

Sunbinn Lee

## Archipelagic Reading: Island Geographies, Literatures, and Criticism

How do islands help us understand colonial history and ecological change? How can island geographies and literatures intervene in current debates in postcolonial criticism and the environmental humanities? This tutorial thinks through the island's dual status both as a material formation and as a central metaphor that has played a deep role in the literary imagination, as well as in histories of science, colonialism, and tourism. Beginning with early modern imagined island paradises, we will track literary modes and genres that deal with the tension between the real and imagined island space, including travel writing, realist narratives, lyric, epic, and docu/video poetry.

The Caribbean and the Pacific will work as two central sites that place island spaces within larger geopolitical and ecological networks. Literature from Antigua, Barbados, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Hawai'i, Guam, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and the Marshall Islands helps us ask: how is the Americas and the Pacific Islands linked via shared histories of colonialism, trade, militarism, tourism, and (both slow and spectacular) ecological change? Both sites engage the "archipelagic" beyond the singular island, a concept that reflects literary study's continued interest in large-scale, cross-cultural formations, including transnational, transatlantic, transpacific, transindigenous, and transhemispheric "turns." While the archipelagic turn brings literatures *from* islands into perspective, it also offers a *mode* of thinking and reading that proposes a critical understanding of colonial geographies and ecological change.

Grounding our discussion in specific literary works, this tutorial provides you with theoretical tools to engage in current issues in ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism. How do literary texts (or our approaches to them) help us think about environmental change as a long *durée* phenomenon, accelerated by colonial expansion and the workings of capitalism? We will discuss how reading *for* the environment transform our understanding of literary texts that do not openly thematize ecological concerns.

### Through this tutorial, you will be able to:

- Examine how the dual understanding of island as trope and as material site take forward debates around postcolonial literature and ecocriticism.
- Explore how literary ecocriticism contributes to empirical and historical understandings of archipelagic formations.
- Argue how different literary genres and modes contribute to our understanding of environmental change and understand their capacities and limitations.
- Develop critical research skills in literary study, which includes:  
designing a research question for literary study; compiling a critical bibliography that helps you examine that question in a theoretically informed manner; putting your close reading and critical ideas in conversation with secondary sources; writing with effective structure and persuasive style.

## Assignments

Shared by all junior tutorials:

- **10%, Short essay**, due end of Week 4:  
A 5–6-page paper that extends a close reading of a primary text, using a term or concept from one of the secondary readings. You are recommended to engage with texts from weeks 1-4, but you may choose texts from weeks further along on the syllabus after consulting me. On week 5, we will workshop our close readings in pairs.
- **10%, Junior essay proposal and annotated bibliography**, due end of Week 7:
  - A 2–3-page prospectus that outlines your tentative thesis and roadmap for the final paper.
  - An annotated bibliography of 8-10 sources. Each source entry should be accompanied by 3-4 sentences describing the argument, and how you will engage with it in your paper.
- **20%, First 12 pages of the junior essay**, due end of Week 11.
- **40%, Junior essay final draft**, due final week (deadline coordinated with all Junior Tutorials):  
A 20–25-page research paper on a major literary work (or works) read in this class.

For this tutorial:

- **10% Attendance and Participation:**
  - As a small group seminar, your **timely attendance** is crucial to our discussion of the material. Three late arrivals will equal one absence. You are allowed one unexcused absence, but please inform me beforehand when you are missing a class. Medical conditions, family emergencies, and religious holidays are permitted excuses.
  - As part of your participation grade, post a **short reaction** to one or more of the assigned readings before our tutorial. This can be a spontaneous and informal reflection, in bullet points or paragraph form. More important is that they include your thoughtful observations or questions about the reading. **Begin your response with a quote from one of the readings that you're responding to.**
- **10% Presentation:** There will be two 10-15 minute in-class presentations on the secondary reading of your chosen weeks. A sign-up sheet will circulate on the first day of class. (No response post on weeks when you present.)

## Policies

### Technology

If you require a laptop or tablet to consult our course material, you are welcome to use one. If you do not *need* an electronic device, I'd strongly encourage you to take notes by hand. Print-outs of readings will be provided one week in advance, and pdf copies will be uploaded to canvas at the beginning of the semester, in case you would like to print material earlier.

**All phones will be stowed away so we can dedicate our attention to the class material and discussion.** The success of this tutorial depends on your being fully present and engaged in our classroom, and it is difficult to do so when connected to constant distractions of messages, emails, news, etc.

### Collegiality

The small size of our tutorial fosters a vibrant intellectual community built on **trust and respect**. We will each bring our varied viewpoints on issues that literary texts speak to, including politics, gender, race, religious beliefs, and socio-economic status. I ask you to remember that sensitivity and generosity to differences will help us expand our horizons. **Take each other's ideas seriously, and engage with them deeply by listening carefully and responding with your own; energetic disagreements can be the highest form of respect and care.** As we learn about and from each other's viewpoints, let's recognize that we may make mistakes, and engage with readings and discussions in good faith. If a conversation ever weighs heavily after a seminar, I hope you will seek me out to share any concerns.

### Generative AI

The use of AI tools at all stages of the work process is forbidden. This tutorial aims to help you design literary research projects independently; **relying on AI cheats you of this opportunity to shape your own questions and roadmaps.** I encourage you to make full use of the resources this tutorial provides you with: class readings and discussions, as well as individual meetings with me and conversations with your peers. This will help you think more clearly and deeply about works and ideas on your own.

### Plagiarism

A crucial component of research is engaging responsibly with work that others have done. Plagiarism is using another person's ideas or writing without giving them credit. Give credit to work that others have done by using **correct and complete citations**. We will go over citation styles together earlier in the semester, and again as we workshop our first 12-page draft. Here is the Harvard FAS Honor Code:

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic

work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

## **Accommodations**

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Disability Access Office (DAO):

Harvard University values inclusive excellence and providing equal educational opportunities for all students. Our goal is to remove barriers for disabled students related to inaccessible elements of instruction or design in this course. Accommodations do not alter fundamental requirements of the course and are **not retroactive. Students should request accommodations as early as possible, since they may take time to implement.** Students should notify DAO at any time during the semester if adjustments to their communicated accommodation plan are needed.

## Reading List and Schedule

**Most of the readings will be available as pdfs on Canvas. Readings will be finalized in August, along with an announcement about required books for library loans or purchase.**

### **Key secondary readings and resources for further research:**

Lawrence Buell. *The Environmental Imagination*. 1995.

--. "Toxic Discourse," *Critical Inquiry* 1998.

Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. U of Hawai'i P, 2007.

--. *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Duke UP, 2019.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry*, 2009.

Ursula K. Heise. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. 2010.

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. 2011.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. 2015.

Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. 2015.

Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*. 2016.

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*. 2016.

Sonya Posmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe*. 2017.

Brian Russell Roberts & Michelle Ann Stephens (eds), *Archipelagic American Studies*. Duke UP, 2017.

Tiffany Lethabo King. *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*. 2019.

Jennifer Wenzel. *The Disposition of Nature: Environmental Crisis and World Literature*. 2020.

Min Hyoung Song, *Climate Lyricism*. 2021.

Max Liboiron. *Pollution Is Colonialism*. 2021.

Pippa Marland, *Ecocriticism and the Island: Readings from the British-Irish Archipelago*. Bloomsbury, 2023.

Tao Leigh Goffe. *Dark Laboratory: On Columbus, The Caribbean, and the Origins of the Climate Crisis*. 2025.

Jonathan Howard. *Inhabitants of the Deep: The Blueness of Blackness*. 2025

Week	Primary	Secondary
<b>Part I: Imagining Island Space</b>		
W1 Lost and Found	Elizabeth Bishop, "Crusoe in England." Excerpts from William Shakespeare, <i>The Tempest</i> . M. Nourbese Philip, from <i>Zong!</i>  <b>Map reading in-class exercise #1</b>	Lawrence Buell, "Introduction" from <i>The Environmental Imagination</i> Brian Russell Roberts & Michelle Ann Stephens, "Introduction," <i>Archipelagic American Studies</i> . (Optional: Gugganig, Mascha, and Nina Klimburg-Witjes. "Island Imaginaries: Introduction to a Special Section." <i>Science as Culture</i> , vol. 30, no. 3, 2021, pp. 321–41.)
W2 Real and Imagined Islands	Henry Neville, <i>The Isle of Pines</i> . Charles Darwin, selections from <i>The Voyage of the Beagle</i> . Jack London, selected stories from <i>Tales of the Pacific</i> . OR Robert Louis Stevenson, selections from <i>In the South Seas</i>	<b>[Modeling critical papers #1: in-class reverse outline exercise]</b>  Alison Fanous Cotti-Lowell, "The Pineapple and Colonial Enterprise in Henry Neville's 'The Isle of Pines.'" <i>Texas Studies in Literature and Language</i> , vol. 59, no. 2, 2017, pp. 209–33.
W3 The Space Between Islands	J. M. Coetzee, <i>Foe</i> .	<b>[Modeling critical papers #2: in-class citation exercise]</b>  Jonathan Howard, "Swim your ground: Towards a black and blue humanities." <i>Atlantic Studies</i> , vol. 20, no. 2, 2023, pp. 308-330. Tiffany Lethabo King, "Ch. 2. The Map (Settlement) and the Territory (The Incompleteness of Conquest)" from <i>The Black Shoals</i> .
<b>Part II: Caribbean Positionings and Genres</b>		
W4 Narrative	Jean Rhys, <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> .  <b>*Short close reading essay due end of this week</b>	Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Selections from <i>The Repeating Island</i> .
W5 Lyric	Derek Walcott, "Islands," "The Schooner Flight," "The Sea Is History," "The Forest of Europe," "The Bounty," "Six Fictions." Mahadai Das, selections from <i>A Leaf in His Ear</i> .  <b>[Paired workshop: close reading paper]</b>	Édouard Glissant, Selections from <i>Poetics of Relation</i> Elaine Savory, "Toward a Caribbean Eco-poetics: Derek Walcott's Language of Plants." (Optional: Min Hyung Song, "Ch. 6. Where Are We Now?: Scalar Variance, Persistence, Swing, and David Bowie" from <i>Climate Lyricism</i> .)
W6 Epic	Kamau Brathwaite, selections from <i>The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy</i> . --. selections from <i>Born to Slow Horses</i> Anthony Vahni Capildeo, <i>Measures of Expatriation</i> .	Kamau Brathwaite, "History of the Voice" from <i>Roots</i> . 1993. Tao Leigh Goffe. Selection from <i>Dark Laboratory: On Columbus, The Caribbean, and the Origins of the Climate Crisis</i> .

W7 Travel Writing and the Short Story	Eric Walrond, “Drought,” “The Wharf Rats,” from <i>Tropic Death</i> . Jamaica Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i> . --. Selected stories from <i>At the Bottom of the River</i>	Rob Nixon, “Ch. 8. Environmentalism, Postcolonialism, and American Studies.” <i>Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor</i> .
	<b>*Proposal &amp; Bibliography due end of this week</b>	
W8 Transnational Networks	Cristina García, <i>Monkey Hunting</i>	Vandana Shiva, Selections from <i>Monocultures of the Mind</i> . Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing, “Reflections on the Plantationocene.”
<b>Part III: Pacific Formations</b>		
W9 Hawai'i	Milton Murayama, <i>Plantation Boy</i> <b>[Proposal workshops]</b>	Tina Chen, “Transpacific Turns,” <i>Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature</i> , 2020, pp. 1-20. Stephen H. Sumida, “Hawai'i's Complex Idyll,” from <i>And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai'i</i> . elections (Optional: Haunani-Kay Trask, “Settlers of Color and ‘Immigrant’ Hegemony: ‘Locals’ in Hawai'i,” <i>Amerasia Journal</i> vol. 26, no. 2, 2000, pp. 1-26.)
W10 Guam	Craig Santos Perez, <i>from unincorporated territory [saina]</i> . --. <i>Habitat Threshold</i> .  <b>Map reading in-class exercise #2</b>	Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “Introduction” and “Ch. 2. Planetarity: Militarized Radiation” from <i>Allegories of the Anthropocene</i> . Hau'ofa, Epeli. “Our Sea of Islands.” <i>The Contemporary Pacific</i> , vol. 6, no. 1, 1994, pp. 148–61.
W11 Marshall Islands	Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, <i>Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter</i> Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner and Dan Lin, Video Poem <i>Anointed</i> <b>*First 12 pages essay draft due end of this week</b>	Teresia K. Teaiwa, “bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans.” <i>The Contemporary Pacific</i> , vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 87-109. Jessica A. Schwartz, “Radiation Songs and Transpacific Resonances of US Imperial Transits,” <i>Journal of Transnational American Studies</i> , vol. 11, no. 2, 2020, pp. 153-171. (Optional: Sarah Dimick, “Ch. 5. Occasional Poetry in Stressed Times” from <i>Unseasonable</i> .)
W12 Aotearoa	Keri Hulme, <i>Stonefish</i> .	Rebecca Oh, “Making Time: Pacific Futures in Kiribati's Migration with Dignity, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner's <i>Iep Jaltok</i> , and Keri Hulme's <i>Stonefish</i> .” <i>Modern Fiction Studies</i> , vol. 66, no. 4, Winter 2020, pp. 597-619.
W13 Philippines	R. Zamora Linmark, <i>Leche</i> , up to Book VIII.  <b>[Individual meetings on essay drafts]</b>	

W14 Comparative Literary Study	R. Zamora Linmark, <i>Leche</i> , to end. <b>[In-class paper workshop]</b>	Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Introduction and selections from <i>Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures</i> .
W15	<b>[Junior Tutorial Conference]</b>	