

The University of Florida.

Department of English.

LIT 4188. 194D (16616): World Literature in English: Nationalism and the Novel

Fall 2020

Times: Thursday Periods 9- 11
(4.05- 7.05 pm)

Location: Remote Learning

Instructor: Apollo O. Amoko

Office: 4350 Turlington Hall

Office Hours: W: 2- 4pm

or by appointment

Email: aanoko@english.ufl.edu

Course Description:

This course explores the relationship imagined between “nation” and “narration.” In *Imagined Communities*, a landmark study on the origins and spread of nationalism, Benedict Anderson appears to suggest that the novel (along with the newspaper) was central to the possibility of imagining the modern nation. The aesthetic of the novel made it possible to think and narrate the nation in “homogeneous empty time.” Further, Anderson seems to contend that the canonization of literary texts through the school system was instrumental for enabling the intelligentsia to “take the nation to the people.” From this perspective, it is not surprising that literature has historically conceived of its objects of study in fundamentally nationalist terms. In *Cultural Capital*, a landmark study on the logic of literary canon formation, John Guillory contends that the effect of nationalist legitimation cannot be understood as a property inherent in the aesthetic of the novel (or the newspaper), but rather, is the product of a certain context of reading, “a pedagogical imaginary.” Specific literary works, Guillory insists, must be seen as “the vector of ideological notions which do not inhere in the works themselves but in the context of their institutional presentation, or more simply, in the way in which they are taught.” He makes a firm distinction between pedagogical and national imaginaries, between school and national cultures. In his argument, school culture “does not unify the nation culturally so much as it projects out of a curriculum of artifact-based knowledge an imaginary cultural unity never actually coincident with the culture of the nation-state.” While for Anderson, the novel enables the emergence of national culture, for Guillory, the cultural institutions of the novel reflect a highly restrictive school culture. Which of these two theorists presents the more persuasive argument regarding the connection between nation and narration? We will attempt to answer this question by looking at a range of canonical texts from a variety of national and continental contexts.

Course Goals:

The course aims to introduce students to various canonical postcolonial writers from a wide range of cultures, nationalities, regions and aesthetic formation. As well, we will examine foundational issues, debates and concepts in the field including the vexed nexus between nationalism and novel. Moreover, the course will address a wide variety of theoretical and critical perspectives with respect to reading aesthetic objects derived from and critiquing diverse political, cultural, social, economic and other perspectives with which they may generally be unfamiliar, at least at the outset. Through close readings of fourteen diverse novels, students will be empowered to engage critically with the dizzyingly diversity of the vast postcolonial library.

Disability Accommodations:

In line with federal law, the university strives to provide reasonable accommodations for students with either physical or mental disabilities (including learning disabilities such as ADHD or dyslexia). Accordingly, it is essential that you call my attention to any disabilities as soon as possible. In addition, it is imperative that you contact the Office of Students with Disabilities in order to obtain not just the required documentation, but also, ongoing support. To reiterate, please arrange for any required accommodations promptly, especially given the inevitable challenges and complications entailed by remote learning.

On a different, but related note, let me underline my commitment to provide all students with a stimulating and rigorous, but also, safe and respectful learning environment. That undertaking notwithstanding, it is imperative that you feel free to express all good faith opinions even or especially when we address charged issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, nationalism, violence and so on.

Course Requirements:

- I. **Assignment Policy:** You will be required a total of three essays on topics be devised collaboratively. Beyond the typical formal academic essay, I will strive to be as creative and flexible as possible. Assigned at roughly four weeks, the first paper consist of a 5-page and comprise 20% of the final grade. Assigned at roughly eight weeks, the second paper will also consist of a 5-page paper comprising 20% of the final grade. Due towards the end of the semester the 8 to10-page final paper will comprise 35% of your grade. Please be aware that I do not accept late papers except in instances of unexpected illnesses, family emergencies and other unforeseen contingencies. Let me hasten to emphasize that, given the various medical and socio-political crises confronting us all, I will strive to be understanding and accommodating but I urge to strive for the timely submission of assignment. **Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need extra time or additional support.**
- II. **Attendance Policy:** Except in cases of medical, family and other emergencies, attendance is mandatory. Moreover, its essential that you complete all assigned readings in a timely and thorough manner, the better to facilitate active participation in class discussions. Once again, it is essential that you contact me in the event you face difficulties that would retard your fulfilling either requirement. Comprising 25% of your grade, participation is singularly important in light of the small class size as well as the challenges posed by unconventional remote learning. In the event of an unavoidable absence, kindly arrange to provide the instructor written notice as far ahead of schedule as possible. To clarify, you will still be required to complete the assigned reading as quickly as feasible and thereafter submit a two-page response paper. Moreover, I recommend that you arrange to meet me in order to catch up.
- III. **Grading Criteria.** (This applies specifically to the final paper the topics of which will be determined individually in consultation with the instructor)

Grade A. This grade is reserved for outstanding or exceptional papers, that is, essays that fulfil all the requirements of a particular assignment in an exemplary manner. Such essay an turns on an excellent understanding and application of relevant critical concepts *in addition to* a focused and trenchant appreciation of both the content and form a specific primary text. As well, it evinces a cogent, coherent and plausible argument justified

through the in-depth analysis of two or three well-defined textual examples. While secondary sources will not be required for either of the first two papers, you will be at liberty to incorporate one scholarly source in each instance. For example, you could supplement a close reading of Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* by succinctly addressing an essay critiquing the racial politics of 1930s and 40s South Africa or a critical essay focusing on the aesthetics of realism/naturalism. The final paper will require that you address two secondary sources. Generally, I reward originality and reasonable intellectual risk-taking even in instances when the argument remains limited, unrefined or flawed in some respect. However, I also place a high premium on lucid writing, substantive arguments and compelling evidence. I am less impressed by the sheer accumulation of unexplained and unexamined textual examples than a succinct close reading of one detailed example.

Grade B. This grade indicates a strong or above average performance. Such papers evince many strengths in terms of addressing an original and potentially insightful topic; formulating a well-defined argument as well as thoughtful thesis statement; and marshalling the textual and/or evidence justifying its various interpretations and conclusions. Nevertheless, a B paper will include some weaknesses. For example, despite the soundness of its argument, it may falter at the level of elaborating a focused, specific, sustained, and in-dept critique. Potentially insightful examples may be marred by insufficient contextualization and/or incomplete or questionable analysis. Alternately, the paper's overall soundness may have been marred by a tendency to cite secondary sources incompletely, inaccurately or uncritically. To clarify, the flaws in question go beyond beyond the occasional typo and other minor slips. Such minor errors would not prevent me awarding an otherwise exceptional essay an A.

Grade C. This reflects a satisfactory or average paper. Amid a general climate of grade inflation, it bears emphasizing that this grade in no way signals failure. A C paper will demonstrate an adequate, but perhaps uncritical or somewhat flawed, understanding of the themes and aesthetics at work in a particular primary text. Moreover, it will show a generally solid, if also limited, grasp of relevant critical concepts. For example, it may posit a generally plausible textual interpretation that was nevertheless substantially marred by ill-defined argument, insufficient focus, inadequate context, superficial analysis and unwarranted conclusions. In question, only to rendered ineffective by persistently unclear writing, dubious premises, unsound arguments and unwarranted conclusions. Alternately, the paper may outline a plausible line of argument but focus disproportionately, if not entirely, on thematic or sociological analyses. In other words, it fails to address the primary text as a work of art or aesthetic object.

Grade D. This grade will be awarded to a deeply flawed paper, one that barely fulfils the minimum requirements of a formal academic essay. A D paper may reflect a satisfactory understanding of central concept only to be undermined by a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature or scope a particular assignment. For example, it may be substantially shorter than was required inevitably rendered its claims rushed, sketchy and shallow. Alternately, the paper may broach so many unexplained and unexamined examples that its claims remain reductive flat assertions rather than in-depth well-justified arguments. Finally, the paper in question may turn on questionable interpretations of a novel and/or a major scholarly argument.

Grade E will be assigned to a paper that entirely fails to address the essay topic presented and/or exhibits fundamentally dubious understanding of the primary text or the

pivotal concepts and ideas broached in the class. Moreover, the grade will be automatically assigned in instances of plagiarism.

Academic Honesty

As you are aware, the university places a high premium on academic honesty. Accordingly, severe penalties are imposed for plagiarism and other instances of intellectual deception or fraud. Examples of such dishonesty include: i) possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or oral information in the preparation of research papers or exams, ii) submitting material that is wholly or substantially identical to material created or published by oneself or others, iii) making false claims regarding performance or work submitted for a class. The university's policies regarding intellectual honesty are detailed in the Academic Honesty Guidelines. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the guidelines and to ensure that all your work for this course is in compliance. If you are ever in any doubt regarding the appropriate use of research materials, please consult the instructor. Class Schedule (please note the schedule detailed above is not final and is subject to change).

Week 1: Thursday, September 3:

- I. Introductions
- II. Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Week 2: September 10: Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Week 3: September 17: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Week 4. September 24: Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*.

Week 5. October 1: Ferdinand Oyono, *Houseboy*

Week 6. October 6: Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, part i.

Week 7. October 15: Roy, *The God of Small Things*, part ii.

Week 8. October 22: Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*

Week 9. October 29: Alan Paton, *Cry the Beloved Country*, part i

Week 10: November 5: Paton, *Cry the Beloved Country*, part ii

Week 11. November 12: Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy*

Week 12. November 19: Witi Ihimera, *The Whale Rider*

Week 13. November 26. Thanksgiving. No class.

Week 14. December 3. Joy Kogawa, *Itsuka*.