



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

FACULTY OF CREATIVE AND CRITICAL STUDIES
Department of Languages and World Literatures

WRLD 399K
**From Forests to Oceans:
Ecological Explorations of the “Global South”**

2022 Winter Term 1
Wed Fri 11am-12.30pm





The Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies acknowledges that the land on which we are situated is the unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) People.

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Office Hours: Wednesday 9-11am, or by appointment

Course description:

This course explores the oceans, mangroves, deserts, and forests of the world through literature emerging from regions popularly known as the “Global South.”

The environmental humanities — that is, the study of nature through humanistic disciplines such as literature and history — has long been dominated by texts and theories from privileged sections of Europe and North America. However, alternative understandings of our natural world, including the role of living beings within it, have always existed. This course explores the oceans, mangroves, deserts and forests of the world through literature (novels, short stories, spoken-word poetry, documentary film) emerging from regions popularly known as the “Global South.” Our literary explorations will transport us to places as varied as the rapidly-transforming archipelagoes of French Polynesia and the disappearing beaches of the Marshall islands; to the teeming mangroves bordering the largest delta in the world, between India and Bangladesh; to the golden sand dunes of the Saharan and Sonoran deserts; and to the majestic trees of Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula. Through detailed literary analysis and a wide range of in-class activities, we will explore the intricate links between (neo)colonialism, capitalism, social injustice, and environmental degradation.

Some key questions that will guide the semester:

- In a planetary ecosystem where species migrate across continents and oceans flow into one another, how might we re-imagine a global configuration that goes beyond the rigidity of nation-states?
- As we will look back at the extinction of the Dodo, and forward to a future where environmental degradation has caused the invariable contamination of the human body, how might literature help us develop new ways of conceptualising ecological temporality?
- What are the latent biases in scientific, anthropological and literary approaches to nature, and how might we attempt to navigate them?

Learning Outcomes:

After completing this course, students will:



- Have a solid understanding of the environmental humanities, including key terminology and theoretical trends.
- Demonstrate strong written and oral close-reading skills.
- Be able to discuss the complexities and value of comparing and relating texts from different cultural and linguistic contexts.
- Be sensitive to cross-cultural variations in definitions, understandings and experiences of “nature,” and be able to critically and respectfully engage in discussion (both written and oral) about these differences.
- Draw from literature to complicate the political category of the “Global South” and re-imagine new global cartographies.
- Demonstrate strong writing and analytical skills in both short and longer-form writing assignments.

Required books (available for purchase at the bookstore, and soon on reserve at the library):

1. Spitz, Chantal. *Island of Shattered Dreams* (2007)

ISBN: 9781869692995

2. Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide* (2006)

ISBN: 9780618711666

3. Martin, Nastassja. *In the Eye of the Wild* (2021)

ISBN: 9781681375854

4. Schweblin, Samantha. *Fever Dream* (2017)

ISBN: 9780399184604

All other readings will be available online through the UBC library, or as PDF on the course Canvas site.