Colonialism and Imperialism in Literature

This course is an introduction to a selection of interesting and exciting works about "race," colonialism, and imperialism in English, from the middle ages to the present--although we will be concentrating on some early modern (roughly 1600-1800) and contemporary (post-1930) examples, rather than trying to cover everything. We will examine how literary and other conventions serve in the making of modern racial identities, especially in conjunction with the history of European colonialism and imperialism. We will also trace the contribution of non-English (and non-European) writers to "English" literature. There are no prerequisites for this class, other than an interest in the literature we will be studying.

As an introduction, this course has two aims: first, to gain some knowledge of the range of literary works (and some non-literary ones, such as films) that have sprung from colonial and imperial realities--realities that include the use of African slave labour in the new world and the conquest of the native inhabitants of the Americas by European invaders; and secondly, to develop a technical vocabulary for discussing the unique attributes and elements of a literature ("English" literature) born of colonialism and imperialism.

"Colonialism" is the term used to describe the advent of permanent European settlement in other areas of the world, beginning soon after Columbus's voyages and becoming widespread from the seventeenth century on. "Imperialism" refers to the political domination of foreign nations (think of the Roman empire). Often areas that were extensively colonized became part of a European nation's empire, although many territories were assimilated without colonization. For example, in 1944 both Canada (a heavily colonized country) and India (where few Britons settled permanently) were members of the British Empire.

These colonial and imperial "adventures" put the inhabitants of the world into new relations of global conflict, and one of the results was the invention and elaboration of the pseudo-scientific notion of "race." Europeans knew for thousands of years, of course, that they had a different skin colour from some of the inhabitants of Africa (for example). This did not lead to the idea that skin colour was essential to the identity of either individuals or groups. We will see in the medieval work known as Mandeville's Travels, for example, that religious differences are
far more important than physical ones. "Race" in the modern sense of an inherited biological essence did not exist during the middle ages or before—on the contrary, it is a modern construction that springs from the attempt by Europeans to dominate and subdue other peoples and cultures. Of course, just because "race" is a construction does not make it any less real or the racism it engenders any less violent.

How is "race" and racial identity constructed? One way it is constructed (and resisted) is in literature. It is not simply that a work of literature may embody an overtly racial idea or theme; works of literature also make use of rhetorical and structural elements that can contribute to racial thinking in certain ways. Our study of the construction of "race" and racism will thus include an examination of the role of some specifically textual elements, including the following: narrative forms such as autobiographical self-fashioning; imaginative geographies that project a civilized "here" and a barbaric "there"; and the rhetorical appropriation of the voice of the "other." The relationship between racial identity and issues of gender and sexuality will also be examined.

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Although I will regularly lecture, classes will also include a seminar component. This will let you discuss the texts we study with your own interests in mind, and give you practice in independent and active learning. Unlike a lecture, a seminar invites you to think for yourself, to offer your own insights, and to assess and comment on the ideas of others without the constant influence of the instructor. Think of this class as a workshop in which you will have a regular opportunity to hone your reading skills and express your insights, as well as to contribute to the team effort. Address yourself to all the participants, not just to me. My role, after introducing new texts and analytic tools, will be to facilitate discussion and act as a resource person.

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Office: Hagey Hall 257, X2416
Office hours: 2:30-3:30 Tuesday and Thursday, or by appointment

Required Texts:
William Shakespeare, Othello (Signet)
Aphra Behn, Oroonoko (Norton)
John R. Jewitt, Narrative, in White Slaves of the Nootka
(Heritage House)
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper & Row)
Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Heinemann)
Kinko's Course Packet

Assignments: Attendance and active participation in class (10%); 1-page paper (10%); 2-page paper (20%); class presentation or mid-term (your choice = 20%); and a final examination (40%).

The 1-page paper is due in-class on October 13. The 2-page paper is due in-class on November 17. For those that choose to write it, the mid-term will be held October 20. Papers must be typed and double-spaced; if using a word-processor, laser print and do not use right justification. A page is 250 words. Papers must follow the format for citation and quotation laid out in the *MLA Handbook*. Papers late without prior permission may be penalized 2% per day. Uncompleted assignments will be graded F-.

NOTE: Please keep a photocopy of any paper you submit, and never hand a paper in by sliding it under (or sticking it to) my office door.
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SYLLABUS

September 13: Introduction: "Race," Colonialism, and Imperialism

I. Re-Mapping the Tradition (English Literature Before 1805)

September 15: The World According to Mandeville: 
Mandeville's Travels (selections in K=Kinko's Packet)

September 20, 22 & 27: The Other at Home: 
Shakespeare, Othello

September 29 & October 4: The Romance of Empire: 
Behn, Oroonoko

October 6: The Colour of Innocence: 
Wheatley, selected poems (K) 
Blake, selected poems (K)

October 11 & 13: Canadian Apartheid: 
"Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance" (film) 
Jewitt, Narrative

October 18 & 20: Re-Writing the Primitive: 
Equiano, Narrative

II. The Empire Maps Back (Literature in English After 1930)

October 25 & 27; November 1: African-American Feminism: 
Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" (K) 
Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

November 3, 8 & 10: Decolonizing Literature: 
Achebe, Things Fall Apart
Walcott, selected poems (K)

November 15, 17 & 22: Re-Making Black Identities:
Public Enemy (music)

November 24, 29; December 1: Post-Colonial and Post-Modern:
"Sammy and Rosie Get Laid" (film)
Ondaatje, Running in the Family

NOTE: Also included in your Kinko's Packet are some supplementary essays. These should be read as follows: at the start of part one of the course (Re-Mapping the Tradition) please read Lawrence Wright, "One Drop of Blood" and Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Race"; and at the start of part two of the course (The Empire Maps Back) please read the essays by Salmon Rushdie ("'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist" and "The New Empire within Britain") and Paul Gilroy ("Nationalism, History, and Ethnic Absolutism" and "A Dialogue with bell hooks").