IDSEM-UG1723 (Dis)Inheriting Power: Literature and the Legacies of Colonialism
Gallatin School, New York University
Fall 2012
Tuesday/Thursday 4:55 pm – 6:10 pm
Location: Tisch LC6

Instructor: Laurie R. Lambert
Email: laurie.lambert@nyu.edu
Office: Room 431, 1 Washington Place
Office Hours: Tues. 1-3 p.m.

Course Description

(Dis)inheriting Power presents a survey of postcolonial literature from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We will focus on the ways in which writers from formerly colonized territories grapple with issues of representation, otherness, and epistemology (ways of knowing). Students will learn to identify the different configurations of power that have shaped former colonies including India, Nigeria, Jamaica, Zimbabwe and the United States. We will investigate the various formal techniques deployed by postcolonial writers to represent their colonial histories and to describe their postcolonial condition. Particular attention will be paid to literary form, narrative voice, structure, imagery, rhetorical devices and figures of speech. Responsiveness to these categories will guide our analysis of the specific ways in which literature functions to reconfigure matrices of colonial power.

Purpose and Goals of the Class

The purpose of this class is to offer students an opportunity to think about how colonial power has shaped both the way we see the world and how we read literature today. Our goal from week to week will be to tackle issues pertaining to gender and sexuality, slavery and memory, race and cultural identity, and diaspora and nation. What are the tensions that arise between the First and Third Worlds, between the North and the South, and the East and the West? Why were these geographic distinctions invented and, most importantly, how are they represented in literature? Readings from postcolonial theorists will supplement our study and provide a framework for understanding the rise of postcolonial studies in the Western academy.

Required Texts

E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924) (Harvest Books, Harcourt Inc.)
Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) (Heinemann)

Recommended Texts

Evaluation
Attendance and Participation: 25%
Critical Reflections/Portfolio: 25%
Midterm Essay (4-5 pages): 15%
Presentation (10 minutes): 5%
Final Essay (8-10 pages): 30%

Attendance and Participation: Participation is mandatory. At each class you should come prepared with a passage to discuss and three critical questions. On occasion you will be required to share these questions with the class. Your participation will also be evaluated based on your attentiveness to the comments and questions of your colleagues. Be a good listener. Remember that when you come to class you are a member of a community of readers. Excessive tardiness or more than two unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your participation grade. All cell phones and electronic devices should be shut-off before class begins.

Presentation: Each student will be responsible for a ten-minute presentation. You may choose a topic from the list below, or develop your own topic in consultation with the instructor. The purpose of the presentation is to serve as a beginning point for class discussion that day. You should provide a hand-out for the class outlining the presentation content and citing any relevant sources. Please include 3-4 discussion questions on your hand-out. You may include film clips, audio, or other media in your presentation as long as you adhere to the time limit. Please make an appointment to see the instructor during office hours in advance of your presentation.

Critical Reflections (1 page/week double-spaced): Every TUESDAY (unless otherwise noted) you will bring to class a one-page close reading of a passage from the text for that day. These are designed to give you an opportunity to hone your writing and analytic skills and to ensure that you keep up with the reading schedule. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory (2000) defines close reading as ‘detailed, balanced and rigorous critical examination of a text to discover its meanings and to assess its effects’ (142). Close reading entails interpretive attention to word choice, language, symbolism, tone, and rhetoric. I will not accept late critical reflections. You may skip up to TWO critical reflections without penalty. On December 4th you will submit all of your critical reflections in a portfolio for evaluation.

Essays: Two essays are required for this course, one 4-5 page midterm essay and one 8-10 page final essay. You will be assigned prompts for each of these essays, however, you may develop your own essay topic in consultation with the instructor. These essays should be double-spaced, 250 words per page, and proof read. Grammatical and spelling mistakes will be penalized. For the midterm essay you are required to compare two imaginative texts and incorporate one secondary source or theoretical text in your argument. For the final essay you are required to compare two imaginative texts from the second half of the course and incorporate two secondary sources. Only one of the secondary sources can be taken from the assigned readings.

Policy on Extensions, Late Essays, and Incompletes
Extensions will only be granted if you have a doctor’s excuse or a family emergency. If I do accept a late paper from you, however, I will grade the paper at my own pace, and therefore
you may suffer delays in assessing your progress in the course. Late papers without an extension will be marked down a third of a grade for every day it is tardy, including weekends.

Incompletes will only be granted at the instructor’s discretion, and if requested and negotiated in advance with the instructor. You must have a compelling reason (i.e. documented illness or family emergency) in order to request an incomplete. You also must have already completed substantially all the requirements for the course including satisfactory attendance.

*Academic Integrity*

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction in accordance with the Student Discipline Rules of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Examples of behaviors the compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website:

http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html

*Class Schedule*

**Week One**  
September 4: Introduction  

**Week Two**  
September 11: E.M. Forster, *Passage to India*, (up to Chapter XXX/p. 250) (CR due)  
September 13: Forster, (Chapter XXXI to end)

**Week Three**  
September 20: Rushdie, (up to p. 271), Tzvetan Todorov ‘Definition of the Fantastic’ (1970) (on BB)

**Week Four**  
September 25: Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* cont. (up to p. 484) (CR due)  
September 27: Rushdie, (p. 485 to end)

**Week Five**  
October 2: Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, (CR due)  

**Week Six**  
October 9: Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (up to p. 205) (No CR this week)  
October 11: CLASS CANCELLED *(Midterm Essay due at midnight via email)*
Week Seven
October 16: Midterm break – CLASS CANCELLED
October 18: Brathwaite, (p. 206 to end), Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ (1989)
(on BB) (CR due)

Week Eight
October 22: Wole Soyinka, Death and the King’s Horseman, (CR due)
October 25: Soyinka, cont.

Week Nine
October 30: Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Decolonising the Mind, (CR due)
November 1: Ngugi cont.

Week Ten
November 6: Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nervous Conditions, (up to p.148) (CR due)
November 8: Dangarembga, (p. 149 to end)

Week Eleven
November 13: Toni Morrison, Beloved, (Parts 1 and 2) (CR due)
November 15: Morrison, (Part 3)

Week Twelve
November 20: David Henry Hwang, M. Butterfly, (CR due)
November 22: Thanksgiving, class cancelled

Week Thirteen
November 27: Coetzee, Disgrace, (CR due)
November 29: Coetzee cont.

Week Fourteen
December 4: M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (CR and CR Portfolio due)
December 6: Class Field Trip to El Museo del Barrio for ‘Caribbean: Crossroads of the World’ Exhibit

Week Fifteen
(on BB) (No CR this week)
December 13: Final Essay Due at the beginning of Class

Sample Presentation Topics
East India Company, Walt Whitman’s poem ‘A Passage to India’, Magical realism, Mahatma Gandhi’s 1930 Salt March, links between Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea and Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre (only if you have read the Bronte novel before), Derek Walcott’s poem ‘Jean Rhys’, Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, nineteenth-century British inheritance laws (specifically primogeniture or the property rights of women), defining the subaltern, the Middle Passage, the Harmattan winds, Petroleum industry in Nigeria, Yoruba cosmology (specifically the egungun, Shango), Rastafarianism, diaspora, Bob Marley’s song ‘Zimbabwe’, Frantz Fanon, Fugitive Slave Act Peking or Beijing Opera, links between Puccini’s Madame Butterfly and Hwang’s M. Butterfly, Marikana Mine Strike in South Africa. You may also choose to base your presentation on a close reading of a passage from the assigned text that week.