ENGL 463: Postcolonial Literatures

Dr. Archana Rampure
Thurs: 4-6:50
Office: HH 254  <archana.rampure@utoronto.ca>

Summer 2006
University of Waterloo
Class: HH 150

Course Narrative

This course is an introduction to the postcolonial literatures of the world. In twelve weeks, we will take a whirlwind tour through the history of half the world in the last five hundred years and across three continents. This is a monumental – not to say impossible – undertaking: and we will attempt it with the full knowledge of its impossibility. In order to underline for ourselves how impossible this task is, we will also undertake a “case study” of South Asian and diasporic literatures. Given that the history of colonialism is a history of the many and varied attempts to bring “other” worlds into our own through the acquisition of exhaustive information about them, we will try to resist turning our reading of so-called “postcolonial” texts into forms of “native informancy.”

We will examine these narratives with a critical eye, in an attempt to understand how these narratives collectively form a discourse within which people live their lives. We will apply a number of theoretical frameworks – feminist and Marxist for instance – to both the forms within which they write and the forms within which they are written into history as we try to understand the underlying assumptions about the relationships between power and history as they are revealed through these texts. We will be looking at how race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity are plotted in the realm of the postcolonial, especially in South Asia and its paradigmatic diasporas. In particular, we will pay close attention to the “problem” of diaspora. Ultimately, what we will attempt to arrive at is a sense of how narratives of the nation and of national belonging are riven by the fictions of the postcolonial. Do people willingly participate in the singular narrative of the triumphant nation-state that forms the bedrock of every postcolonial nation or do they resist such demands? Can they subvert this narrative? Do they want to subvert it? What are the structures – of power, of production, of labour, of sexuality, of paternity, of globalization, of religion, of tradition – that keep this discourse of the postcolonial nation-state in place?

Our readings will demonstrate how the rest of the world is always already constructed within the context of the world that we currently reside in. By the end of the class, you should have a reading knowledge of the history of colonialism and its aftermath in Africa and Australasia, as well as a more nuanced sense of the history of South Asia. You will have a sense of how writers have responded to colonialism, to anti-colonial resistance, and to postcolonial reality, both from the perspective of the triumph of modernism and from the attempts to write back to the centre against the grain of triumphant nationalist histories. You will be able to identify the links between culturally constructed scripts of colonialism, anti-colonial resistance and the ways in which these scripts are themselves material products, fashioned in particular spaces and born of particular historical moments. You will also have a sense of the textures of life in particular spaces and particular historical moments, ranging from West Africa and India.
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in the throes of independence movements in the 1940s, to the lives of first and second generation immigrants to Britain and Canada in the present.

Texts

Ania Loomba: Colonialism/ Postcolonialism (text)

Sembene Ousmane: God's Bits of Wood (novel)
Ama Ata Aidoo: No Sweetness Here (short story cycle)
Amitav Ghosh: In An Antique Land (creative non-fiction)
Rabindranath Tagore: The Home and the World (novel)
Meera Syal: Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee (novel)
Ashok Mathur: Once Upon an Elephant (novel)
Mudrooro: Doctor Woodreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the End of the World (novel)

Assignments and Grading

Reading Journals: 20%
1 page “ink-sheds” are to be handed in at the end of every class, from class 2 to class 11; these are to be your reflections about any of the texts for the day. These reading journals are meant to help you keep track of your thoughts as you read. Journals will not be accepted late or by email. Hand in hard copies at the end of each class.

Group Presentation: 20%
A group of 3 students will present each week – on either one of the books or one of the films – and then take questions from the class. You will have 20 minutes to take a position on the assigned text. The assignment is not to become a plot summary but is rather to be an exercise in critical thinking. My assessment will focus both on your performance and on your group’s position’s originality and persuasiveness.

In-class Essay: 10%
You will write a very short, in-class essay, with no advance preparation.

Essay: 40%
Due at the end of the term, this 18-20 page essay should be your major critical project for this class. I will discuss my expectations for the essay later but some options include writing a critical essay on a topic of your choice, or an introduction to one of the texts we read in this class or putting together a critical outline for an (imaginary) anthology of postcolonial fiction on a theme. Note that you will be expected to hand in a detailed
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Outline for your essay in Class 9, which I will hand back in Class 10 with comments and suggestions. You will be expected to incorporate these into your essay.

Participation: 10%
Self explanatory. I do not mark attendance; however, it is truism to say that you cannot participate in a class that you are not in.

Administrivia

Attendance – it’s a truism to say that you can’t benefit from a class you don’t attend. My policy is that more than one absence requires a formal explanation and that more than three might mean failing the class.

Plagiarism – if it’s not your own work and you haven’t cited it, it’s called plagiarism. Don’t do it; it’ll cause you (and me) endless grief and at best you’ll end up failing the class. Trust me, I’ve read all the articles in all the journals and if you can find it on the internet, so can I. I’d rather spend my time reading what you have to say than read what you can find online. Consider this your written notice that plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class, in any form and to any degree. If you have any questions about citing sources, consult the freely available guidelines to what and how to cite, and of course, ask me.

Respectful Behaviour in Class – you’re welcome to disagree with me or anyone else in class at any time. Keep in mind, though, that you are all expected to listen respectfully to each other; that this is a class where we will be considering contentious texts and emotional concepts. There will be heated discussion – the history of economic, social and political thought is always difficult ground to cover and there will be moments when you will feel particularly strongly. No doubt, we will all bring with us opinions that we justify with personal experiences. By staying in this class, you’re agreeing to extend the courtesy of listening carefully and respectfully to each other and to me.

Contacting Me: I live in Toronto and will be commuting to Waterloo once a week. In general, then, I am only available to consult with you on Thursdays. But I’m very accessible by email: I would recommend this as the best way of getting in touch with me. However, do note that there are times I will be away: expect to hear from me within 2 working days.
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CLASS SCHEDULES:
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Class 1: May 4: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Neocolonialism: Histories, Cultures, Literatures
Film viewing: Bye Bye Brazil

Class 2: May 11: Introduction: Colonialism and its Aftermath
Read Loomba (pgs 1-114)

Class 3: May 18: Introduction – contd.: Postcolonialism and its Ethics
Read Loomba (pgs 115 – 228)

Class 4: May 25: The Colonial Fantasy of Africa: Anticolonial Resistance
Read God's Bits of Wood

Class 5: Jun 1: The Postcolonial Fantasy of Africa: The Remains of the Day
Read No Sweetness Here

Class 6: Jun 8: "As to the Fable that there are Antipodes": Australia and Authenticity
Read Doctor Woodreddy's Prescription for Enduring the End of the World

Class 7: Jun 15: The Case of India: The Romance of Resistance
Read The Home and the World

Class 8: Jun 22: Wild Anthropologists: The Materiality of History
Read In An Antique Land

Class 9: Jun 29: The Case of the South Asian Diaspora: The Romance of the City
Film viewing: Sammy and Rosie Get Laid
Hand in Essays Outlines

Class 10: Jul 6: Into the Heart of England
Read Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee
Essay Outlines Returned with Comments

Class 11: Jul 13: Curry in Calgary?: A Postcolonial Canadian Farce
Read Once Upon an Elephant

Class 12: Jul 20: From Wounded Knee to Caledonia, via Oka and Ipperwash:
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Film viewing: The Business of Fancydancing
Essays Due in Class

*Please Note*: CLASSES MAY HAVE TO BE RESCHEDULED OR CHANGED DEPENDING ON THE AVAILABILITY OF BOOKS & FILMS