

English 372

Fall 2007, ENGL 372, Ryan Claycomb

English 372: Commonwealth Literature(s)

The legacy of England in its former colonies, and The legacy of the former colonies in England

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Class meets MWF 10:30-11:20
Office Hours: MWF 1:30-2:30
or by appointment

ONCE upon a time... the sun never set on the British Empire, or so they said.

Then, the empire began to crumble, as nations began to resist the grip of empire, began to write back, and establish a new identity---neither wholly native nor wholly British.

This course will examine various literatures of the Commonwealth of Nations, a loose confederation of nations that largely comprise what used to be the British Empire. We will examine novels, plays and poems that express the rhetoric of Empire, challenge that rhetoric, examine the ripple effect of Britain in the world, and come to understand London as a post-colonial city, one characterized more by the cultures that have come to inhabit it than the culture for which it once stood. In doing so, we'll look at texts from England, the Caribbean, Nigeria, India, and South Africa to understand the legacy of England in its former colonies, and the legacy of the former colonies in England.

Central to the course will be the problem of even having such a course itself, which is, "Is the notion of 'Commonwealth Literature' even useful?" The whole idea holds England at the center of a global literature, even as it ghettoizes all of the other national literatures that could be included, and lumps diverse local and national interests together under a heading that defines them all in relation to England. Indeed, we might find ourselves coming to the conclusion that a Commonwealth Lit course is less useful, and perhaps less desirable than a post-colonial literature course, or even several different courses in various national or diaspora literatures (i.e. the literature of an ethnic group as it migrates across the world).

As a result, our objectives for the course will be multiple:

- To ascertain some basic historical principles of the British Empire, its (former) colonies, and the Commonwealth;
- To examine the rhetorical tropes of Empire and its cousin, colonialism;
- To consider the function of nationalism as a concept in relationship to empire;

- To interrogate the role of language and literature in figuring the relations between peoples within imperial, colonial, post-colonial and transnational contexts;
- To explore (for better or worse) the persistence of British presence in various national literatures in contemporary literature;
- To think critically about the effects of globalism on post-colonial nations, people, and literatures.
- To investigate tensions between local cultures and global pressures.
- To read some amazing texts, ones that teach us much about the world and happen to be (gasp!) good reads.

Texts:

These texts are available at both the University Book Store and the Book Exchange. Please obtain them immediately. While it is generally important to obtain the same edition as is denoted here, this is particularly true for the Conrad and Soyinka texts.

- John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester UP)
- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Norton Critical Edition)
- Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Anchor)
- Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (Norton Critical Edition)
- Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Norton)
- Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (Random House)
- J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (Penguin)
- Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (Vintage)

Several texts (both primary and secondary) will be made available in PDF format on the e-campus site. Those readings will be marked with three asterisks (***) and clearly labeled on the site. For primary texts, please print them and bring them to class. For secondary texts, you may print, but if not, please bring reading notes to class.

Course Requirements:

You are expected to meet the following requirements to achieve a passing grade.

1. Complete all reading by the date it is listed in the syllabus. There is a LOT of reading in this course, so be sure to budget your time accordingly.

2. Complete all work by the date listed in the syllabus

- Grades on all assignments will drop one letter grade for every weekday they are late.
- Work handed in more than one week past the due date will automatically be graded F (55%).
- Work handed in more than 2 weeks past the due date will earn a zero.
- A paper is not considered turned until I have a hard copy in my hand.

- Electronic versions via email or disk are unacceptable unless I give explicit permission beforehand.

3. Participate in class activities in such a way that enhances learning for both yourself and your classmates.

Assignments and Grading:

30% (5% each) - *Discussion Questions and Responses*: For most major works we read, you will be responsible for emailing me two discussion questions for that text (I will pass out some guidance on the features of a good discussion question). I will collect all of the questions from the class, choose several of the best ones, and distribute those questions. You will then choose one discussion question from my list, and compose a 450-600 word (1.5-2pgs) response paper that engages the question with close textual analysis. While the grade on the assignment will derive from the response paper itself, if I use your question for that week, your grade will go up five points. If you neglect to submit questions, your grade will be penalized a letter grade. At the end of the semester, you may drop your lowest grade on one of these papers. More details coming soon.

15% (5 times 3%) - *In-Class Participation* See course requirement #3. Attendance will also factor into this grade, so please see the attendance policy. I will assign a class participation grade every three weeks based on attendance, preparation, meaningful contribution to classroom discussion and in-class activities, and absence of disruptive behavior.

20% & 30% - *Critical Papers*: Two papers, one 1200-1800 words (4-6 pgs), the other 2500-3000 (8-10pgs) will be assigned; in the first case, I will assign a topic, but you will have significant room and responsibility to develop your own argument within those assignments. In the second case, I will give plenty of leeway for you to select a topic and text to work upon, as long as we read the text in class and your argument falls within the parameters of our course. As with all academic arguments, you will be asked to craft a unique thesis, and support it with individual claims that are themselves bolstered by substantial textual evidence. Please feel free to come to office hours or make appointments to discuss drafts of papers.

5% - *Group Project*: The group project will take place throughout the semester on various dates marked in the syllabus. Groups of 4-6 people will be responsible for introducing the relevant colonial and postcolonial historical background and some major authors for the region in question—West Africa, the British Caribbean, India, South Africa, and Immigrant London. Guidelines to follow.

Attendance Policy: Attendance for this class is required. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to gather notes or make up any material. If you accumulate **9 or more** absences (three full weeks of class) for any reason, you **will fail the course**. If a circumstance arises that drastically impacts your attendance, perhaps in all of your classes (serious illness, family tragedy, etc.), I'd strongly encourage you to contact Dr. Thomas Sloane, Sr. Associate Dean of Students, at 293-5611 or Tom.Sloane@mail.wvu.edu.

Excessive tardiness is also a problem and will negatively impact class participation. Late entrance into class is disruptive to the workings of the class, assignments are collected at the beginning of class, and with only 50 minutes to work with, every moment is precious. Assignments turned in late because of tardiness will be considered late.

Format for Papers:

All out-of-class assignments must adhere to the following criteria: typed or word-processed, Times New Roman 12-point font double-spaced, 1 inch to 1.25 inch margins, spell-checked, page-numbered, and finally, stapled or paper-clipped. Since paper assignments are based on word counts, a good rule of thumb is that each page is approximately 300 words. Please head your papers with your name, the date, the course, my name, and the word count, followed by a (creative) title that is centered above your essay.

Submissions that do not meet these requirements will be dropped as much as a letter grade. Please note: I am seriously troubled by students who fiddle with the physical appearance of the paper so as to achieve the illusion of length. This belief assumes that I cannot tell the difference between quantity and quality, and I find that personally offensive. A paper that is shorter than the assigned length but presented in an honest way will earn far more respect. That said, word counts should reduce the impulse to indulge in this practice.

Special Circumstances:

If you have a *registered* disability that might affect your performance in this course, let me know as soon as possible and I will make whatever accommodations are warranted. If you have a disability that is not registered, please contact the Office of Disability Services (G30 Mountainlair, 3-6700, TDD3-7740) here on campus as soon as possible in order to get the documentation to me. While I am entirely sympathetic to accommodating disabilities, getting help is your responsibility, and until I have documentation, my hands are tied. If you suspect that some other circumstance may affect your performance this semester (University Athletics, etc.), please let me know as soon as possible.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Because the various forms of academic dishonesty have proliferated in the past few years, I have begun to take this problem very seriously, and will aggressively pursue full punishment (an unforgiveable F for the course) if I find significant evidence of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty cheats you out of your education. Moreover, there is an underlying assumption of absolute disrespect for your classmates, your instructor and your institution. If you are panicking and feel like you might be forced to rely on academic dishonesty, please please please try to see me about other options.

It is your responsibility to be informed about your responsibilities. For more information on the University's Code of Academic Integrity, visit <http://www.arc.wvu.edu/admissions/integrity.html>

Class Schedule/ Syllabus

English 372; Fall 2007

Wk	Day	Date	Class Schedule, Readings, Assignments
1	M	8/20	Introduction to the course What is Commonwealth Literature?
	W	8/22	Empire, Decolonization, The Commonwealth and its Literatures To read: McLeod, Introduction and Chapter 1 Rushdie, “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist” *** Oxford History, Introduction ***
	F	8/24	The Rhetoric of Empire To read: McLeod, Chapter 2, plus 259-260 (Kipling’s “Overland Mail”) Rudyard Kipling, poems ***
2	M	8/27	Heart of Darkness To Read: Joseph Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> Due via email Sunday Night: <i>Heart of Darkness</i> discussion questions
	W	8/29	Heart of Darkness To Read: Conrad, skim excerpts from <i>Congo Diaries</i> in <i>HoD</i> Sir Henry Morton Stanley, from <i>Into the Dark Continent</i> ***
	F	8/31	Heart of Darkness To Read: Achebe Essay in <i>HoD</i> Due in class: <i>Heart of Darkness</i> response paper
3	M	9/3	Labor Day: No classes
	W	9/5	Looking back on Empire To Read: McLeod, Chapter 3 Group 1 Presentation: West Africa
	F	9/7	Death and the King’s Horseman To read: Wole Soyinka, <i>Death and The King’s Horseman</i> , all Due via email Thursday night: <i>Death and The King’s Horseman</i> discussion question
4	M	9/10	Death and the King’s Horseman To read: Soyinka, “Theater in Tradiational African Cultures” <i>D&KH</i> 89-102 Thiong’o from <i>The Language of African Theatre</i> Byam “Communal Space and Performance in Africa”
	W	9/12	Nation and Narration To Read: Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Men”*** Due in class: DKH Response Paper
	F	9/14	Things Fall Apart To read: Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i> , Chapters 1-7
5	M	9/17	Things Fall Apart To read: Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i> , Chapters 8-13
	W	9/19	Things Fall Apart To read: Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i> , Chapters 14-end Due via email Thursday night: <i>Things Fall Apart</i> discussion question
	F	9/21	Things Fall Apart
6	M	9/24	Critiques of Nationalism To read: McLeod, Chapter 4

Ngugi wa Thiong'o from *Decolonizing the Mind****

Due in class: TFA Response Paper

Paper #1 handout

- W 9/26 **The Empire Writes Back**
To Read: McLeod, Chapter 5
Walcott: "A Far Cry from Africa"***
Jane Eyre Presentation
- F 9/28 **Wide Sargasso Sea**
To Read: Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, pt. 1
Group 2 Presentation: The British Caribbean
- 7 M 10/1 **Wide Sargasso Sea**
To Read: Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, pts. 2 & 3
Due via Email, Sunday Night, WSS Discussion Questions
- W 10/3 **Wide Sargasso Sea**
Due in class: WSS Response Paper
- F 10/5 **Pantomime**
To Read: Walcott, *Pantomime****
Robinson Crusoe Presentation
- 8 M 10/8 **Pantomime**
- W 10/10 **Pantomime**
- F 10/12 **Paper Workshop**
Due in class: Complete draft of Paper #1
Note: Though little reading has been scheduled this week to facilitate work on your paper, you may want to read ahead!
- 9 M 10/15 **Catch up**
Due in class: Paper #1
- W 10/17 **Salman Rushdie, East, West**
To Read: Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands,"* "Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies,"**The Courter****
Group #3: India and Pakistan
- F 10/19 **Salman Rushdie, East, West**
To Read: Rushdie, "At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers"****
- 10 M 10/22 **The God of Small Things**
To read: Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Chapters 1-4
- W 10/24 **The God of Small Things**
To read: Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Chapters 5-10
- F 10/26 **The God of Small Things**
To read: Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Chapters 11-end
Due via email on Thursday Night: GST discussion questions
- 11 M 10/29 **The God of Small Things**
To Read: McLeod, Chapter 6
- W 10/31 **The God of Small Things**
To Read: Sara Suleri "Woman Skin Deep"****
Due in class: GST response paper
- F 11/2 **The God of Small Things**
- 12 M 11/5 **After Postcolonialism?**

- To Read: McLeod, Chapter 8
Group #4: South Africa
- W 11/7 **Disgrace**
To Read: Coetzee, *Disgrace*, Chapters 1-11
- F 11/9 **Disgrace**
To Read: Coetzee, *Disgrace*, Chapter 12-end
Due via email Thursday Night: *Disgrace* discussion questions
- 13 M 11/12 **Disgrace**
W 11/14 **Disgrace**
Due in class: *Disgrace* response paper
- F 11/16 **Disgrace**
(Guest Lecture from WVU PhD candidate Sohinee Roy)
11/19-11/25 Thanksgiving Break
Get a head start on *White Teeth*—finish it if you can!
- 14 M 11/26 **Postcolonial London: *White Teeth***
To Read: Smith, *White Teeth*; Archie and Samad sections
Group 5 Presentation: Immigrant London
- W 11/28 ***White Teeth***
To Read: Smith, *White Teeth*; Irie section
- F 11/30 ***White Teeth***
To Read: Smith, *White Teeth*; M/M/M section
Due via email Thursday Night: *White Teeth* discussion questions
- 15 M 12/3 ***White Teeth***
Due in Class, *White Teeth* Response Paper
- W 12/5 ***White Teeth***
To Read: McLeod Chapter 7
Oxford History, “Epilogue”***
- F 12/7 **Final Paper Workshop**
- 16 W 12/12 **Final paper due in my Office or my mailbox: Wednesday, December 12, by 2:30 pm**