

# “The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On”



Nicholas Roerich

## ENGL 4650: Literature and the Environment

Meets Mondays & Wednesdays, 2-3.20 pm in LANG 201

Dr. Ishanika Sharma

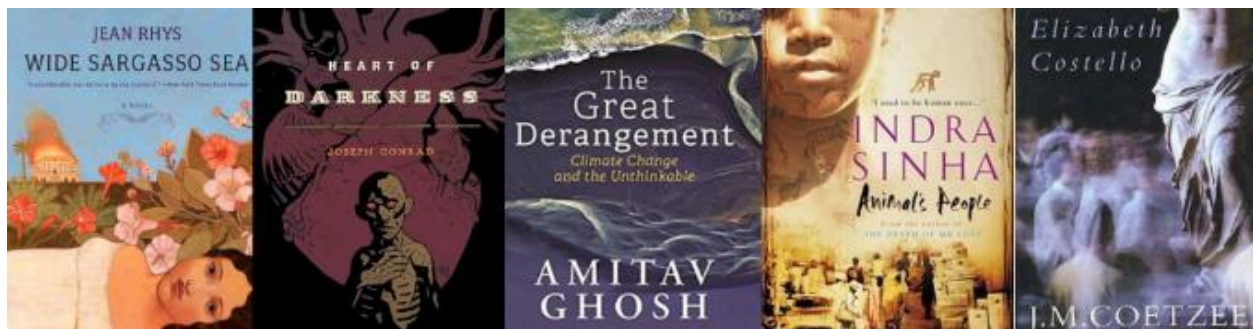
Office Hours: W 9.30-10.30 am | T 3-4 pm on Zoom | by appointment (email me)

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## Course Description

How does literature grapple with what is *catastrophic* about catastrophe? How does literature anticipate and represent life in the wake of disaster? What kind of life is possible after the apocalypse anyway? From the twentieth century into the present, writers and artists have pushed beyond the limits of their media to figure the disastrous. As this course will demonstrate, they have also thrown into relief the ways in which the histories and legacies of colonialism and capitalism have been “ending” worlds for as long as they have been in existence.

This course will introduce students to the environmental humanities from a postcolonial perspective. We will contemplate the geopolitics of ongoing environmental collapse by engaging poetry, fiction, nonfiction, literary theory from the nineteenth century into the present. We will respond to theorizations and figurations of environmental ruination across the world through weekly blog posts, paired presentations, and critical papers. We will read how literary texts frame the rupture of disaster against the backdrop of longer histories of colonial and racial violence, exploitation, and dispossession. We will pay special attention to issues such as corporatization, globalization, resource extraction, climate change, and climate migration. Readings will include works by Rob Nixon, Indra Sinha, Jean Rhys, J.M. Coetzee, Joseph Conrad, and Amitav Ghosh.



## Course Texts

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*  
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*  
Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*  
Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*  
J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

To succeed in this class, purchase the above texts well in advance; read and annotate everything before we meet; and bring your annotated texts to our course meetings.

This is a device-free class. I recommend securing copies of the required texts as soon as possible. All other readings will be circulated via your course readers. These readers are for you to keep. Please do not hesitate to annotate included readings.

## Learning Outcomes

- Analyze, interpret, and compare texts using a variety of methodologies, including close reading and comparative analysis.
- Demonstrate an understanding of key concepts in postcolonial theory and ecocriticism.
- Read attentively to understand complex arguments and formulate thoughtful responses.
- Use the writing process as a method for pursuing lines of intellectual inquiry in and beyond the classroom.

## Course Policies and Resources

### Accessibility

I strive to create an inclusive learning environment for all. I am invested in your success in this class and at UNT, so do let me know early and often if anything is standing in the way of you doing your best work. This can include your own learning strengths, ESL or language obstacles, disability or chronic illness, and/or personal issues that impact your work.

### Contact and Communication

The best way to get in touch with me is over email. I will generally respond to your emails over 24 – 48 hours, though I may take longer on weekends and over holidays. Please write to me again with your request if I have not responded to you in time. I also expect you to check your UNT email and our Canvas webpage regularly for updates about the class and your progress.

### Attendance

Attendance is crucial and will affect your participation in this class. Research has shown that students who attend class are more likely to be successful. You should attend every class unless you have a university excused absence such as active military service, a religious holy day, or an official university function as stated in the Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy (PDF) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-039>). If you cannot attend a class due to an emergency, please let me know. Your safety and well-being are important to me. Aside from documented absences for school-related activities, you may miss two classes without incident. Meet with me if you feel your situation warrants an exception to this rule. Bring appropriate documentation to our meeting.

Missing six or more classes may result in automatic failure of the course unless you have been proactive in keeping me informed *and* we have a mutual understanding about your participation.

Please note that I need you to be on time for our meetings. I also need you to be active and engaged in class; simply showing up and doing the readings will not cut it. I expect you to be active stakeholders in the discussion. This means: no sleeping, no checking out, no being distracted by devices.

### **Note on technology**

Please refrain from using your devices in our course meetings. Cellphones are not permitted for use in class under any circumstances (except if you have sought permission from me beforehand). The use of laptops and tablets is strongly discouraged; all secondary texts are included in your course pack.

### **Late work**

All assignments are due by the time and date specified. I will not accept late work without granting advance permission via email, and permission is not guaranteed. You will be allowed one free-pass that grants you a 24-hour extension on your work. Each day's delay after that will impact your grade. Please contact me as soon as possible if you face any difficulty turning in your assignment.

### **Academic Integrity**

Every student in my class can improve by doing their own work and trying their hardest with access to appropriate resources. Students who use other people's work without citations will be violating UNT's Academic Integrity Policy. You can learn more about UNT's policy on academic integrity here: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>.

Cooling-Off Period: When I return a graded assignment to you, I request that you read my comments about your work carefully and wait 24 hours before coming to speak with me about your grade. I have found that asking for this "cooling-off" period results in more productive discussions about graded work.

### **AI Policy**

The use of generative AI writing tools (such as ChatGPT, GrammarlyGO, GPT-3, GPT-4, BERT, or others) is prohibited in this class. Assignments have been designed to help you develop as a writer without the use of these technologies. You will generate ideas, read, revise, and write on your own and/or in consultation with peers, me, or Writing Center tutors; and you will not use AI at any stage of your writing process. You are the author of your work and authorship means you take responsibility for your words and claims. Any use of AI in your work will be considered a violation of UNT's academic integrity policy and addressed accordingly.

### **Writing Center**

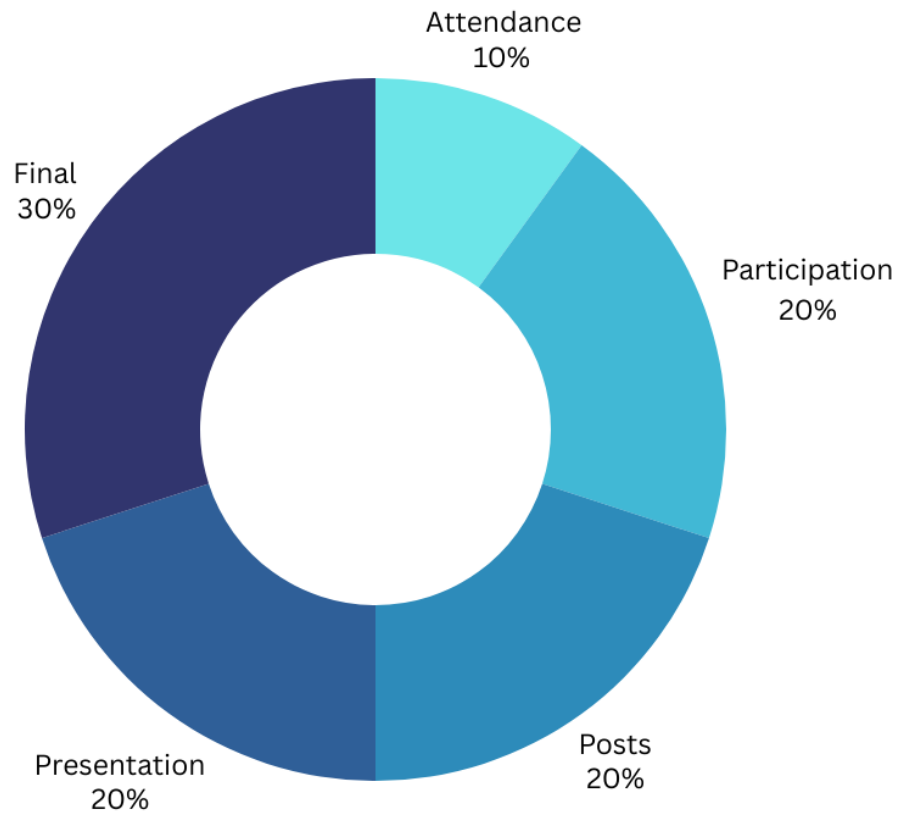
I recommend that you visit the Writing Center with your assignments for this class. All writers can benefit from sharing and discussing their work with a trained peer tutor, early and often. A tutor can help you get started on a paper or help you decide what to revise on an existing draft. During an appointment with a tutor, you can develop your ideas, organize your thoughts, and clarify your prose. For more information or to make an appointment, visit [writingcenter.unt.edu](http://writingcenter.unt.edu), call 940-565-4665, or stop by Sage Hall 150.

### **Office of Disability Access**

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. Students needing a reasonable academic accommodations must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the student will request

their letter of accommodation. ODA will provide faculty with a reasonable accommodation letter via email to begin a private discussion regarding a student's specific needs in a course. Students may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding their accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access website.

## Course Assessment



10% | Attendance

20% | Participation

20% | Online Posts

20% | Paired Presentation

30% | Critical Essay

### **Attendance**

If you would like to succeed in this class, please mind your attendance. I expect you to be present on time. After the two unexcused absences, I will dock your grade by a full letter per couple of absences. Six or more absences may automatically result in failure, unless we are in close communication about your participation in this course *and* have come to a mutual understanding.

### **Participation**

You are active stakeholders in the success of this class. Come to class having read, annotated, and reflected on the assigned text. Make sure you have a copy of the text in front of you. To succeed in this class, you need to speak and speak regularly. This class will only be as strong and rigorous as the contributions you make.

Remember that you are here to speak *with* people, and not *at* them. Be mindful of how you articulate your responses to the texts and to each other.

### **Online Posts**

Your online posts are short, low-stakes responses (200 words) where you can begin formulating your initial thoughts and observations. Your postings should identify a line or short passage in the set reading that interests you (start off by quoting and citing it!); explain what interests you about the line or passage; and ask one question about it!! (Avoid rhetorical questions like “is the world ready for change?” or “how could this have been allowed to happen?”)

### **Paired Presentations**

Please sign up for your presentation on the first day of class.

You will be required to give a 20-minute presentation once in the semester. Think of this assignment as a well-crafted, jointly written Canvas post being presented in real time. These presentations will be used to guide the class for that specific day. Your presentation will be scheduled for the start of our course meeting.

Instructions for this assignment are available separately on Canvas under the module titled “Important Links and Documents.”

### **Critical Essay**

For this assignment, you will complete a 7-8-page paper that critically responds to one (or more) of the texts/ topics that we have read in class. Instructions are forthcoming.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Note: To earn a passing grade, you must complete all major writing assignments.

- 90-100%=A

- 80-89.99%=B
- 70-79.99%=C
- 60-69.99%=D
- 59.99% and less=F



## Course Schedule

- 8/18 Introductions; Syllabus Overview  
8/20 Franny Choi, "The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On"  
8/25 Charles Lyell, from *Principles of Geology*  
8/27 Timothy Morton, "A Quake in Being"  
9/01 Labor Day; no class  
9/03 Malcom Ferdinand, "A Colonial Ecology: At the Heart of the Double Fracture"  
9/08 Jamaica Kincaid, "The Disturbances of the Garden"  
9/10 Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (part one; pp. 1-42)  
9/15 *Wide Sargasso Sea* (pp. 43-108)  
9/17 *Wide Sargasso Sea* (pp. 109-end)  
9/22 Derek Walcott, selected poems  
9/24 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (part I)  
9/29 *Heart of Darkness* (part II)  
10/1 *Heart of Darkness* (part III)  
10/6 Amitav Ghosh, "Stories" from *The Great Derangement*  
10/8 Ghosh, "Politics" from *The Great Derangement*  
10/13 Rob Nixon, from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*  
10/15 Indra Sinha, *Animal's People* (Tapes 1-3; until p. 43)  
10/20 *Animal's People* (Tapes 4-8; until p. 114)  
10/22 *Animal's People* (Tapes 9-10; until p. 141)  
10/27 *Animal's People* (Tapes 11-14; until p. 222)  
10/29 *Animal's People* (Tapes 15-16; until p. 259)  
11/3 *Animal's People* (Tapes 17-20; until p. 324)  
11/5 *Animal's People* (Tapes 21-23; until the end)  
11/10 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"  
11/12 Franz Kafka, "Report to the Academy"  
11/17 J.M. Coetzee, from *Elizabeth Costello* ("The Lives of Animals"; Lessons 3 & 4)  
11/19 *Elizabeth Costello* ("At the Gate")  
11/24 Thanksgiving break; no class  
11/26 Thanksgiving break; no class  
12/1 Juliana Spahr, from *Well Then There Now*  
12/3` Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, "2 degrees"