

## Literature in African History

Tues/Thurs 10:00-11:30 am  
2436 Mason Hall

### Dr Derek R Peterson

Email: drpeters@umich.edu  
Phone: (734) 615 3608  
Office: 1634 Haven Hall  
Office hours: Tuesdays, 12:00 to 1:30, & by appointment

### Course outline

Welcome! This course is about the history of African literature. The reading list includes some of the founding works in the field. It also includes lesser-known texts: novels published serially in West African newspapers; editorial writings from early Christian converts; a play from a beleaguered Ugandan author. We'll be studying how African writers, in their creative work, participated in the political and moral arguments of their time. Literature was not an escape from real life. African writers did work in their texts: they conjured up audiences, fired them with a shared vision of the past and the future, and set them on a forward path together. By studying the social and political work that African writers did, this course explores the intersection of literature and history, and of imagination and politics.

The course is organized around three national literatures: the literatures of Nigeria, of Kenya, and of South Africa. In each of the case studies we'll be tracing the historical development of a particular literary tradition, studying how authors commented on the changing politics of their homelands. We'll also be exploring a set of cross-cutting themes that draw the three case studies together. Some of these texts define and defend a national community. Other texts depict the crisis of urban life in twentieth century Africa. In the whole of our work together we'll be asking a set of questions about the vocation of the literary writer. What were these authors doing in their own time? What was literature good for?

### Required texts

#### At Ulrich's bookstore:

M.G. Vassanji, *The Gunny Sack* (Anchor, 2005 [1989])  
Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Anchor, 1994 [1959])  
Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (Penguin, 2012 [1967])  
Amos Tutuola, *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (Grove, 1993 [1952])  
Sol Plaatje, *Mhudi* (Waveland, 2014 [1930])  
T. Mofolo, *Chaka* (Waveland, 2013 [1931])

#### In the coursepack:

Modikwe Dikobe, *The Marabi Dance* (Heinemann, 1973)  
John Ruganda, *The Floods* (East African Educational Publishers, 1980)

Almost all of the books are available for purchase from Ulrich's bookstore, or can be purchased through an online vendor. There is a coursepack where two of the texts (which are currently out-of-print) are reproduced. The coursepack can be purchased at Dollar Bill Coursepacks, 611 Church Street in Ann Arbor (just off South University).

There are in addition a number of articles and excerpts posted on the CTools website associated with this course. These are labeled with a double star (\*\*) on the reading schedule below. *Please print these essays out*, or bring some kind of reliable reading device with you to class. They'll be an integral part of our discussions. *You must have a copy of all the assigned texts in hand* on the day when the readings are discussed.

### Requirements

1. Attendance and participation: Attendance in this class is mandatory. If you miss a class, you must provide a written explanation in order to be excused. I will on occasion ask you to write short 'response papers' to help you think through the issues we'll be discussing. These papers will be figured into your participation grade.
2. Midterm exam: This will consist of a take-home essay exam. Questions will be distributed on Thursday, 2 October, and the essays will be due—on paper—on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> October.
3. Final exam: This will be an in-class examination testing your knowledge of the texts we've discussed over the course of the year. The examination will be given on the date set by the University—Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m.
4. Final paper: In the second half of the semester you will research and write a 12-15 page essay about a fictional text (a novel or a play) composed by an African author. I will distribute a list of possible titles; you can choose from among those books, or identify another book you wish to study (after talking to me). Your task will be to interpret the fiction in light of the author's political, social and moral entanglements. In what context did the author write? Who else was working on the political and social field? What problem did the author seek to address through fiction? What intervention did the book make when it was published? Your task is the task of the literary historian: you are to write a social analysis of the book. That means you'll need to read quite a lot outside the book itself: you will need to consult contemporary newspaper reports, consult archives (if possible) and read historical books and articles.

I will distribute a list of possible books for your consideration on **Thursday, 16 October**. By **Tuesday, 11 November** you should have identified a book that you want to research. On that day everyone will meet with me—individually—for a discussion about the book you're pursuing. The paper will be due at the same time as the final exam: Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m. I am happy to read and review earlier drafts.

### Calculation of marks

Marks will be awarded on the following basis:

Attendance, participation and informal writing: 20%

Midterm essay: 30%

Final exam: 20%

Final paper: 30%

### Academic Integrity Policy

This course follows the academic integrity guidelines set forth by the College of LSA [<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/>] and the History Department [<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/history/undergraduate/courses/guidelinesandpolicies>]. Students should familiarize themselves with both of these documents, which explain the standards of academic integrity and clarify the prohibited forms of academic misconduct. Students in this course should utilize the Chicago Manual of Style Online [or alternative guidelines] for all issues of source citation, along with any specific guidelines provided in the course assignments.

Clarifying the disciplinary standards of research ethics and source citation is part of the educational mission of this course, and students should consult the instructor regarding any questions. Any cases of academic misconduct in this class will automatically earn a zero for the assignment (and may incur further penalties). All cases of deliberate academic misconduct that result in formal sanctions of any kind will be reported to the dean's office, as required by LSA policy, which also ensures due process rights of appeal for students.

### Grading criteria:

Grading papers is not an exact business. I do not give or take off a fixed number of points for particular strengths or weaknesses. The following table, therefore, should be read as a guideline.

GRADE	ARGUMENT	EVDIENCE	STYLE	MECHANICS
A	Argument clearly stated at beginning and developed logically throughout the paper to a clear conclusion.	Extensive and varied evidence supports argument. No significant omissions, irrelevancies, or errors.	Excellent prose style; clear, elegant and persuasive.	No errors of grammar, spelling etc.
B	Argument generally clear, but some digressions or failures to develop fully to a conclusion.	Generally good evidence, but some lack of variety of sources or errors of omission, or some irrelevant data.	Clear and understandable prose, but less than elegant.	A few minor errors.
C	Argument is implied, but not explicitly states and/or not well developed to a conclusion.	Some evidence, but excessive dependence on a single source, substantial omissions or irrelevancies, and/or minor errors of fact.	Understandable writing, but sometimes vague, wooden, or choppy.	Substantial errors which detract from overall effect of the paper.*
D	Argument is barely discernable and/or very poorly developed.	Very little or largely irrelevant evidence, and/or substantial errors of fact.	Writing is confusing, vague, and/or hard to understand.	Frequent and serious errors which make paper hard to understand.*
F	No discernable argument or paper totally digresses from argument.	Virtually no relevant evidence and/or very serious errors of fact.	Writing is nearly unintelligible.	Massive errors which render paper nearly unintelligible.*

Note that my comments on your paper will not aim to correct your grammar and mechanics, but any paper in which these are present cannot get a grade above C+, regardless of the quality of the argument and evidence.

### \*\*\* Schedule \*\*\*

#### I. Newspapers and Literary Life

##### Reading:

I.B. Thomas, 'The Life Story of Me, "Segilola of the Fascinating Eyes," She Who Had a Thousand Lovers in Her Life' (1929-30) \*\*

##### ***Tues., 2 Sept.***

Introduction to the class

Lecture: Newspapers and the generation of literature

##### ***Thurs., 4 Sept.***

Discussion of readings: Thomas's pseudonymous writing

#### II. Christianity and Public Culture

##### Reading:

Excerpts from *Mwigwithania* ('The Reconciler') (1929-30) \*\*

J. Lonsdale, "'Listen while I read": patriotic Christianity among the Gikuyu', in T. Falola (ed.), *Christianity and Social Change* (Carolina, 2005). \*\*

##### ***Tues., 9 Sept.***

Lecture: Christianity and literacy

##### ***Thurs., 11 Sept.***

No class session: professor at the African Studies Association (UK) annual meeting

##### ***Tues., 16 Sept.***

Discussion of readings: The making of a vernacular literature

#### III. Nationalism and Literature

##### Reading:

C. Achebe, *Things fall apart* (1958)

P. Zachernuk, 'Nationalism and the Future', in *Colonial Subjects* (Virginia, 2000), 125-174.\*\*

##### ***Thurs., 18 Sept.***

Lecture: Nationalism and literary work

**Tues., 23 Sept.**

Discussion of reading: Achebe in his time

**IV. Mau Mau and the making of Kenya**Reading:

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967)

**Thurs., 25 Sept.**

Lecture: Mau Mau and post-colonial Kenya

**Tues., 30 Sept.**

Discussion of reading: How does Ngugi do politics?

**V. Asians and Africans**Reading:

Moyez G. Vassanji, *The Gunny Sack* (1989), 1-55, 144-269 (59-143 optional).

James Brennan, 'Continental Shift: Civilization, Racial Thought, and the Intellectual Foundations of An African Nationalism,' in *Taifa* (Ohio University Press, 2012), 118-136, 143-158. \*\*

Christopher Ssebadduka, 'Maly ya Nyoko' \*\*

**Thurs., 2 Oct.**

Lecture: Reading Asian history in East Africa

Mid-term essay questions distributed

**Tues., 7 Oct.**

Discussion of reading: Where are Indians in Eastern Africa?

**Thurs., 9 Oct.**

Discussion of mid-term essay assignment

Screening: *Afrique, je te plumerai*

**Tues., 14 Oct.**

No class session: Fall Break

**VI. Remembering Shaka: ethno-history and literature**Reading:

T. Mofolo, *Chaka* (1931)

C. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty* (Harvard, 1998), 168-205. \*\*

**Thurs., 16 Oct.**

Lecture: Shaka and Zulu political history

**Due:** Mid-term essay

Final research paper assignment distributed

***Tues., 21 Oct.***

Discussion of reading: How has Shaka's memory been made?

**VII. The Literature of Liberalism in South Africa**

Reading:

Sol Plaatje, *Mhudi* (1930)

***Thurs., 23 Oct.***

Lecture: Plaatje and the making of modern South Africa

***Tues., 28 Oct.***

Discussion of reading: Is *Mhudi* a political novel?

**VIII. The Poetry of Abdilatif Abdallah**

Reading:

A. Abdallah 'UNGAPOMOKA' and other poems (1970s and 80s)

'Telezi' (1970)

'Siwati' (1970)

'KONGONI NGULI KONGONI' (1979)

'Face to Face with Kenya's First Post-Independence Political prisoner,' *Sunday Nation* (8 July 2012)

Ken Walibora Waliaula, 'Prison, Poetry, and Polyphony in Abdilatif Abdalla's *Sauti ya Dhiki*,' *Research in African Literatures* 40 (3) (2009), 129-148.

***Thurs., 30 Oct.***

Lecture: Politics, Dissent, and Literature in Post-colonial Kenya

***Tues., 4 Nov.***

A Visit from Abdilatif Abdallah

**IX. The literature of urban life in South Africa**

Reading:

M. Dikobe, *Marabi Dance* (1973) (RP).

Clive Glaser, 'Managing the Sexuality of Urban Youth: Johannesburg, 1920s-1960s,' *Int. Jo. Afri. Hist. Studies* 38 (2) (2005), 301-327.

***Thurs., 6 Nov.***

Lecture: Urban life and cultural production in mid-twentieth century South Africa

***Monday, 10 Nov.*** (in the Erlicher Room, North Quad, at 4:00 p.m.)

Lecture by Isabel Hofmeyr (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa)

‘Mandela's Copyright: Intellectual Property and the Postcolonial World’

**Tues., 11 Nov.**

Individual meetings to discuss final research paper

**Thurs., 13 Nov.**

Discussion of reading: Dikobe and urban living

**Tues., 18 Nov.**

No class. Instead, please attending the following panel discussion, which takes place at 4:00 in the Erlicher Room, North Quad:

‘Publishing In and About Africa’

with: Gillian Berchowitz, Director, Ohio University Press

James Tumusiime, founder, Fountain Publishers

Alexander Bangirana, Head of Publications and Dissemination, CODESRIA

Charles Watkinson, Director, University of Michigan Press

## **X. Idi Amin and the literature of displacement**

Reading:

John Ruganda, *The Floods* (1980) (RP)

Alicia Decker, ‘A Gendered History of Disappearance in Idi Amin’s Uganda,’ *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7 (1) (2013), 125-42.

**Thurs., 20 Nov.**

Lecture: Idi Amin and the politics of exhortation

**Tues., 25 Nov.**

Discussion of readings: Ruganda and the Ugandan condition

**Thurs., 27 Nov.**

No class: Thanksgiving Break

## **XI. Magical realism?**

Reading:

Amos Tutuola, *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952)

**Tues., 2 Dec.**

Lecture: Yoruba literature?

**Thurs., 4 Dec.**

Discussion: Tutuola and the literary imagination

**Tues., 9 Dec.**

Review for final exam

**Final essays are due on the day of the final exam  
Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m.**