

# English 387

Gwen Bergner, ENGL 387, Fall 2002, Special Topics in Women's Literature

## English 387W - Special Topics in Women's Literature

### Postcolonial Women Writers

Dr. GwenBergner \* Fall2002 \* TR 10-11:15 \* 123 Armstrong

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#### Course Description

As recently as World War I, the European empire dominated more than 85% of the globe. Over the several preceding centuries, nations such as England, France, Spain, Holland, and Belgium had colonized vast regions of Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, and the Pacific Rim. So it wasn't until relatively recently that these areas won independence from their former colonizers. India became a sovereign nation, independent of England, in 1947. Many African countries didn't gain their independence until the 1960s. The sheer extent and duration of the European empire and its disintegration after World War II had led to widespread interest in the literature produced by these former colonies, literature now termed "postcolonial." Although there is considerable debate over the precise boundaries of the field and the definition of the term "postcolonial," in a very general sense, it is the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period. Postcolonial literature and criticism is now a major field within English.

In this course, we will read a number of novels and view a couple of films by women from colonial/postcolonial nations. We will consider how these novels represent women's symbolic, ideological, and political role in constituting national identity for emerging nations; the legacy of psychological, cultural, and physical violence of colonization; and the relationships among religious, gender, racial, sexual, and national identities. We will also consider what sort of future these novels imagine for women and for the postcolonial nations themselves. With the rise of "globalization" as the new paradigm for understanding the world's interconnectedness, we must rethink how we conceive of relations between the postcolonial world and its former colonizers.

In addition to introducing students to the area of postcolonial literature and gender studies, this course aims to develop skills of critical thinking and analysis. Writing is crucial to developing such skills. Further, WVU requires all students to pass at least one course, beyond Eng. 102, that requires a substantial writing component and in which the grade is partially determined by writing skills. Eng. 387 has been designated a "W" course. For these reasons, Eng. 387 includes several writing assignments, both graded and ungraded, distributed throughout the semester.

#### Required Texts

Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883)

Buchi Emecheta, *The Bride Price* (1976)

Nadine Gordimer, *July's People* (1981)

Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (1991)

Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997)

Bharati Mukherjee, *The Holder of the World* (1993)

Merle Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970)

Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (1990)

Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994)

**Films** (to be watched in class)

*Chocolat* (1988, dir. Claire Denis)

*Mississippi Masala* (1992, dir. Mira Nair)

### **Course Requirements**

- 3 Five-page Papers (20% each) 60%
- 1 Class Presentation 20%
- 9 Discussion Paragraphs 10%
- Participation 10%

### Papers:

You will write three critical papers with a minimum length of five pages each. Writing workshops are built into the syllabus to provide guidance and feedback in paper . writing. Writing conferences will also be required. Late papers will be penalized unless you have made arrangements with me prior to the due date. You will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit papers 1 and 2 on the condition that you have completed all scheduled workshops for that assignment and have submitted a completed and polished assignment by the first due date. Paper due dates: 9/27, 11/8, 12/11.

### Presentation:

You will sign up to do one class presentation. The presentation must not exceed ten minutes. In the presentation you will need to interpret, supplement, contextualize, or illustrate the assignment for that day by researching an aspect of the reading/film that interests you. Most likely, your research will focus on one of three areas: 1) the historical and political context of the region and events represented in the novel/film, 2) the cultural issues represented in the novel/film, or 3) critical background about the author/director's body of work. Your research does not need to be exhaustive, but you will need to bring to class some information, document, object, or visual image that advances our understanding of the text. In your presentation, you'll need to explain the significance and implications of your research and to raise

some questions for discussion. You will incorporate your presentation research into one of your written papers.

#### Discussion Paragraphs:

On nine class days, you will bring to class one full paragraph that analyzes and interprets an aspect of the day's reading. These paragraphs are intended to give you practice writing, especially with paragraph structure, and to raise issues for class discussion. You might be asked to read your paragraph to the class. A full paragraph is defined as 3/4-1 double-spaced page. Paragraphs should follow proper structure (thesis, development, example/quotation, interpretation of example/quotation, conclusion). These assignments must be word processed. You will complete nine paragraphs over the course of the semester. Each assignment is worth one point of your final grade. You get one free point. You will get credit for these assignments as long as you complete them in good faith and according to the specified requirements. They will not be graded.

#### Participation:

In order to foster community and to maximize learning, it is crucial that you participate in class discussion. Therefore, you will need to have completed all assigned reading for each class and to bring the text under discussion to class with you. You must also bring to class any written assignment necessary for that day's program.

\* You will receive more detailed information about the writing and presentation assignments, as necessary, throughout the semester.

#### **Attendance and Late Policy:**

Attendance is required. You are granted four "free" absences. For each additional absence, you will lose a percentage point from your participation grade. If you miss any class, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate in order to find out what happened in class, if there is an assignment for the next class, and whether changes were made to the syllabus or assignment schedule. You are responsible for all assignments, graded and ungraded, due in the next class. If you are not in class by the time class begins, you may be marked absent unless you let me know after class that you came late. Two late arrivals count as an absence.

#### **E-Mail:**

I will use WVU's MIX e-mail system to communicate with the class between class meetings. Please check your M1X e-mail account regularly, at least once between class meetings. You can access MIX from the WVU homepage or at [www.mix.wvu.edu](http://www.mix.wvu.edu)

If you want to e-mail me privately, please use my [gbergner@wvu.edu](mailto:gbergner@wvu.edu) address. Please do the following two things to help me sort through junk mail and avoid viruses (I will also appreciate the courtesy):

1. Put your name and the course number in the subject heading
2. In the body of the e-mail, address your audience (me) at the beginning and sign your name at the end.

#### **Honor Code:**

Any work that you submit must be your own. In addition, any words, ideas, or data that you borrow from another source (individual, website, published text) must be properly documented. It is your responsibility to learn the rules and conventions of citing

sources in your academic work. If you have questions about academic citation, see me in office hours before papers are due. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses. Clear cases will result in an unforgivable F for the course and appropriate academic sanctions. Please see the WVU Undergraduate Catalog section on Academic Integrity/Dishonesty for a full explanation of expectations and procedures.

### **Learning Environment:**

WVU is committed to social justice. I support that commitment and will work to create a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. I welcome suggestions for furthering such an environment. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

### **Syllabus** (subject to change, as necessary)

#### Week 1

T 8/20 Introduction

Th 8/22 John McLeod, "From 'Commonwealth' to 'Postcolonial'" (6-24, handout)

Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies" (handout)

### **Africa**

#### Week 2

T 8/27 Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (p. 138)

**Due:** Paragraph #1

Th 8/29 Schreiner, *Farm* (to end)

#### Week 3

T 9/3 Buchi Emecheta, *The Bride Price* (p.82)

McLeod, "Postcolonialism and Feminism" (172-181, handout)

**Due:** Paragraph #2

Th 9/5 Emecheta, *Bride* (to end)

#### Week 4

T 9/10 Nadine Gordimer, *July's People* (p.84)

**Due:** Paragraph #3

Th 9/12 Gordimer, *July's* (to end)

McLeod, "Postcolonialism and Feminism" (182-203, handout)

#### Week 5

T 9/17 Writing Workshop

**Due:** Draft of intro. paragraph

Th 9/19 Writing Workshop

**Due:** Complete draft of Paper #1

#### Week 6

T 9/24 *Chocolat* (film, in class)

Th 9/26 *Chocolat* (cont.)

F 9/27 **Due:** Paper #1, Noon, my mailbox in 231 Stansbury

### **India and Pakistan**

#### Week 7

T 10/1 Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (p.109)

**Due:** Paragraph #4

Th 10/3 Sidhwa, *Cracking* (p.200)

McLeod, "Nationalist Representations" (67-76, handout)

#### Week 8

T 10/8 Sidhwa, *Cracking* (to end)

Th 10/10 Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (p. 117)

**Due:** Paragraph #5

Week 9

T 10/15 Roy, *Small Things* (p.216)

**Due:** Optional revision of Paper #1

Th 10/17 Roy, *Small Things* (to end)

Week 10

T 10/22 Bharati Mukherjee, *The Holder of the World* (Part One, p.91)

**Due:** Paragraph #6

Th 10/24 Mukherjee, *Holder* (Part Two, p.208)

Week 11

T 10/29 Mukherjee, *Holder*, (to end)

In class: "Savage Acts" (film on Spanish-American War, 30 min.)

Th 10/31 *Mississippi Masala* (film, in class)

**Due:** Draft of intro. paragraph

Week 12

T 11/5 Election Day - No Class - Vote! E

Th 11/7 *Mississippi Masala* (film, in class)

Return drafts of intro. paragraphs

F 11/8 **Due:** Paper #2, Noon, my mailbox in 231 Stansbury

**The Caribbean**

Week 13

T 11/12 Merle Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey* (Ch. 11, p.62)

**Due:** Paragraph #7

Th 11/14 Hodge, *Monkey* (to end)

McLeod, "The Nation in Question" (102-117, handout)

Week 14

T 11/19 Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (p.83)

**Due:** Paragraph #8

Th 11/21 Kincaid, *Lucy* (to end)

Thanksgiving Break

Week 15

T 12/3 Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (p.119)

**Due:** Paragraph #9

Th 12/5 Danticat, *Breath* (to end)

**Due:** Optional revision of paper #2

Conferences will be scheduled 12/9 and 12/10.

**Paper #3 Due: Wednesday, December 11, 11:00 a.m., 231 Stansbury, in my mailbox**

**Format for written assignments:**

- Typed on a computer
- Double-spaced
- Titled
- Pages numbered
- Labeled with your name, my name, date, course #
- Proofread by you from a hard copy
- Spell-checked by computer (not a substitute for proofreading)
- Formatted with standard one-inch margins and 12 point type
- Stapled
- Submitted with rough draft if I have commented on a rough draft

(You may incur penalties in grading if you fail to meet any of these criteria.)

### **Submission of Assignments**

1. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified.
2. All written assignments are to be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.
3. Late submissions will be penalized unless the student has made prior arrangements.
4. You should keep a folder of all your graded course work.
5. You should keep a computer disk copy of all written assignments you hand in.

### **This course aims to meet the following LSP goals:**

To help students understand:

- alternative views and cultures,
- principles of social justice,
- major influences in and challenges to society,
- our interdependent world,
- the arts and humanities.

To help students communicate effectively and think critically and analytically.

### **Evaluation criteria for written work:**

**A (90-100):** This is an outstanding essay which reflects a perceptive and thoughtful response to the assignment. It is well organized with excellent development of its ideas and reflects the writer's command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of American prose.

**B (80-89):** This is a very good essay that fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. It is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics of writing which do not interfere with reading the essay.

**C (70-79):** This is a satisfactory essay which fulfills the assignment and is adequately developed. The writing is clear and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish an above-average essay.



**D (60-69):** This is a below-average essay which fulfills the assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. It may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.

**F (>60):** This is an essay that relates to the topic but is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. It fails to present its basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard American usage. Such an essay may have sentence boundary problems, poor use of idiom, inappropriate diction (words used incorrectly), agreement errors, or verb tense problems.

**0:** This is an essay that represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing which are clearly not the student's. Refer to the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the University policy on Academic Dishonesty.