



English 3882G – Topics in Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial Criticism and Late Twentieth-Century African Literatures

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Tuesdays 3:30 – 5:30, Thursdays 4:30 – 5:30; Office Hours Tuesdays & Thursday: 5:30 – 7:00
University College Rm. 289.

Postcolonial criticism has remade the world of late twentieth-century literature. With surgical precision postcolonial critics align a diverse array of texts along a single axis: the socio-political influence of imperialism. The world is not so simple. Students in this class will be introduced to the postcolonial turn in contemporary literary criticism through a selection of by-now canonically postcolonial African novels and plays. We will also, however, trouble ourselves to explode the postcolonial interpretative axis into fragments. Picking up the pieces, we will study a few complex questions in the cultures from which “postcolonial literature” emerges, questions which challenge traditional ideas of postcolonial criticism.

Course elements include 1) the rise of the African novel in English; 2) theatrical responses to crises in African history and politics; 3) South African literature in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and 4) literary reflections of postcolonial(?) globalization. We will address different ideas of what makes criticism “postcolonial” through essays by scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Achille Mbembe. We will conclude by taking postcolonial criticism into the twenty-first century as we read contemporary novels by K. Sello Duiker and Nnedi Okorafor.

Course Goals and Objectives, Student Learning Outcomes

The goal of this course is to provide an introduction to postcolonial theory and texts in a selected region of world literature: African literature from the second half of the twentieth century.

Course objectives are

- 1) to develop an understanding of the advantages and complications of postcolonial criticism in its application to literary cultures, exemplified by novels and drama from West and South Africa
- 2) to sharpen critical and analytic skills in oral and written work;
- 3) to facilitate student confidence and research prowess in a rigorous academic discipline.

Student learning outcomes will be cooperatively discussed at the beginning of the course.

Course Calendar Description

This course will be broad enough to provide an introduction to Postcolonial Literature, but narrower in focus than English 2310E. It may concentrate on a particular geographical area, or use some other principle of selection.

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1036E or both of English 1027F/G and 1028F/G, or permission of the Department. *Extra Information:* 3 hours, 0.5 course.



Reading List:

Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952)
Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
Ama Ata Aidoo, *Anowa* (1970)
Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (1972)
Bessie Head, *A Question of Power* (1974)
Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horsemen* (1979)
J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980)
Jane Taylor, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997)
K. Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents* (2000)
Nnedi Okorafor, *Who Fears Death* (2010)

Theoretical and critical essays and selections will be made available through a Course Package available from the UWO Bookstore. Others are on JSTOR.

Assignments

Participation, 10%

Four short written responses (2 pages), 2.5% each, due by the eighth week.

One group presentation (approx. 15 minutes), 10%

Thesis & research workshop, 5%, week eleven.

Term paper (12 pages), 30%, due week thirteen.

Final exam, 35%

Active participation is essential to this course, both to a student's own learning process and to support the class presentations of other students. Students should regularly attend class prepared to discuss course readings and ready to engage in conversation. Participation is evaluated on the basis of the quality and consistency of discussion contributions, the demonstration of active and engaged listening, and a willingness to engage with other students' presentations. Occasionally, free-writing exercises of short 5- to 10-minute periods will supplement active participation for specific days.

Short written responses (2 pages each) are written at the student's leisure. Of the four required, one must address theory, another literature, and the final two are at the student's choice. Theory responses will examine how literature is important to a single postcolonial theorist. Literature responses will examine how a literary text provides its own response to imperial themes, histories, or genres. These must be completed individually and with proper academic rigour, including grammatical and stylistic effort, but are records of opinions and readings of specific topics. They are not argument- or research-driven essays, and so can be provocative, risky, or personal. They *must* cite the text or texts discussed and use MLA documentation. All responses are due by the eighth week of class.

The *group presentation* will be an informal but provocative co-leadership role that entails taking charge of a short portion of a class (15 minutes), with topics to be determined. These presentations will run



Concept art from Amos Tutuola's writing, "To 7th Town"

weekly and stem from the current course readings; their nature will be exploratory, analytic, and designed to invigorate class discussion. Creativity is welcomed! Out of class practice is essential for presenters' comfort. Presentations are evaluated on the basis of participation, content, collaboration, and a short (page length) concluding self-evaluation, individually written by each student in the group.

A *thesis and research workshop* will be held on the eleventh week. The workshop is designed for students to collaboratively discuss term paper preparations. Students will bring a paragraph-long thesis draft and a short list of three research sources for small-group evaluation. Participation in the workshop is mandatory. Feedback will be collegial and constructive.

The *term paper* (12 pages) will discuss a text from the course reading list, not including one already discussed by a response paper or presentation. Topics and a fuller description will be given in class.

The *final exam* will be scheduled by the university for the exam period. It will compose two parts, equally weighted. Part A will ask for passage analysis. Part B will ask for two short essays. All questions will reference works on the syllabus, but no work is to be discussed at length more than once.

The *late policy* is 2% per day, including weekends. After 10 days assignments will not be accepted. Also note: the Department of English stipulates that **students must pass both term work and the final examination** in order to pass the course. Students failing the final exam automatically fail the course.

Coursework should be typed, double-spaced, use 1-inch margins and 12-pt Times New Roman font, and adopt MLA documentation. Print submissions are required.

Course Schedule

January 6, 8 / Introduction to the class, syllabus discussion, and introduction to postcolonial theory
Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write about Africa" (2005)
Frantz Fanon, selections from *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

January 13, 15 / Postcolonial Criticism & African Literatures
Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952)
Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language" (1964)

January 20, 22 / Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

January 27, 29 / Postcolonial Criticism
Edward Said, selections from *Orientalism* (1978)
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, selections from *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986)
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985)

February 3, 5 / Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1970)

February 10, 12 / Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona's *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (1972)



February 17, 19 / Reading Week

February 24, 26 / Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horsemen* (1979) / **All responses due.**
Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Postcolonialism'" (1992)

March 3, 5 / Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974)
3 Achille Mbembe, from *On the Postcolony* (2001)

March 10, 12 / J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980)
Thesis and research workshop.

March 17, 19 / Jane Taylor and William Kentridge's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997)
3 Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998)

March 24, 26 / K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000)
3 Arif Dirlik, "Is There History After Eurocentrism? Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History" (1999)

March 31, April 2 / Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (2010)
3 Timothy Brennan, "From Development to Globalization: Postcolonial Studies and Globalization Theory" (2004)
Term paper due.

April 7 / Exam Review & Course Conclusion

Exam Period

Final exam.

A Note on the Readings: Some of these texts deal with sensitive and difficult issues regarding human suffering, including sexual and political violence; often they also promote understanding, kindness, and healing. Literature's difficulty is its value, and one of our critical tasks is to understand human complexity through that historical difficulty. If you anticipate serious reservations with discussing these subjects the course may pose a problem. In that case you should contact me as soon as possible.

Readings for this class are a liberal mixture of *short* novels, plays, and critical essays. Unless otherwise noted, weekly discussions focus on literary texts or a specific period of postcolonial criticism. Additional readings have also been included which, while optional reading material, will be frequently referenced in course lectures. Optional readings are noted on the course schedule above with the 3 symbol.

Please note that this syllabus is flexible and subjects to change.



Departmental and Course Policies

Concept art for *Who Fears Death*

Regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters can be found at “Information for Students” on the Department of English website: <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/info-for-students.html>.

Academic Offences: as Western’s Academic Handbook states, “Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.” Please also consult the Department of English guidelines available here: <http://www.uwo.ca/english/site/undrgrd/info.html>.

Plagiarism: all essays and assignments must be written in a student’s own words. The value of an academic education depends on integrity, honesty, and personal effort. Where intellectual labour has been sourced from another author it must be acknowledged through proper documentation and referencing: quotation marks, footnotes, and citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Western’s Academic Handbook states, “All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. The use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).” This class will not use Turnitin. We will discuss what constitutes appropriate and fair use.

Academic Accommodation on medical grounds for missed tests, exams, participation components, or assignments worth more than 10% (alone or in combination) must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student’s Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>.

Those in emotional or mental distress should please refer to MentalHealth@Western, <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>.

Email correspondence will be replied to in a timely and considerate fashion. Many topics are unsuitable for email, however, and questions about lecture material, writing, textual explication and grade discussions all merit face to face consultation. Email can be used to schedule time in office hours.

Classroom etiquette dictates that we either use our electronic devices for course work or that, at a bare minimum, we do not distract each other from the purposes for which we meet in class. Phone use and other disruptive behaviour will not be tolerated. Those engaged in disruptions will be asked to leave.