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ENGL 157: Great Works of Global Literature

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English 157W:

Great Works of Global Literature

According to Jacques Rancière, the term ‘literature’ emerged around 1800 to name a particular “mode of visibility of writing.” Literariness, he argues, upsets hierarchies of representation and tunes us into the politics of everyday life. Given this definition, *why should we study literature? What kinds of questions do literary texts raise? How can they help us think differently about the world?* This course will take a “case studies” approach to some problems of world literature, delving into the questions raised by contemporary literary texts from different parts of the world:

- *To what extent are our stories our own?*
- *How does the medium (images, text, sound, etc.) affect the story?*
- *How do places shape our life paths and possibilities?*

We will explore how the conventions of storytelling and processes of mediation shape our understandings of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality (among other things). We will also experiment with the story-telling strategies we encounter by producing our own critical and creative texts and attending to each other’s work with the same care and scrutiny that we give to assigned readings. This course should be undertaken as an experimental, collaborative, and hopefully thrilling intellectual adventure into the processes of meaning making in our lives.

This is a general education course that satisfies the Literature requirement for the Queens Core under the CUNY General Education structure called Pathways. English 157W also fulfills the Pathways Common Core requirement in the area of World Cultures, Global Issues.

Introduction to Literature

A course in this area must meet all of the following learning outcomes. A student will:

- Be able to respond proficiently in writing (i.e. per the outcomes for “A”) to literary works.
- Display familiarity with literary works by a variety of authors in a variety of genres.
- Be able to offer an extended discussion in writing of two or more texts and authors in relation to each other.
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze and interpret based on careful attention both to the detail and overall design of a literary work.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the role of context in determining meaning.

Course Goals

Upon completing this course, students will be able to

1. think in nuanced terms about how and why we read literature.
2. analyze rhetoric and use it more effectively.
3. produce critical and creative compositions.
4. communicate complex ideas to a public audience.
5. design and implement a collaborative research project.

Primary Sources:

Conrad, Joseph *Heart of Darkness* [Read it here](#)

Achebe, Chinua *Things Fall Apart* [Read it here](#)

Head, Bessie *Maru* [Read it here](#) or [Read it here](#)

Satrapi, Marjane *Persepolis Part 1* [Read it here](#)

Secondary source Materials:Sources for *Heart of Darkness*

“An Image of Africa” by Chinua Achebe [Read it here](#)

“Conrad’s Critique of Imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*” by Hunt Hawkins [Read it here](#)
(You will need to be logged in using your CUNY login credentials in order to access the Hawkins article)

David Von Reybrouck, from *Congo: The Epic History of a People*: Chapter 2 “Congo Under Leopold” [Read it here](#)

“The Civilizing Mission” – Letter from King Leopold II, published as an appendix to Guy Burrows’ 1898 book: *The Land of the Pigmies*; [Read it here](#)

“An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of Congo, by Colonel the Honorable Geo. W. Williams of the United States of America” – published as an appendix to *George Washington Williams: A Biography* by John Hope Franklin. [Read it Here](#)

Sources for *Things Fall Apart*

“Playful Ethnography: Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Nigerian Education” by David Borman [Read it here](#)
(You will need to be logged in using your CUNY login credentials in order to access the Borman article)

Sources for *Maru*

“Irony and Schizophrenia in Bessie Head’s *Maru*” by Modupe Olaogun [Read it here](#)

(You will need to be logged in using your CUNY login credentials in order to access the Olaogun article)

Sources for *Persepolis*

“Occidentalism: Rewriting the West in Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*” by Typhaine Leservot [Read it here](#)

(You will need to be logged in using your CUNY login credentials in order to access the Leservot article)

“Edward Said on Orientalism” [Watch it here](#)

Major Assignments:

Paper 1:

Confronting The Heart of Darkness (3-4 pages)

In the political and cultural climate of contemporary America, Heart of Darkness offers a potentially controversial view of the world which collides with many of the perspectives that globalization and post-colonial studies have illuminated, especially in terms of race, gender, and socio-economic status. Compose a 3-4 page essay responding to Heart of Darkness. This should be presented as either 1) a defense (apology) perhaps because your reading of Conrad’s work points more towards Conrad’s writing as an indictment of imperialism, or 2) as a criticism which identifies some “blind spot” in Conrad’s work that utilizes either Achebe or another peer-reviewed scholarly article in your reading; draw from other essays in support of one of these foundational ideas. In your essay, focus on specific passages as the basis for your argument and connect quotes from your chosen secondary source(s) with the text as you establish your own interpretation of this controversial yet esteemed text.

Paper 2:

Two Visions of Africa (3-4 pages)

After reading Things Fall Apart & Maru, you have explored two visions of Africa which differ in numerous aspects including geography, narrative style, time period, commentary on colonialism/ specific colonizers, and others. Choose ONE of these aspects as the basis for an essay in which you compare and contrast the two novels. Use your close reading skills to analyze specific sections of text from each novel AND use your research skills to include at least TWO Secondary Sources which clarify, illuminate, or otherwise expand the claims that you are making in regards to your chosen focus for the essay. In the course of your analysis and counterargument, you should also address Achebe’s declaration from the previous essay. How do these novels avoid the “dehumanizing” accounts which Achebe claims are fundamental to the narrative in Heart of Darkness? In your conclusion, explain what these two novels might share which distinguishes them from Heart of Darkness.

Paper 3 (Final):

Beyond the Academy

Identify a political/cultural turning point in history that was not studied in this class. Identify the intrinsic philosophical challenges faced during your chosen moment in history. Using evidence from two (2) primary sources and 4-6 secondary sources, present an analysis of how aspects of the novels and short stories we’ve studied

deepens your understanding of the intrinsic challenges faced. Which aspects of the stories parallel this other event/moment, and how do the characters from the novels react as compared to people during the real-life event? How do you account for the similarities and disparities among these people & characters?

Evaluation / Grading:

Paper 1: 15%

Paper 2: 15%

Midterm: 10%

Final reading quiz: 10%

Research proposal: 5%

Annotated bibliography: 5%

Project 3: 20%

Participation/ Blog posts (250+ words): 20%

All assignments are graded based on the quality of the work produced and the amount of effort put into completing the assignment. It should be assumed that only the very best papers (those that properly answer the requirements of the assignment, have a clear thesis and argument, correctly utilize and cite sources, have a structure that fits the subject matter and an argument that is well-supported, and that are carefully written and that show signs of revision) will receive A's. Papers that do not meet these criteria will be marked down.

Participation will comprise 20% of the final grade. This grade is based on a student's level of engagement in group activities, low stakes assignments, blogging, and class discussions. The successful student will make an effort to contribute to discussions at least occasionally, will remain attentive during class, and will be an active member of his or her group when we engage in group work and peer reviews. Groups should make sure that work is distributed evenly among the members of the group (if tasks are not pre-assigned), especially when we move to assignment 4 which will be developed collaboratively. Students will also be expected to participate in online activities outside of class, and should make sure early in the semester that they have access to our class Blackboard . Weekly blog posts are due by 5pm Friday of the week they are assigned.

Pre-drafting exercises will be considered "low stakes" assignments, meaning they will be marked "pass" or "fail." They must have been fully completed, and they must show evidence of effort to receive a "pass." Some in-class assignments will not be collected for a grade. These writing activities are intended to help students formulate written responses to our readings or to prepare ideas for a paper.

Grades on formal papers submitted for a grade will be determined according to the following rubric:

Superior paper (A/A-)

Strong thesis. Smooth transitions. Solid paragraphs with topic sentences. Well-chosen textual evidence. Quotations carefully integrated into the paper. Paper is logically organized, and effectively makes its case. Sentence structure, grammar, and diction (word choice) are excellent.

The Good paper (B+/B)

Good argument and thesis, but the main argument may not be clear or may lack insight. The structure may wander and need focusing. Transitions may need some improvement. Counter arguments may not be addressed. Not all the evidence is well-chosen and some of it may not support the claims being made. There may be some grammatical errors and issues with sentence and paragraph structure.

The Borderline Paper (B-/C+)

The thesis may be vague, too general, or unoriginal. The structure of the paper may be disorganized, with weak transitions and paragraphs that need development. The paper may need more evidence from the text or may not use the best evidence to prove its points. Quotes from the text may not be properly integrated into the argument. There may be flaws in the logic of the paper. The paper may suffer from grammatical errors, run-on sentences and typos.

The “Needs Help” Paper (C/C-)

The thesis may be hard to identify or may be a vague restatement of something obvious. The structure may need a lot of reorganization. Transitions may be confusing and unclear. The evidence used may be weak, or statements may not be properly supported. There may be little effort to relate the evidence to the argument. Ideas may not flow. There may be major problems with grammar, sentence structure and diction.

The Failing Paper

Shows lack of effort or failure to comprehend the assignment. Difficult to understand. May have no thesis or argument.

The “0” Paper

Was not turned in or was turned in too late to count.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY: Turning in someone else’s writing as your own is not acceptable in this or any other class. This is called plagiarism and is regarded as a serious academic offense. Papers should be entirely your own work, or should properly attribute ideas to their original sources. If ideas, phrases or sentences come from another source, they should be in quotation marks if they are taken word-for-word, and the source should be cited. Papers that are plagiarized in full or in part will receive a zero. More than one offence will result in an “F” for the course and the filing of a formal report. We will discuss the proper use of sources throughout the semester, but academic integrity policies go into effect on the first day of the semester, and students are expected to familiarize themselves with these policies. See <http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>

WRITING CENTER: Located in Kiely Hall 229, tutors there are trained to help you revise your writing at various stages. If you believe you need additional help with your writing, or if I ask you to set up a regular meeting with a tutor, you should make an appointment at least one week prior to when an assignment is due. You can also get online help by visiting their website at <http://qcpages.qc.edu/qcwsrw>.

SPECIAL ACCOMODATION: If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation in this class, contact the Office of Special Services in 171 Kiely Hall at 718-997-5870 and please inform me.

How to Do Well in This Class:

Identify your intellectual investment in the course material.

Pay attention to what most interests and perplexes you each class. Take note of these. Try to make connections among them.

These will help you craft interesting blog posts and papers.

Come see me during office hours.

If you want to come but aren't sure what you'd like to talk about, start with your list of intellectual investments.

I'm here as a resource for you.

Ask questions. No question is too small. We are all learning and experimenting.

Make an effort to connect our course discussions, readings, and activities to your experiences outside of the classroom. This is called praxis

Be an active class participant.

Come to class ready to share questions and ideas. This includes reflections on the structure of the class itself. Be vocal about what does and doesn't work for you, and suggest learning experiments you'd like us to try as a class.

Because this class is structured around experiments, take risks. We learn through trial and error.

Care about your work as much as I do. This means proofreading ad nauseum (so many times that you can't bear to look at it again) and finding people, such as peers and tutors, willing proofread your work.

TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR

Week **Mondays & Wednesdays (unless otherwise noted)**

1 Wednesday Jan. 25th 2023

Syllabus day/ What does Global Lit mean? / Introducing *Heart of Darkness*

*HW*Read: *Heart of Darkness*

Blog post: *How does reading Heart of Darkness enrich your understanding of history? Of literature? Does this text feel hostile to you? Why or why not?*

2 Jan 30th & Feb 1st

Monday: Unpacking *Heart of Darkness*

HW: Von Reybrouck “Congo under Leopold II 1885-1908” ; King Leopold II “The Civilizing Mission” ; GW Williams “An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty”

Wednesday: HoD in its historical moment,

HW: Read- Chinua Achebe “An Image of Africa” & Hunt Hawkins “*Heart of Darkness* and Racism”

Blog Post How does your reading of historical texts connected to Belgian colonialism under Leopold II impact your reading and stance as you grapple with opposing viewpoints from Hawkins and Achebe? Base your analysis on evidence from the source material.

3 Feb 6th & Feb 8th

Monday: Engaging with primary and secondary source material, reconsidering the narrative itself, preparing for Essay I drafts

HW: Bring a draft of Paper I to class Wednesday (description above)

Wednesday *Workshopping* Bring rough draft of Paper #1 to class. Workshop in groups of 3-4

HW: Final draft of Paper I (Submit Final essay on Blackboard under ASSIGNMENTS)

Blog Post (no blog post- Complete Essay I)

4 February 15th (Wednesday)

Wednesday: Turn in Paper I/ Discussing Achebe as a novelist, two visions of Africa

HW: Read *Things Fall Apart* Part I

Blog Post What has changed in this new world we have entered with Achebe, compared to what we left in Conrad? Do these characters act in unexpected ways? Does the story seem fundamentally different than our previous one?

5 February 22nd (Wednesday only)

Wednesday: Okonkwo's world and Achebe's perspective relative to Conrad's.

HW: Finish *Things Fall Apart*

Blog post How does reading *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* in sequence give you a perspective on the impact of colonialism as presented through literature? Is it significant that Conrad wrote in 1890s and Achebe wrote in the 1950s? Why or why not?

6 03/07/22 & 03/09/22

Monday: *Things Fall Apart* as global literature, as social signifier

HW: Read "Playful ethnography..."

Wednesday: Mid-semester Review

HW: Prepare for Mid-term

Blog post No blog post – catch up on reading and review all source material for Midterm

7 03/14/22 & 03/16/22

Monday: VIRTUAL MID-TERM DAY

(*Heart of Darkness* & associated critical material; *Things Fall Apart* associated sources)

Wednesday: Intro to *Maru*, social hierarchies throughout the world.

HW: Read *Maru* Pp 1-50

Blog Post How does reading a book written from the perspective of multiple narrators change your perception of aspects of a central plot? How does this make the story different than what we have read earlier in this class?

8 03/21/22 & 03/23/22

Monday: Narrative voice in Achebe and Head

HW: Read *Maru* Pp 51-100

Wednesday: Contrasting narratives of Italy, cultural differences conveyed through language

HW: Read Olaogun's "Irony & Schizophrenia in Bessie Head's *Maru*"

Blog Post Reflect on the idea of "two visions of Africa" as seen through the two novels, *Maru* and *Things Fall Apart*. How are the perspectives distinct?

9 03/28/22 & 03/30/22

Monday: Discussion of academic source material, planning for Paper 2

HW: Draft Paper 2

Wednesday: Workshopping Paper 2, bring your rough drafts to class

HW: Finish writing Paper 2 / Watch video on Orientalism

Blog Post No Blog post—finish writing Essay 2 & watch video on Orientalism

10 04/04/22 & 04/06/22

Monday: Submit Essay 2 on Blackboard. Revolutionary history in Iran. Significance of graphic novel as memoir.

HW: Read *Persepolis* Pp 1-62 (Up to “The Sheep”)

Wednesday: Colonialism and Western influence in Iran. Making connections to the other global sources discussed previously in class

HW: Read *Persepolis* Pp 63-end; Read “Occidentalism: Rewriting the West in Marjane Satrapi’s ‘Persépolis’”

Blog post Contrast Said’s explanation of the ‘Orientalist’ portrayal of the Middle East with what you found in ‘Persepolis’ – consider how these readings have informed your understanding of the Arab world, and the extent to which Iran is culturally distinct (Persian).

11 04/11/22 & 04/13/22

Monday: Orientalism & Occidentalism. Understanding how culture influences perspective Recap on *Persepolis*

HW: Complete the [tbd] survey and consider the possibilities of your family/ cultural history as it connects to the objectives of the final essay assignment.

Wednesday: Discussing the survey and possible approaches to the final.

HW: Revise and expand your plans for the final,

Blog Post BEGIN PLANNING FOR FINAL PROJECT. For your blog post, compose a 200 word reflection on the survey and what thoughts the survey brings to mind regarding your own cultural history. Include a brief description of how you could access some aspect of your family’s history as a point of comparison with one or more of our readings from the semester.

12 04/25/22 & 04/27/22

Monday: Review of readings from the semester, student-centered discussion on plans for the final essay.

HW: Our readings this semester have focused on searching for and establishing identity especially in the midst of political strife/change. Select an excerpt from another source that focuses on personal history amidst political upheaval and post it to the blog. Be prepared to defend and discuss your choice.

Wednesday: Contrast of student-sourced external research with primary source material based on survey results.

HW: Write a proposal for your final paper. 3-4 Paragraphs addressing what you plan to research, why it's important, and how you plan to do it (what sources you'll consult and what about these sources will be useful. Submit this as your RESEARCH PROPOSAL under Assignments on Bb.

Post ONE SOURCE which could be a useful Secondary Source based on either something related to your results from the survey or your subsequent independent research.

Blog post No Blog Post -- Complete your Research Proposal and Post at least ONE SOURCE as a reply to the Thread "Post your source for the Final Essay here"

I3 05/02/22 & 05/04/22

Monday: Discuss student sourced materials, explore additional research

HW: Compile an annotated bibliography, using 2-3 of the sources from the syllabus and 3 or more (total 6+) from your own research. (Details above)

Wednesday: Submit annotated bibliography on Bb; scheduling and planning for conferences

HW: Compose your 3+ page draft

Blog Post No blog post – Draft your final for conferences

I4 05/09/22 & 05/11/22

Monday: Conferences (Virtual)

Wednesday: Conferences (Virtual)

Blog Post: No Blog Post – Submit your final Essay

I5 05/17/21

IN-CLASS Review for Final Exam

Final Exam (Virtual) ~May 24: 8:00-9:15am

