Poetry and Politics of Decolonization

IDSEM-UG 1866, Gallatin School of Individualized Study, NYU
Interdisciplinary Seminar, Spring 2017

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
The course begins with poets whose work is caught up in the struggle for independence from colonialism and other forms of oppression and moves on to the formation of post-colonial literatures. Poets writing from the colonies and former colonies of Europe in the first half of the 20th century share the challenges of defining national and racial identities, addressing problems of place and displacement, and exploring decolonization and freedom from linguistic and political oppression. We will read, among others, the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore; English-language poets including W.B. Yeats, William Carlos Williams, and Derek Walcott; the two leading poets of négritude, Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor, in relation to movements in Caribbean, African, and American literature including the Harlem Renaissance (Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Nicolas Guillén); and Latin American poets including Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, and Octavio Paz. We will also make room for poets that reflect each student’s background, since each country has passed through a period of literary self-definition or redefinition in the course of the 20th century. The course will evolve a framework within which to address the comparative and interdisciplinary issues raised by the poetry. Though class discussions will be in English, students are encouraged to suggest poets from other traditions they may be familiar with and, to the greatest extent possible, to read the poetry in the original language. Please email lcm8@nyu.edu for suggestions or further information.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
• Use interdisciplinary research to ground literary works in their political and historical contexts
• Analyze and contextualize the content and structure of literary works through close reading
• Translate critical reading into elegant and persuasive expository writing
• Deepen interdisciplinary perspectives through class presentations and discussion

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
One five-seven page paper due Week 7 (20%); one oral report (20%); one fifteen-twenty page paper due the last week of classes, the topic to be selected in consultation with the instructor (40%). Regular attendance and committed participation in class and in online forums (20%).
SYLLABUS

Each week’s class will include:

(1) Reading of poetry; and some related prose, including

(2) Theory

(3) Presentation

**Week 1: Introduction (January 26)**

1.1 Post-nativist poetics; the poetic creation of a native identity in Ireland, India, West Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America.

Readings: Selections from "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" (1921): especially "Easter 1916" and "The Second Coming"; and “Leda and the Swan” (1924)

Theory: Selections from The Empire Writes Back and “Yeats and Decolonization” (in Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature: The Field Day Company, 1990)

**Week 2: William Butler Yeats and independent Ireland (1921) (February 2)**

2.1 Context for poetry and decolonization in Ireland: Brian Friel’s Translations


Theory: “Yeats and Decolonization" in Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (220-238); Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities.

**Presentation on Yeats, Ireland, and Irish Independence.**

**Week 3: Rabindranath Tagore and the Bengali language movement (February 9)**

3.1 Prose: Introduction to Gitanjali by W.B. Yeats;


Theory: "Nationalism" in A Tagore Reader (181-204)

**Presentation on Tagore, Bengal, and Indian Nationalism**
Week 4: Partition, Pakistan, and Islamic Tradition (February 16)

4.1 Muhammed Iqbal (1877-1938), *Tulip in the Desert* (scanned)
Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984), *The Rebel’s Silhouette: Selected Poems*

Theory: Salman Rushdie, Ahmad Aijaz, Edward Said (from *Orientalism*)

**Presentation** on Gandhi and Partition; Iqbal, Faiz, and the Emergence of Pakistan

Week 5: South Africa (February 23)

5.1 Readings to be selected

Theory: Achebe, Ngugi, and Soyinka; Amilcar Cabral

**Presentation** on Mandela, Poetry and the End of Apartheid
Possible special speakers: Souleymane Bachir Diagne, author of *Bergson postcolonial. L’élan vital dans la pensée de Senghor et de Mohamed Iqbal*, Paris, Editions du CNRS, 2011 or Mamadou Diouf (Columbia); sd2456@columbia.edu in 522 Philosophy Hall; (212) 854-3907.

Week 6: Léopold Sédar Senghor and Négritude (March 2)

6.1 Introduction to *Anthology de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (1948) by Jean-Paul Sartre, available in an English translation entitled "Black Orpheus."

Readings: *The Collected Poetry* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1991), especially "In Memoriam" (3), "Letter to a Poet" (5), "Black Woman" (8), "Snow in Paris" (12), "Blues" (14), "To the Music of Koras and Balaphon" (17-24) from *Chants d'ombre* (1945) and selected elegies ("Elegy for Martin Luther King" and "Elegy of Carthage", pages 211-223).

**Presentation** on Senghor, Senegal, Négritude, and the politics of West Africa

Week 7: Aimé Césaire, Martinique, and Paris in the 1930s (March 9)

7.1 Theory: Fanon and Glissant


**Presentation** on Césaire, Fanon, and the politics of the French Caribbean
FIRST PAPER DUE BY SPRING BREAK!

SPRING BREAK (March 11-20)

Week 8: Claude McKay and the english-speaking Caribbean; the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on negritude (March 23)

8.1 Selected poems from Claude McKay; Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance; *Harlem Shadows*.

Theory: Brathwaite, Lamming, Harris; and Melvin Dixon

**Presentation** on Claude McKay and the English-speaking Caribbean

Week 9: Nicolás Guillén and afro-cubanismo (March 30)


**Theory:** Retamar

**Presentation** on Nicolás Guillén and afro-cubanismo; “El gran zoo”

Week 10: Pablo Neruda and the Spanish Civil War; other poetry of the Spanish Civil War, including Vallejo; return to Chile and the writing of the *Canto general* (April 6)


**Theory:** Jameson, and Giddens, “The Consequences of Modernity”

**Presentation** on Neruda and Chilean history; *Canto General*

Week 11: Octavio Paz and Mexico; uses of mythology (April 13)

11.1 "Piedra de sol" in *Configurations* (New York: New Directions, 1971, 2-38);

**Theory:** Krauze, Paz, and Mignolo
Presentation on Paz in relation to Mexican history and politics

Week 12: William Carlos Williams and the Beat Poets (April 20)

12.1 Paterson and In the American Grain; Reconsider the intersection of the European avant-garde in the ’20s with the evolving "Americanisms" also apparent in Eliot and Pound.

Theory: from William Carlos Williams, In the American Grain

Howl (Allen Ginsberg, 1926-1997)); Presentation on Political Poetry in the USA: Williams and/or the Beat Poets

Week 13: Darwish and Palestine; and/or women poets in Latin America and other post-colonial settings (April 27)

13.1 Readings from Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral (tr. Ursula Le Guin, University of New Mexico Press, 2011) and/or Yvette Christiansë, Castaway (1999).

Presentation on women poets in Latin America and other post-colonial settings, such as Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) and/or Yvette Christiansë.

Theorising Gender: Spivak, Suleri and Sharpe

Alternative - Possible speaker: Sinon Antoon on Darwish

Week 14: Derek Walcott and the Caribbean; Theory and comparative analysis (May 4)

14.1 Walcott, Omeros (1990)

Presentation on Walcott, Brathwaite, and the contemporary Caribbean.

Week 15: Celebration and Final Papers due (May 11)
Extracts from the following are available through the course website:

Europe
Hannah Arendt, *Imperialism*
Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*
Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*

Asia
Ahmad, Aijaz, *In Theory*
Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*

Africa
Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments*
Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*

Latin America and the Caribbean
Arnold, A. James, *Modernism and Negritude*
Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*
Fernández Retamar, Roberto, *Caliban*
C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*
Rodó, Jose Enrique, *Ariel*

North America
Baker, Houston, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*
Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *"Race", Writing and Difference*
LaCapra, Dominick, *The Bounds of Race*
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds*
Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism* (Knopf, 1993)
I have ordered the following books (in bold). Copies of all these texts are available on Amazon or under Resources on NYU Classes, or on college reserve:


*Gitanjali* (Introduction by W.B. Yeats, 1913)


*Cahier d'un retour à mon pays natal* is also available in separate editions by Présence Africaine (1983) and Penguin (1969) and in a pdf:


*Summa poética* (Ediciones Cátedra, 1980)

Claude McKay, *Selected Poems* (1953), and *Banjo*,


Gabriela Mistral, *Selected Poems* (tr. Langston Hughes)

*Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* (University of New Mexico Press, 2011)


*The Heights of Macchu Picchu* is also available separately from Farrar, Straus & Giroux (1966; sixteenth printing, 1990) and in a pdf

Octavio Paz, *Configurations* (New York: New Directions, 1971)

*Sunstone/Piedra De Sol* (New Directions PB, 1991)

William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* and *In the American Grain* (New York: New Directions)

Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (City Lights Pocket Poets, No. 4, 2001)


Yvette Christiansê, *Castaway* (Duke University Press, 1999)

**Selected Theory** (available in pdf or online):


COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Grading/Requirements
Attendance/Participation throughout (including online responses) 20%
Presentation (20%)
First Essay: 5-7 pages due Week 7 (20%)
Final Essay: 15-20 pages due the last week of classes (40%)

Attendance/Participation
Regular attendance, punctuality, and engagement with the readings are keys to being an active participant. As such I will expect you to be present and on time at each of our class sessions. For your benefit and mine, I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. Should you need to miss a session, let me know ahead of class by email, as I will not consider retroactive explanations and each unexcused absence will incur a two point reduction from your final grade (with a maximum of five). After five unexcused absences, you will receive an “F” for participation/attendance. More importantly, though, I will expect you to come to class prepared, which of course means that you have read/seen/heard the work assigned in advance of each class, and are ready to participate in discussions about the materials. Please take this course only if you think you will enjoy a reading load including a lot of poetry, theory, and some drama.

Presentations
You will be responsible for researching and preparing material on the history and politics of a particular country, region, and/or period in relation to one or more of the authors we are reading. Your research will result in a 20-minute presentation in class and should be posted with links and a bibliography that you will assemble. The presentation, together with your finished commentary and analysis, will account for 20% of your grade.

Responses (by text)
I will ask each of you to write not weekly responses, but responses to selected poets, relating them to the historical, political, and economic context addressed in the presentations. The responses should be about a page (one or two paragraphs) in length. They can take the form of questions and analysis of single poems or collections of poems, or responses to questions raised by other students. You should aim to make specific interdisciplinary connections between each work and its context. These should be posted on the discussion board while we are reading the work or, at the latest, within a week of finishing the work. These required responses will not be graded separately but will become a part of your overall participation grade.

Essays #1 and 2
The first essay is an analysis of the work of one of the poets or authors that we have studied before spring break. It can take off from one of your responses or a part of presentation that particularly interests you. This essay should be 5-7 pages in length (double spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 point font, Times New Roman or comparable font) and is due in Week 7 (March 9).

You should email me (Lcarymehta@gmail.com) your essay by Thursday, March 9th. You may also drop off your essays in the mailbox outside my office (1 Washington Place, Rm. 608) if you prefer.
After spring break, I will ask you to submit a topic to me for your final paper, which should include more in-depth research on a particular topic or set of connections between one or more poets and novelists and their context. I would like to see a basic outline or prospectus for your final essay before you begin to write it. The final essay should be 15-20 pages long, and is due a day after the final class; if you wish, you may hand in a draft or part of a draft for feedback during the last two weeks of classes, and I will give you comments promptly.

Extra Credit
Over the course of the semester, the instructor may make extra credit opportunities available to students. These may include attending relevant talks, performances, films, expositions, etc, followed by brief 1-2 page reaction essays submitted on the Discussion Board tab of the course website. Students are also encouraged to recommend any events that strike them as relevant to the course. Each extra credit opportunity will add one point to a student’s final grade, with no more than three points possible.

Late Submissions/Incompletes
Students can ask for extensions and will receive them at the instructor's discretion, though any late submission will incur a half grade drop unless the delay results from documented medical reasons or family emergencies. Only requests made in advance of the deadline will be considered. Assignments submitted late without previously alerting the instructor will not be graded. The last day to submit all your work is 11 May. If you anticipate being unable to meet this deadline, you should contact the instructor immediately and request to receive an Incomplete, which will be granted at the instructor's discretion and only with a previously approved plan to complete outstanding work.

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, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that 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 for a full description of the academic integrity policy: (www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)