

Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies
EN122 MODES OF READING, 2017-2018
Second Assessed Essay

Write an essay of approximately 3,500 words in response to **one** of the following questions. Essays **MUST** be submitted electronically via TABULA by **12.00 noon** on **Tuesday 1st May 2018 (week 2, term 3)**. Note that this is a departmental, centrally-set deadline. Any request for an extension must be made in advance directly to the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Please make sure that you are aware of the departmental guidelines for the presentation of essays and of the regulations on plagiarism (see 'Useful Links' / 'Essays' link on the Modes of Reading website, under 'Assessments').

1. In what ways can we read and interpret *The Word for World is Forest* as an 'energetic' story?
2. Make a case for an ecocritical reading of *The Word for World is Forest*. You may want to focus on one particular strand of ecocriticism, or demonstrate several over the course of your essay.
3. Upon receiving the prestigious National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American letters in 2014, Ursula K. LeGuin said: "I think hard times are coming, when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, and can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies, to other ways of being." How does this inform a reading of *The Word for World Is Forest* as a feminist political novel?
4. "When I see Earth, Kees, I mean people. Men. You worry about deer and trees and fibreweed, fine, that's your thing. But I like to see things in perspective, from the top down. And the top, so far, is humans. We're here, now; and so this world's going to go our way. Like it or not, it's a fact you have to face; it happens to be the way things are" (Davidson in *The Word for World is Forest*, p.14). Using this statement as your cue, argue the case for reading Le Guin's novel as a registration of the Anthropocene.
5. "A dark huddle and jumble and tangle of trees, endless, meaningless" (*The Word for World is Forest*, p. 15). Write an essay on the ecocritical aspects of "place" in Le Guin's novel.
6. Critically analyse the convergences and divergences between feminist theory and 'green' (or ecocritical) theory. Illustrate your answer through reference to *The Word for World is Forest*.
7. "The category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature. Thus racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture." (Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 4). Discuss the meaning and

significance of Plumwood's statement, drawing out its implications for a reading of *The Word for World is Forest*.

8. According to Walter Benjamin, there are two kinds of storytellers: "When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about, goes the German saying, and people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions. If one wants to picture these two groups through their archaic representations, one is embodied in the resident tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman." ("Storytellers Without Souls", pp. 107-8). Discuss the techniques that allow Yoko Tawada to function both as "resident tiller" and "trading seaman" for her German readership in the German-language prose texts that are included in the anthology *Where Europe Begins*.

9. Both Roland Barthes and Yoko Tawada demonstrate that the sign is arbitrary, devoid of inherent meaning and subject to manipulation. Both writers rejoice in this state of affairs as an opportunity for creative play with surfaces. Discuss these two claims with reference to *Where Europe Begins* and *Empire of Signs*.

10. Exophonic literature – literature written in an adopted language rather than in the writer's mother tongue – challenges the "imagined community" of the nation not only by undermining the individual's sense that language is a territorial possession, but by undermining the sense that language is under the individual's control. Discuss this statement with reference to *Where Europe Begins* and relevant theoretical texts that you have studied on this module.

11. "In a translated text, the relationship between meaning and the letter is such that it allows only for analysis of the former, not for commentary on the latter" (*L'Âge de la Traduction*, Antoine Berman, p. 19). Discuss this claim about how we read and interpret translated texts with reference to Yoko Tawada's *Where Europe Begins* and relevant theoretical texts that you have studied on this module.