**Engl 672: African Literature**

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Dr. Laura Wright Fall 2015

Weds. 6-8.50

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Understanding what is meant by “African literature” is no simple task. There is really no such thing as a monolithic African literature – or a monolithic Africa; Africa, as a geographical locale and ideological construct, is not a uniform location, even though it is often presented to Western audiences a singular entity. The continent of Africa is made up of (at last count) 58 distinct countries – and the category of “country” is dependent upon a colonial legacy that divided the continent in accordance with imperial mandates. Therefore, “Africa,” as we understand it, is an entity at once constituted by colonization and at odds and acting in response to the European colonial project. African literature, if we are thinking both pre-colonially and postcolonially, is made up of the oral and written traditions that have resulted from the various cultures, languages, and peoples that have populated the continent for millennia. It would be impossible to do justice (over the course of a single semester) to such a diversity of narrative expressions, so in this class, we will focus on Anglophone postcolonial African literature from a handful of countries: Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Botswana, and South Africa. And we will focus primarily on contemporary narratives, those written since 1945.

The objectives of this course are aligned with the WCU campus theme, “Africa! More than a Continent”: To increase cultural competency, to increase global awareness, to increase WCU’s global reputation, and perhaps most importantly, to address our role in our colonial history with regard to Africa. Further, in this class, we will deconstruct the way that we in the West understand “Africa” – and why we understand (or misunderstand) Africa as we do. We will examine African literature through a variety of theoretical and intersectional lenses including postcolonial, ecocritical, feminist, and Marxist. We will read and discuss significant and foundational scholarship about African literature, the role (and controversy) of the English language in shaping its history, and the impact that African literatures have had on the established literary canon.

**Required texts:**

* Please note that it’s important that we all have the same editions of the required texts, as having these will make accessing passages and engaging in class discussions infinitely easier.

**For purchase:**

Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart* (Nigeria)

Flora Nwapa *Efuru* (Nigeria)

[Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](http://www.l3.ulg.ac.be/adichie/) *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Nigeria)

Tsitsi Dangarembga *Nervous Conditions* (Zimbabwe)

Ngugi *Petals of Blood*(Kenya)

Bessie Head *When Rainclouds Gather* (Botswana)

Nadine Gordimer *The Conservationist* (South Africa)

J. M. Coetzee *Disgrace* (South Africa)

Zakes Mda *Heart of Redness* (South Africa)

**Essays/excerpts (on Blackboard):**

“An Image of Africa” (Achebe)

From *Decolonizing the Mind* (Ngugi)

From *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon)

From *Country of my Skull* (Krog)

“The Charleston Syllabus”

From *Imagined Communities* (Anderson)

“What is a Nation?” (Renan)

From *Invented Tradition* (Hobson)

From *Key Terms for Postcolonial Studies* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin)

And others for theory facilitation TBA

**Requirements**

*Essays (55% of final grade; close reading: 20%, critical analysis: 35%)*

One of the essays will be a short close reading (6-8 pages) of an aspect of one of the works we read. In order to write this essay, you will not need to do outside research. The second essay (12-15 pages) will be more research-oriented. This essay should also involve close reading, but have a wider scope. It may consider the plot of a novel or compare two or more works; it may trace the evolution of a character or compare two or more characters; it may bring in cultural or historical context to shed light on a work; it may use a theoretical lens to clarify the meaning of a work. To support your interpretive argument, the essay should include ample and relevant outside research. More detailed information and timelines for these essays will be provided in class.

*Class Facilitation (20%)*

You will begin discussion of a specific work for one class meeting. The class should begin with a short presentation, outlining important plot points, themes, questions, and connections with other texts – particularly the other texts on Blackboard that accompany the novel – as well as information about the author, culture, and time period relevant to the work. You will also need to provide to your classmates and to me an annotated bibliography of 10 sources for whichever text you introduce. The style and method of the facilitation is entirely up to you; I urge you to meet with me prior to your facilitation session if you have any concerns. You may want to base the research essay on the work for which you facilitate discussion; however, it is not necessary that you do so.

*Theory Facilitation and Evaluation (10%)*

We will be reading several texts that constitute important milestones in postcolonial theory, African history, and African literature. These readings will be available on Blackboard or as handouts. As a way of approaching these texts, you will need to provide a mini-facilitation of one of these pieces, using the piece in conjunction with one of the literary texts we have read. Following your facilitation, you will submit a two-page evaluation of the text wherein you will provide ways in which students and scholars could use the text, criticisms you have of it, and/or a judgment of the importance of the work in African literary studies.

*Weekly Responses and Class Participation (15%)*

It is important to engage with texts; one way to engage with them is to write about them. To encourage this activity, you will post some preliminary thoughts via email to the entire class through Blackboard on Tuesday (by 9:00 pm) before our Wednesday meetings. In these responses, you should record your reactions to the texts we read and to class discussions. I will not be grading you on this material in terms of your literary prowess; instead, I will just be reading through to see what sorts of things you’re thinking about and in order to help shape discussion for the following class. Use these responses to pose questions, to raise points, to ask about anything that’s confusing, or to make connections to other things that we’ve read and discussed in class. Feel free to respond (constructively and as an ally) to your classmates’ responses as well. Think of this as low-stakes, exploratory writing. Satisfactory progress is a page per week. \*\* Because of the size of this class, I will divide you into two groups, and we will alternate postings. You should read the postings every week, regardless of whether or not you posted for the week.

All of the facilitation and responses are designed to help you shape your focus for the two essays that make up the majority of your grade for the course. This is a discussion-based seminar; therefore, you need to talk – to me, to each other, and to anyone else who will listen!

**Policies:**

**Attendance:**

This is a graduate class, so I hope that it goes without saying that you should attend all classes. If you miss three or more classes for whatever reason, you will not be able to pass the course. I had a heart attack in fall of 2013, and I still made it to every class I taught that semester, so I’m pretty serious about this.

**Academic integrity:**

<http://www.wcu.edu/student-life/DeanOfStudents/AcademicIntegrity/academicintegrity.asp>

Students, faculty, staff, and administrators of Western Carolina University (WCU) strive to achieve the highest standards of scholarship and integrity. Any violation of the Academic Integrity Policy is a serious offense because it threatens the quality of scholarship and undermines the integrity of the community. While academic in scope, any violation of this policy is by nature, a violation of the Code of Student Conduct and will follow the same conduct process (see ArticleVII.B.1.a.). If the charge occurs close to the end of an academic semester or term or in the event of the reasonable need of either party for additional time to gather information timelines may be extended at the discretion of the Department of Student Community Ethics (DSCE). Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy include:

\* Cheating - Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise.

\* Fabrication – Creating and/or falsifying information or citation in any academ­ic exercise.

\* Plagiarism - Representing the words or ideas of someone else as one’s own in any academic exercise.

\* Facilitation - Helping or attempting to help someone to commit a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy in any academic exercise (e.g. allowing another to copy information during an examination)

Students who violate the Academic Integrity Policy will receive an F for the semester; the case will be turned over to the Department of Student Community Ethics. I will use technological databases to search for material that I suspect might be plagiarized.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Western Carolina University is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions.  Students who require reasonable accommodations must identify themselves as having a disability and/or medical condition and provide current diagnostic documentation to the Office of Disability Services.  All information is confidential.  Please contact the Office of Disability Services at (828) 227-3886 or come by Suite 135 Killian Annex for an appointment.

**Student Support Services:**

Student Support Services provides support to students who are either first-generation, low-income or those who have disclosed a disability with: academic advising, mentoring, one-on-one tutorial support, and workshops focused on career, financial aid and graduate school preparation. You may contact SSS at (828) 227-7127 or email sssprogram@wcu.edu for more information. SSS is located in the Killian Annex, room 138.

**Technology:**

You can’t use your phone in class for any reason – to text or to read any of the assignments for class. If assignments are posted on Blackboard, you will need to print and bring them to class. I also ask that you not take notes on your computer, as typing during class is distracting to me and to your fellow classmates.

**Recording:**

No student may record, tape, or photograph any classroom activity without the express written consent of the instructor. Students may not make audio or video recordings of course activities except students permitted to record as an approved accommodation. Recordings of class may not be posted publicly (online or otherwise) or distributed to individuals who are not students in the course without the express permission of the faculty member and of any students who are recorded.

**Grading Scale:**

A = 93-100%, A- = 90-92%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 83-86%, B- = 80-82%, C+ = 77-79%, C = 73-76%, C- = 70-72%, D+ = 67-69%, D = 63-66%, D- = 60-62%, F = Below 60%

**Weekly Schedule**

**Part 1: Everything always goes back to *Heart of Darkness*.**

8/19 Introduction, sign up for presentations, discuss syllabus and terms.

 Campus theme discussion, discussion of discourse analysis.

8/26 Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*

Watch [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](http://www.l3.ulg.ac.be/adichie/)’s TED Talk (BB)

 In class: African American slave songs

9/2Chinua Achebe: “An Image of Africa” (BB)

*Things Fall Apart*

 In class: W.B. Yeats: “The Second Coming”

 **\*Group 1 Post**

9/9 Flora Nwapa: *Efuru*

Read about the Igbo Women’s War of 1929 (BB)

 **\* Group 2 Post**

**Part 2: “The condition of the native is a nervous condition.”**

9/16 Tsitsi Dangarembga: *Nervous Conditions*

 From *The Wretched of the Earth* (BB)

 In class: Shona praise poems

 **\* Group 1 Post**

9/23 Ngugi WaThiongo: *Petals of Blood*

 From *Decolonizing the Mind* (BB)

 **\* Group 2 Post**

9/30 Bessie Head: *When Rainclouds Gather*

 Discuss climate

Essay #1 due: potluck and discussion

10/7 Theory facilitation 1: Environmental, postcolonial

10/14 FALL BREAK – NO REGULAR CLASS MEETING

**Part 3: Intersectional Theory**

10/21 Nadine Gordimer: *The Conservationist*

“Living in the Interregnum” (BB)

In class: poetry by Van Wyk and Forché

 **\* Group 1 Post**

10/28 Theory facilitation 2: Feminist, U.S. cultural

**Part 4: Cultivation and Environment**

11/4J.M. Coetzee: *Disgrace*

From *Country of my Skull* (BB)

Watch: *Long Night’s Journey into Day* (BB)

 **\* Group 2 Post**

11/11 Zakes Mda: *Heart of Redness*

 J. B. Peires, from *The Dead will Arise* (BB)

 Work on ecotourism by Rosaleen Duffy and Martha Honey (BB)

 **\* Group 1 Post**

11/18 [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](http://www.l3.ulg.ac.be/adichie/) *Half of a Yellow Sun*

 **\* Group 2 Post**

11/26 Thanksgiving: No class

12/2 Final class: Essay 2 due

**Final exam: 12/9**