Debating Global Literary Culture, 1800–Present

Convenor: Claire Chambers

All students on the MA in Global Literature and Culture embark on the core module. In this module students gain a strong grounding in the key theoretical developments and debates that have shaped our understanding of 'global' literature. Debating Global Literary Culture, 1800–Present interrogates the key tools of postcolonial studies, mapping their continued usage and probing their relation to the contemporary global dispensation. The module helps students to navigate canonical postcolonial texts, and to respond to these texts in a critically informed fashion. Students are expected to raise questions about the processes and legacies of empire, especially in relation to literary history. They are invited to link these issues to widespread and well-known theoretical concerns with identity politics, equality claims, and human rights.

If postcolonial studies worked to ensure that the resistant force of populations working against empire was recognized as globally significant, this module will help tie such recognition to contemporary debates about political resistance to capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, ableist/normalcy discourse, ecological degradation and disaster and the circulation of literary and cultural texts in English. Across the module, key theoretical texts and literary examples are connected to cultural texts more broadly and political debates. Students can follow up on debates in class in small, peer-led discussion groups, through the suggested set of linked films, and via the wide range of related talks that the Department of English and partner departments offer. This will be a challenging, theoretically investigative and lively module ensuring that students get off to a global start to the MA. Students from MAs other than Global Literature and Culture are also very welcome to choose this module as an option.

2015 Module Structure: In Brief

Week 2: Establishing Postcolonial Theory (Attwell 9–11 am)
Week 3: 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?': Abolitionist discourse and the 'Negro Question' (Watt)
Week 4: Islam, Identity and Politics Before & After the Rushdie Affair (Chambers)
Week 5: African Literature/African Literary Languages (Attwell 9–11 am)
Week 6: Reading Week
Week 7: Theorizing the Literary−Critical World (Westall)
Week 8: Human Rights, Playwriting and the Idea of Documentary Theatre (Morin)
Week 9: Global Feminisms (Chambers)
Week 10: Commodities, Ecologies and Resources (Westall).

2015 Module Structure: In Detail

Week 2: Establishing Postcolonial Theory (David Attwell)
How did 'postcolonial theory' as it came to be known in the 1980s – an offshoot of what had already, and equally problematically, come to be known as ‘poststructuralism’ – turn into the variegated field that would more accurately be described today as ‘postcolonial studies’? How has this intellectual movement changed and developed since its inception, and what pressures, internal and external to it, have precipitated its development? Where does it seem to be going? In our first class, we will explore these questions and try to identify the key contexts and histories of postcolonial studies, with a view to understanding the critical formations, past and present, that inform our own practices.

Required Reading
1. All students research definitions of key historical terms for brief discussion: mercantilism; colonialism; imperialism; neo-colonialism.
2. All students read:

i) On the field of postcolonial studies:

ii) On the ‘Third World’ origins of poststructuralism:
    Young, Chapter 27, 'Foucault in Tunisia', pp. 395–410, and Chapter 28, 'Subjectivity and History: Derrida in Algeria', 411–426

iii) On the materialist critique of postcolonial theory:

iv) On subaltern studies:
    Ranajit Guha, ‘Chandra's Death’, in *Subaltern Studies V* and ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’, in *Selected Subaltern Studies*

3. Students select for brief presentation and discussion one of the texts within the formations or force-fields of postcolonial theory above. Presentations should be descriptive rather than analytical at this stage.

**Secondary Readings Within Each sub-field**

(i) The field of postcolonial studies: Graham Huggan, introduction to *The Postcolonial Exotic*


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**Week 3: ‘Am I not a Man and a Brother?: Abolitionist discourse and the ‘Negro Question’ (Jim Watt)**

In this seminar we will begin with a discussion of the complex and fascinating poem ‘Slavery’, written by the Tory evangelical Hannah More in 1788, as the campaign to abolish the Atlantic slave trade began to gain momentum. We will then go on to consider what happens to the abolitionist rhetoric of 'brotherhood' after the emancipation of slaves in Britain's sugar colonies in 1834, looking in particular at Thomas Carlyle’s 1849 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', and John Stuart Mill's rejoinder ‘The Negro Question’ of 1850 (photocopies of all these works will be provided). With reference to this material, we will think about ideologies of empire and discourses of race in the late eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries, and also consider some competing accounts of the abolitionist movement in recent histories of the British Empire.

**Recommended Reading**


**Week 4: Islam, Identity and Politics Before & After the Rushdie Affair (Claire Chambers)**

In discussions of postcolonial or diasporic literature, questions of faith and religious identity have tended to be subsumed under such categories as ethnicity, nationality, and ‘race’. Yet some critics suggest that the relative neglect that postcolonial theory has shown to religion may be partly due to its unwitting valorization of ‘a secular, Euro-American stance’ (Amin, 2005: 17). A character in Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator* argues that ‘Even Fanon […] had no insight into the religious feelings of the North Africans he wrote about’. In this session, we will attempt to redress the critical imbalance, while guarding against the urge to overcompensate and privilege religion at the expense of other components of identity. Using insights drawn from anthropological, religious studies, and sociological research we consider the important and dynamic role of religion, specifically Islam, in contributing towards cultural identity and literary practices.

We think about Salman Rushdie’s controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and the intellectual heat generated in what became known as the Rushdie affair. After that, we explore the politics surrounding and representations of Islam from the 1990s to the early 2000s, which particularly emphasize the issue of ‘fundamentalism’. Finally, we consider the perhaps more nuanced texts produced by Muslims in the years following the 2001 Burnley, Oldham and Bradford riots, the attacks on America later that year, and the onset of the so-called war on terror.

**Required Reading**


**Secondary Reading**


**Week 5: African Literature/African Literary Languages (David Attwell)**
Tbc.

***Week 6: Reading Week***

**Week 7: Critically Theorizing World Literature (Claire Westall)**
This session will consider the shortcomings of postcolonial studies – specifically postcolonial literature and theory – and help students interrogate their own reception of ideas bound to postcolonial modes of academic thinking. From this questioning position, the class will explore how and why other terms are being used to think about literature across the globe (e.g. Global Literature, World Literature, and World-Literary System). We will specifically hone in on debates about ‘world literature’ and consider why a ‘world-literary system’ might be a useful, challenging and/or troublesome way of tackling the relational interconnectivity of literature across the globe.

**Required Reading (best read in this order)**
Chapter One ‘World-Literature in the Context of Combined and Uneven Development’

**Secondary Reading**
Week 8: Human Rights, Playwriting and the Idea of Documentary Theatre (Emilie Morin)

In this seminar, we will look at the rich, fascinating and deeply fraught relation between contemporary theatre and human rights. The surge in documentary theatre over the past two decades, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, shows that many playwrights and theatre companies are seeking to further the remit of public debate about human rights violations and human rights agendas. In this seminar, we will discuss some of the debates that have surrounded the relation between human rights and contemporary liberal thought, via Jacques Rancière’s re-examination of Hannah Arendt’s work, and we will look closely at an interesting example of documentary theatre, a play from 2008 entitled Seven. Seven first originated in interviews with seven human rights activists, all women, which were transformed by seven women authors into a dramatic text with new resonances and new political dimensions. Our discussion of the play will lead us to think about the role that unresolved colonial conflicts have played in contemporary representations of human rights in the West, and us to reflect on the legacy of historic struggles for civil rights and social justice.

**Required Reading**

Rancière, Jacques. 'Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 2&3 (2004), 297–310. [online; accessible via library website/VLE resource list]


AND please look at the play’s website, [http://seventheplay.com/](http://seventheplay.com/)


Secondary Reading

Week 9: Global Feminisms (Chambers)
Some of the most important work in postcolonial theory and criticism has considered issues of gender and sexuality as well as those of race, nation, and empire. (Western, liberal) feminist scholarship has often been criticized for its universalizing, in fact, colonizing tendencies. Spivak and Mohanty, for example, make a crucial case in arguing for a more nuanced feminism that admits that ‘woman’ is no longer a stable term. Furthermore, these theorists point out that women’s apparently transhistorical, marginalized voices are not easily recoverable by feminist researchers (who have themselves somehow escaped this position). However, the narrative against feminism can also be critiqued for its tendency to universalize, and to treat the term ‘feminism’ itself as astable, transhistorical critical and political position. It is in the intersections between critical positions that some of the most interesting work appears and, in this seminar, we will debate the importance of crossing and challenging artificial borderlines between the two apparently separate theoretical groups. The session will end by introducing students to recent currents in postcolonial feminism, not least its turn towards intersectionality, postsecularism and in particular debates surrounding Muslim women.

Required Reading (best read in this order)


**Secondary Reading**


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**Week 10: Commodities, Ecologies and Resources (Claire Westall)**

Since the late 1990s there has been a growing interest in ecology and environmentalism in literary studies, reflecting, some might say, our need to collectively reimagine how we ‘use’ and ‘manage’ the world as a physical resource. Postcolonial literary studies has often forged the way in eco-critical thinking, but this has meant that many of the limitations of postcolonial studies have haunted our engagement with ecological and environmental debates. This class looks to move away from an explicitly ‘postcolonial’ encounter with eco-thinking and into an understanding of ‘world-ecology’, and why we must reassess the culture of commodities and resource stripping that is dominant under capitalism.
**Required Reading (best read in this order)**


All Moore pieces are available from his website www.jasonwmoore.com


**Secondary Reading**

Buell, Frederick. 'A Short History of Oil Cultures: Or, the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance.' *Journal of American Studies* 46. 02. (2012): 273–293.


Szeman, Imre. 'System Failure: Oil, Futurity', *Atlantic Quarterly* 106. 4 (Fall 2007): 820–21


**There are also a number of postcolonial ecology collections, anthologies and summary studies around which are also very useful. These include:**

Huggan & Tiffin’s (2009) *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*

Roos & Hunt’s (2010) edited collection *Postcolonial Green*

And Greg Garrard’s useful (2011) *Ecocriticism*. 
**Examples of Films to Inform Core Module Classes** (listed chronologically)

- *The Harder They Come* (1972) Dir. Perry Hazell

**Examples of Suggested Preliminary Reading (i.e. as module background)**

- Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (1963)
- McClintock, Anne, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995)
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade *et al., eds, Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991)
- Morey, Peter and Yaqin, Amina, *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (2011)
- Parker, Andrew et al. *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (1992)

**Example of Relevant Publications by Teaching Staff**

**David Attwell**

**Claire Chambers**

**Alice Hall**

**Emilie Morin**

**Claire Westall**