CIEE Cape Town, South Africa

Course title: South African Literature and Film
Course code: LITT 3101 CTSA
Programs offering course: Cape Town Open Campus Block
Open Campus Track: Language, Literature, and Culture
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3
Contact hours: 45
Term: Spring Block II 2020

Course Description

In this course, students will be introduced to South African literature and film, and to some of the critical debates around the politics of representation, cultural production/consumption and appropriation, as well as a host of other themes that all circle around the core question, how does a text or film represent or portray South Africa? This broad overarching question of the course unravels into several other major conceptual questions: what does it mean to be South African? Are we speaking of the nation state here or a South African identity that draws from it? Is it the content, the story, the style, the language that makes a novel or a film South African? How is South Africa understood in texts by both, the obscure and the internationally renowned South African authors and film-makers? The course experiments with reading films as texts, and viewing texts like films. In doing so, it acknowledges the performative, and sometimes theatrical, as a core site of (African) subject formation. Students will come away from the course with an impression of South African traditions of cinema and literary art. At the same time students will develop critical analysis skills with which to explore this course’s texts and films for a much deeper and more enriching comprehension of cultural production in South Africa.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:
• Gain background knowledge and historical context with which to participate in the debates around the literary and cinematic landscape of 20th and 21st century South Africa.
• Critically review the primary texts and films of the course with a confident grasp of their central themes and aesthetic choices, and of their historical and cultural significance.
• Argue how different media and genres (including short story, poetry, novel, feature film, theatre, documentary film) communicate the many facets that make up South Africa as a nation, idea, identity, construct, symbol, and one of the youngest democracies in the world.
• Critically evaluate some of the debates surrounding mainstream versus independent publishing, the canon, and the continuing influence of colonialism on local literary and cinematic culture.

Course Prerequisites

Students should have an appreciation for literature, film, and the analysis thereof.

Methods of Instruction

Instruction will involve a combination of readings and screenings. In class, participants will experience lectures, facilitated discussion around each week’s reading and viewing, small-group exercises, and presentations.

The viewings of the films will take place outside of scheduled class time. Screenings have been arranged to minimize trouble with accessing the various films, but also to encourage communal viewing and post-film discussion. If not able to attend, students are responsible for acquiring and viewing the film on their own. While it is not required to attend all film-screenings, it is required and quite essential to class discussions to view all films listed as ‘required viewing’ in this course.

The co-curricular activities for this course include two theater performances and an excursion to District 6 and the Company Gardens. Guest speakers who are have published and/or performed around Cape Town will enhance our understanding of the contemporary literary scene.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. 2 Reflections 15%
2. Close Reading Essay 20%
3. Close Viewing Essay 20%
4. Final Project 25%
5. Class Participation 20%
TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

2 Reflections

Reflection 1: 1000 words, 10% of final grade

Think back to the first time you were educated about Africa in a formal school setting. Do you remember anything about the text/discussion/lesson/etc? In this paper, tell the story of how you learned what you learned, and from whom/what you learned about Africa, and South Africa specifically (if applicable). Take the reader through your history of (un)learning about who Africans are, where/how they live, and what Africa is in relation to you.

Reflection 2: 5% of final grade

Completed on site during co-curricular

Close Reading Essay

1500 words, 20% of final grade

Engage conceptually with a specific paragraph/page from one of the four novels (Plaatje, Ngcobo, Wicomb or Coetzee) we have discussed so far. In 1500 words, offer a close reading of your text selection and contextualize it in terms of how it represents and imagines South Africa.

Close Viewing Essay

1000 words, 20% of final grade

Select one scene from one of the films we have discussed so far (list provided in class) and write a 1000-word essay in the narrative style of a TedTalk or public
lecture. The goal is to help the viewer (and reader) explore the scene for its depth and relevance to contemporary representations of South Africa.

Final Project

20% of final grade

Students have the option of completing a creative writing project (1500 words) OR a film project (max 10 min). Instructions and criteria for evaluation will be discussed in class, during week 2.

Class Participation

20% of final grade

Participation will be assessed through in-class participation, contribution to class discussions, debates and, significantly, through active listening. Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, responses to reading comprehension questions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback, interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness during co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities overall.

Attendance

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they
were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent.

Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to any required field placement. Students may not miss placement/work hours at an internship or service learning site unless approved in advance by the Academic Director and placement supervisor. All students must complete all of the requisite 100 minimum work hours on site at the internship or service learning placement to be eligible for academic credit.

Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Absences for classes will lead to the following penalties:
N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, and local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class: 1.1 Orientation Week / Introduction to Class

In the introductory session, participants verbalize their own subject position in relation to the South African political landscape through a discussion on positionality and identity politics in South Africa’s past and present. We will explore the way South Africa has been fantastically “packaged” for a global audience since 1994 (in blockbusters such as Invictus, Tsotsi, Disgrace), versus the painful realities on the ground, including gross economic inequality, institutional racism, xenophobia,
and other social ills that reveal the limitations of the Rainbow Nation fantasy, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission model, even Nelson Mandela’s legacy. The lecture will also introduce students to Zoe Wicomb and her novel Playing in the Light, which is the one novel that the class will read in its entirety throughout the course.

Readings provided in class. No prior reading or viewing required.

Class: 1.2 The Slave Lodge & Company Gardens

Participants receive an Activity Guide that they can complete anywhere they like, at any time during the field-trip.

Required Reading


DUE: Reflection 1

Week 2

Class: 2.1 Positionality & Identity Politics

The life and death of the rainbow nation; local and global audiences; politics of representation.

The lecture will sketch out the South African literary landscape by identifying some of the internationally best-known writers such as J M Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, André Brink, Alan Paton, Zakes Mda, Breyten Breytenbach, and Athol Fugard. Against the backdrop of a masculinist and predominantly white canon, we closely read excerpts from And They Didn’t Die to learn about how pass laws and labor practices interacted with patriarchy to generate chronic and structural poverty in both, rural KwaZulu Natal, where the novel is set in the 1950s and 60s, and in South Africa today.

Required Reading
Class: 2.2  Beyond the Masculinist Canon

During this class, we will further explore the context of mid-20th century black consciousness writing and Ngcobo’s way of representing women’s pivotal role in the resistance struggle against colonialism and apartheid. At the same time the novel shows how women’s leadership and ability to organize for land rights and against abusive labor laws risked, and arguably achieved, a total alienation from their own community, especially the community of men.

For the second half of this session we read excerpts from J M Coetzee’s controversial novel Disgrace to consider the troubled state of white identity in post-apartheid South Africa. We ‘think through’ the novel’s difficult representation of blackness, rape, and sexuality, as well as the novel’s wild popularity and “classic” status abroad. The lecture will also extend to other South African writers who have dealt with various aspects of white identity and the performance of racialized identities.


Required Reading


OR

Suggested Reading


Week 3
Class: 3.1 History & Memory

Representing the Reprehensible…

This session introduces students to major debates around South African film, popular culture, and some film theory. Students will practice applying theoretical frameworks to their study of film excerpts from a range of films that were produced in the last twenty years. The following essential questions will inform class discussion:

- How do films help us remember?
- How do films help us imagine?
- What is the relationship between imagining and remembering?
- How do films represent South Africans? To whom are films representing/ who is the intended audience?
- What are the politics of representation?
- How do films write history?
- How do films record, reflect, analyze history?
- How do films witness?
- What does witnessing and remembering mean in Cape Town?

Required Reading

Required Viewing

t.b.a.

Class: 3.2 Deconstructing Apartheid Language

By this time in the course, students will have read half way through Zoe Wicomb’s Playing in the Light. This session explores themes of (de/re)construction of identities in the novel, but also draws on students’ knowledge of histories of “passing” in the US context, and in other places. A cluster of questions presents itself – questions about visibility being an advantage or disadvantage, a privilege or a curse; questions like “do we become what we perform?” and whether it is even possible to perform race in the same way we can perform class. For some, essentialist questions may arise, for others, existential ones. What is black? white? coloured? If the labels are so arbitrary and absurd, why is it so (im)possible to switch and move between what they describe?

Required Reading


Suggested Reading


Class: 3.3 Decoding South African Films / Films about South Africa

Co-curricular: Film Screening/ Theatrical Production at Artscape/ Baxter/ UCT

DUE: Close Viewing Essay

DUE: Reflection 2
Week 4

Class:  4.1  The (Short) Story

History of the Short Story

This week we immerse ourselves into South African short stories. The lecture will provide students with an overview of the popular genre and will specifically explore the question of whether/why the gender of the writer matters, how gender intersects with race in ‘women’s writing,’ and how these narratives construct a sense of history.

Required Reading


Class:  4.2  The Suit Continued

In this session we look at the way black queer feminist writers like Makhosazana Xaba rewrite the old masculine, heteronormative canon, and how genres like spoken word and slam poetry is redefining the meaning of “text”. We explore the intersection between text and performance, South Africa’s enormous history of theater traditions and oral traditions that, on one hand, date back centuries, but that, on the other hand, play a new a critical role in 21st century discourse around what it means to be South African. (Guest Speakers)
Required Reading


Class:  4.3  Co-curricular: Theatrical Production at Artscape

The Labia/ Baxter/ UCT/ etc

Required Reading

t.b.a.

Class:  4.4  Forbidden Stories

For this session, we read excerpts from Thando Mgqolozana’s controversial novel A Man Who Is Not a Man, about Xhosa circumcision practices, and K Sello Duiker’s novel The Quiet Violence of Dreams, about gay black identity in post-apartheid Cape Town. The films The Wound (based on Mgqolozana’s novel), Tsotsi, and the more recent Noem my Skollie all explore the dilemmas and contradictions of contemporary black and coloured masculinity, and hint at the way black and coloured masculinity has been criminalized and sensationalized since colonialism.

Required Reading


Suggested Reading


Class:  5.1  Poetry

The Body and Language Arts

Guest Speaker: A theater practitioner who can offer a lecture and work-shop on how theater brings literature alive through the body and the interaction of bodies in a defined space.

Required Reading

t.b.a.

Class:  5.2  The Untranslatable

This session will grapple with several layers of translatability. We will examine the experience and challenge of language barriers, lingua franca and the politics of translation, but we will also explore communicability in itself and how poetry achieves to communicate experiences that seem untranslatable or extremely difficult to communicate.

Required Reading

Poetry Packet provided in class includes poetry by Ingrid Yonker, Antje Krog, Sandile Dikeni, Lesego Rampolokeng, Dennis Brutus, Keorapetse Kgotsitsile, Lebogang Mashile, and Gcina Mhlope.

Required Viewing

A selection of online sources, documenting poetry and spoken word scene in South Africa.

Class:  5.3  Protest, Politics & Poetry

As we begin to conclude the course, we review the films, novel and articles we read through the lens of protest and struggles for social justice. We take a closer look at forms of performance and poetry that
uniquely seek to affect social change through a shifting of social norms.

**Required Reading**

excerpts from Anti-Apartheid Poems on
[http://africanpoems.net/tag/anti-apartheid/](http://africanpoems.net/tag/anti-apartheid/)

Selected works by Mzwakhe Mbuli

DUE: Close Reading Essay

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**Week 6**

**Class: 6.1 Decolonizing Literary Spaces**

**Final Projects & Presentations**

During this session, we conclude our reading and discussion of Playing in the Light.

**Required Reading**


**Class: 6.2 Poetry in Cape Town**

After a concluding lecture that consolidates and evaluates major take-aways from the course, our last session will feature local poets who will read or perform their original work.

DUE: Final Project (Creative Writing or Film)

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**Course Materials**

**Readings**


Students are advised to cite using the Chicago Style for referencing. The footnoting referencing system involves two key components:

Examples:


Media Resources


Have You Seen Drum Recently?, directed by Juergen Schadeberg, 1989.

Mapantsula, directed by Oliver Schmitz, 1992


U-Carmen eKhayelitsha, directed by Mark Dornford-May, 2005.
Disgrace, directed by Steve Jacobs, 2008.

Izulu Lami, directed by Madoda Ncayiyana, 2008.

Gangster’s Paradise: Jerusalema, directed by Ralph Ziman, 2008.

Skin, directed by Anthony Fabian, 2008.

Endgame, directed by Pete Travis, 2009.

Life, Above All, directed by Oliver Schmitz, 2010.

The Bang Bang Club, directed by Steven Silver, 2010.

Mama Africa, directed by Mika Kaurismäki, 2011.

Otelo Burning, directed by Sara Blecher, 2011.

Four Corners, directed by Ian Gabriel, 2013.

Lungelwa, directed by Nthabiseng Mokoena, 2013.

Miners Shot Down, directed by Rehad Desai, 2014.

Treurgrond, directed by Darrel Roodt, 2015.

Action Kommandant Ashley Kriel, directed by Nadine Angel Cloete, 2016.

Noem My Skollie, directed by Daryne Joshua, 2016.


Number 37, directed by Nosipho Dumisa, 2018.

Kanarie, directed by Christiaan Olwagen, 2018.

Krotoa, directed by Roberta Durrant, 2017.

Vaselinetjie, directed by Corne van Rooyen, 2017.
Sarafina, directed by Darrell Roodt, 1992.


This is by no means an exhaustive list. Please be warned that many of these films depict violence and graphic material, and that participants are not obliged to watch films that they find disturbing.