Reading for the World: System, Resource, Text (or the Energetic Humanities)

Convenor: Dr Claire Westall (English)

MA Option Module Spring 2020

This is an energetic and still relatively new MA Module, addressing contemporary debates about resources and energy through a world-literary and world-ecological lens. It will introduce students to an understanding of the world-literary system, and the intellectual and theoretical developments necessary to think in ‘worlded’ terms. More exactly, it will introduce students to resource and energy related prose, often fiction, as well as other cultural texts (e.g. graphic novels, documentaries, blockbuster films), and use these materials to reconfigure debates about postcoloniality, globalization and the capitalist world-system. It will also help students to analyse different forms of human and non-human energy, and to consider their interactions. It will encourage students to think across geographic boundaries and through relational inequalities by concentrating on depictions of energy resources and energy expenditure, moving from the human body out into the world-system. Topics will include land and labour, food and bio-politics, coal and collapse, iron men, oil and water, and electricity, with attention being paid to shifts in energy paradigms and, at the human level, labouring, sporting and suffering bodies. This module will appeal to students interested in world literature, literature’s relationship to politics and contemporary eco-criticism, as it moves to consider the world-ecological dimensions of energy management. This will enable students to develop new ways of approaching comparative literary studies and to get to grips with new developments in what is called the Energy Humanities.

Background Reading
Before the module begins you might want to do some reading to ground yourself in the terms of debate contextualising the module. Note: some of the ‘background reading’ will be directly used as theoretical required readings during the module, but all are useful for contextualising and theorising what is at stake in the module.

Setting up a general understanding of energy
Klein, Naomi, This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014). The whole book is relevant, but the ‘Introduction’ is particularly helpful.
Robertson, William, Energy: Stop Faking It! Finally Understanding Science So You Can Teach It (National Science Teachers Association, 2002)
Szeman, Imre After Oil (Petrocultures Research Group, 2016)
Szeman & Boyle, Energy Humanities: An Anthology (Batimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2017)
For specific academic sources and debates about energy provision see journals like: Energy; The Energy Journal; Energy, Sustainability and Society; Natural Resources Research. You may also want to consult with the special issue of the Journal of Postcolonial Writing, 53/3, titled 'Resistant Resources/Resources of Resistance'.

Readings for our specifically world-literary approach to energetics
MacDonald, Graeme, "Oil and World Literature", American Book Review, March/April 2012, Vol. 33, No. 3
All Moore pieces are available from his website www.jasonwmoore.com and you might want to read more than one.

Weekly Schedule of Primary Required Reading for Spring Term 2017
Week 2: Sweetness & Light – theory (items above marked **) plus poetry & short stories (VLE)
Week 3: Sugar & Sleep: The Farming of Bones (1998) by Edwidge Danticat
Week 4: Bananas & (Bio)Politics – Banana stories & extracts
Week 5: Iron Men – The Iron Man (1968) by Ted Hughes
Week 6: READING WEEK
Week 7: Coal & Collapse – GB84 (2004) by David Peace
Week 8: Oil/Water – Helon Habila, Oil on Water (2011) plus Steve Dunn & Sharon Wheeler, Oil & Water (2011)
Students will need to purchase copies of all the primary texts listed above.
As a seminar group, we will also decide which documentaries/films we will watch and discuss in class from the selection given below.

**Documentaries & Films**

**Week 2/3**
*That Sugar Film* (Damon Gameau, Australia, 2014)
*The Price of Sugar*, (dir. Bill Haney, Dominican Republic/USA, 2007)
*The Secrets of Sugar* (Ronna Syed & Allya Davidson, 2013)

**Week 4**
*Life & Debt* (dir Stephanie Black, UK, 2003)

**Week 5**
*The Iron Giant* (dir. Brad Bird 1999)
*Iron Man* (dir John Favreau, 2008), plus *Iron Man 2* and *Iron Man 3*
*Living is Winning* (dir. Linda Burns 2008)

**Week 6**
*The Battle of Orgreave* (dir Jeremy Deller 2001)
*The Price of Coal* (dir Ken Loach, 1977)

**Week 7**
*Lessons From Darkness*, (Germany/Kuwait, dir. Werner Herzog, 1992)
*A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash* (Ray McCormack, Switzerland, 2006)

**Week 8**
*Electricity*  (dir Bryn Higbens, UK, 2014)
*The Selfish Giant* (dir Clio Bernard, UK, 2013)

**Week 9**