

English 443-01
Spring 2003
W 7.30-10
Syllabus

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Modern African Fiction

This course will serve as an introduction to Modern (Anglophone) African Fiction and postcolonial theory important to the study of African literature. This course will foreground the diversity of African literatures and cultures: we will begin with the premise that African literature cannot be understood as a conceptual unity. Rather, this course will try to situate Anglophone African fiction in a global context. Aside from exploring the international discussions in which African literature participates, we will try to assess how the global culture industry affects the way we approach these texts as American readers. To this end, we will use individual novels to think about the questions of revolution and anti-colonial struggle, political repression, women's rights, the diaspora of African peoples, and the status of African literature on the international stage.

Texts

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*.
Aidoo, Ama Ata. *Our Sister Killjoy*.
Coetzee, J.M. *Disgrace*.
Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*.
Emecheta, Buchi. *Joys of Motherhood*.
Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*.
Ghosh, Amitav. *In an Antique Land*.
Gurnah, Abdulrazak. *Paradise*.
Saro-Wiwa, Ken. *Sozaboy*.
Soynika, Wole. *The Interpreters*.
Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. *A Grain of Wheat*.
Vassanji, M.G. *The Gunny Sack*.
Yacine, Kateb. *Nedjma [Star]*.
Coursepack.

Course Objectives

This course has two main goals: 1—introduce some of the important African novels in English; 2—acquaint students with some of the major theoretical concerns of African and postcolonial theory. I want this to be a discussion-based course, which requires a significant contribution from each student. This will work well only if students come prepared to class; I would like each of you to mark important passages in the reading and think about their significance. In addition, I will ask each student to make regular contributions to the course's electronic blackboard;

responsibilities also include reading other students' contributions. The reading load is intense, and as a consequence, I have decreased the volume of writing for this particular course.

Assignments

- Complete the reading each week. This is by far the most important component of a good seminar.
- Weekly questions posted to the course blackboard by Wednesday morning. I would like each student to pose at least one question and/or topic for further discussion for the novel and an additional question related to the critical readings for the week.
- Similarly, each student is required to check blackboard before class and read the questions posted by fellow students.
- Each student will lead discussion once during the course of the semester.
- Final paper proposal, outlining the parameters of a final research project.
- A final research paper, 12-15 pages in length. Each student will develop a research project in consultation with me during the second half of the semester.

Policies

Absences: because of the size and nature of a seminar, student attendance and participation are essential. Each student may miss one class (unexcused) during the term. Religious holidays (please give advance notice) and illness (with doctor's note) count as excused absences; students will not be penalized under such circumstances. Four unexcused absences will result in a grade of No Entry.

Class participation is worth fifty percent (50%) of your final grade. This includes participating in class, making timely contributions to the course blackboard, and leading discussion once during the semester.

The final paper is worth fifty percent (50%) of the final grade.

Office hours: I will hold office hours on Wednesdays, 1-3PM. I realize that this may not be convenient for everyone so I am also available by appointment. My office is located at 28 Rice Hall. You will have to meet me in office hours at least once at the beginning of the semester to discuss your interest in the course and once to discuss your paper proposal. I strongly urge you to take advantage of my office hours at other points in the semester; don't come only when you have serious problems.

Syllabus

February 5

Introduction

Themes: Origins of African literature in English; Recovering pre-colonial culture; The politics of writing in English

February 12

Text: *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe).

Critical Readings: Ngugi, from *Decolonising the Mind*; Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language."

February 19

Text: *Paradise* (Gurnah).

Critical Readings: selections of the Yusuf/Joseph story from the Qu'ran and the Bible; Fanon, "On National Culture."

Themes: Revolution, Independence, and Disillusion

February 26

Text: *A Grain of Wheat* (Ngugi).

Critical Readings: Fanon, "Concerning Violence."

March 5

Text: *The Interpreters* (Soyinka).

Critical Readings: Fanon, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness."

March 12

Text: *Nedjma* (Yacine).

Critical Readings: Hayes, from *Queer Nations*.

Film Screening: *The Battle of Algiers?*

Themes: Women Writers, Global Feminism

March 19

Text: *The Joys of Motherhood* (Emecheta).

Critical Readings: Suleri, "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition."

March 26: *Spring Break*

April 2

Text: *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga).

Critical Readings: Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses."

April 9

Text: *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo).

Critical Readings: Bhabha, from *The Location of Culture*.

Themes: Globalization and The Colonial Archive

April 16

Text: *The Gunny Sack* (Vassanji).

Critical Readings: Joseph, from *Nomadic Identities*.

April 23

Text: *In an Antique Land* (Ghosh).

Critical Readings: Jameson, "Third World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism;" Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness."

Final paper proposal due

Themes: International Celebrities, Causes

April 30

Text: *Sozaboy* (Saro-Wiwa).

Critical Readings: Essays from *Ogoni's Agonies*, other essays on art & human rights.

May 7

Text: *Disgrace* (Coetzee)

Critical Readings: Essays on Africa's international stars (Achebe, Soyinka, Gordimer, Coetzee); Brennan, Huggan, Robbins on Cosmopolitanism.

May 14

Discuss final projects.

May 18: Final project due.

Select Bibliography

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- Baucom, Ian. *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and Locations of Identity*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994.
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- Coundouriotis, Eleni. *Claiming History: Colonialism, Ethnography, and the Novel*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.
- Desai, Gaurav. *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library*. Durham & London: Duke UP, 2001.
- Diawara, Manthia. *In Search of Africa*. Cambridge & London: Harvard UP, 1998.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Tr. Constance Farrington. New York: Penguin, 1967.
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- . “There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack”: *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1991.

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- Joseph, May. *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship*. Minneapolis: UP of Minnesota, 1999.
- Lloyd, David. "Ethnic Cultures, Minority Discourse and the State." In *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Barker, Hulme, and Iversen. 221-238.
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- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
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