges in responding to such topics as climate change, environmental despoliation, species extinction and media ecology
- Adapt the theoretical debates surrounding the environmental humanities to extend research in a variety of subfields

## Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

## Research element

An essay of 4,000 words and a possible field trip report.

## Interdisciplinary

The module involves readings from the fields of ecology, environmental history, political science and sociology.

## Subject specific skills

- Ability to closely analyse a wide variety of texts with regard to their environmental

implications in form, content, medium and strategy.

- Ability to conceive, plan and carry out independent research projects in the field of environmental humanities.
- Ability to participate in informed discussion of major environmental debates, issues and problems.

## Transferable skills

- Close critical analysis of texts.
  - Planning and organising independent research.
  - Assessing questions of environmental sustainability and impact with regard to specific policies and activities.
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## Study

### Study time

Type	Required	Optional
Lectures	(0%)	1 session of 1 hour
Seminars	10 sessions of 2 hours (12%)	
Project supervision	1 session of 30 minutes (0%)	
Fieldwork	1 session of 2 hours (1%)	
External visits	(0%)	2 sessions of 2 hours
Online learning (independent)	11 sessions of 10 hours (67%)	
Other activity	32 hours 30 minutes (19%)	
Total	165 hours	

### Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

### Other activity description

Library research, site investigation and other practical fieldwork

### Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

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## Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

## Assessment group A1

	<b>Weighting</b>	<b>Study time</b>	<b>Eligible for self-certification</b>
<b>Assessment component</b>			
Research essay	100%	20 hours	Yes (extension)
A research essay on a topic chosen by the student in consultation with the tutor(s)			

Reassessment component is the same

## Feedback on assessment

Written feedback by tutor(s)

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## Availability

There is currently no information about the courses for which this module is core or optional.