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Course Description & Objectives

English 3384 equips students for critical encounters with the texts, images, sounds, and situations that relate to the postcolonial world. Through a series of essays and formal assignments, students will also improve their understanding of persuasive and correct communication.

Colonialism waned in the 1940s through 60s amidst decolonization movements, yet globalization flourished in often unnoticed, hegemonic pathways. Considering cultural products of this moment leads us to ask what happens in the age of globalization that follows after an age of nationalism. When capital migrates, and labor follows, whence culture? What and who are the Others of a global culture? This course will give students the social, cultural, and literary tools to manage the critical paradigms that now shape the discipline. It assumes no familiarity with the critical materials and will build students’ critical tools and literary background from the ground up.

WebCampus

Each Unit within the course will be presented through WebCampus. Students will have access to the Study Guide (this document) in a PDF format. Videos and Podcasts will only be available through WebCampus. Some of these video and audio materials will be required while others will be optional. Moreover, some have copyright secured by FDU or are available under Creative Commons licenses – these will be presented within WebCampus itself. Other materials are available to the public but have copyright held elsewhere, and these will be linked from within WebCampus.

Students are strongly encouraged to use the Discussion Board to post questions, especially when the course readings are confusing. Postcolonial literature is a complex topic, and you are certain to face challenges during the course. By sharing your questions, you make your classmates more comfortable sharing their own questions as well.

Each Unit will be opened in WebCampus a week prior to its start date. Try to read ahead as best you can.

Services to Students

Fairleigh Dickinson University's Metropolitan and Vancouver undergraduates, including Petrocelli College's online learners, can make use of eTutoring.org.
which provides free, professional, online tutoring in writing and other
disciplines including math, statistics and accounting.
Undergraduates can log in anytime and from anywhere!
Metropolitan and Vancouver undergraduates can create an account
using the instructions found in the left column to access the three tutoring
options available:
1. The eWriting Lab where you can submit up to three drafts of the same
   paper to a tutor, ask for specific feedback, and receive a tutor's written
   response within forty-eight hours.
2. Live Tutoring (or eChat) where you meet online with a tutor in a one-
on-one, fully interactive, virtual online session. The subjects currently
   available are:
   a. Math (from the developmental level through Calc II)
   b. Accounting
   c. Biology (including Anatomy & Physiology)
   d. Chemistry
   e. Information Literacy (and Research Methods)
   f. Statistics
3. Offline eQuestions where you can leave a specific question (such as
   “how do I cite a DVD as a source?” or “can my thesis sentence be put
   in the second paragraph?”) for an eTutor and get an answer within
   forty-eight hours.

Getting Started:
1. Go to eTutoring.org and click on the red “Login Now!” arrow.
2. A pop-up box will open; click on “Northeast Consortium” (because
   FDU's main campus is located in the northeast region).
3. A drop-down list will appear; scroll down to Fairleigh Dickinson.
   When you click on FDU, our eTutoring home page will open.

Logging in:
4. Your user name is your seven-digit, FDU student ID number.
5. Your password is your birth date in eight-digit format; for example, if
   you were born on April 9, 1991, your password would be 04091991.
6. You will be asked to type your student ID twice more to confirm, and
   you will need to accept the terms of the site by checking the box and
   clicking the “Update Your Profile” bar at the bottom.

Reading, Listening, & Viewing Assignments

Not all course readings and contents are accessible through WebCampus.
Required Texts


Written Assignments & Writing Essays

In addition to the online quizzes for each Course Unit and the final examination, your coursework will include two written essays and an annotated bibliography that demonstrates your capacity for academic research. Your essays should conform to the MLA Style Sheet (guides available on WebCampus or in any standard writing guide book) and should have a level of correctness and creativity appropriate to an advanced writing course.

Please review the course syllabus or the “Assignments” section in WebCampus for detailed descriptions of each essay assignment and its deadline for submission. Each essay must be submitted in WebCampus through SafeAssign. Direct submission to your professor by email will not be accepted. Essays are evaluated based on the accuracy, clarity, and persuasiveness of the writing as well as their capacity to demonstrated completion and comprehension of the course materials. The capacity for creative thought and engagement in a critical dialogue are also important.

The Annotated Bibliography assignment can be used as preparation for your final essay. The Bibliography is evaluated based on your ability to provide a correct MLA Style citation for each entry, the grammatical correctness of each annotation that describes the scholarly work you have cited, and your demonstration of the ability to recognize the kind of work you are citing as well as its potential usefulness.

Writing Essays

Your essays should conform to the MLA Style Sheet (guides available on
WebCampus or in any standard writing guide book). Please submit all essays using Safe Assign in WebCampus using either the “.doc” or “.docx” MS Word format or the “.pdf” Adobe format. You can write your essay in any word processing program you like (Mac Pages, OpenOffice, MS Word, etc.), but submit the actual file saved as a “.doc,” “.docx,” or “.pdf” document.

**Essay Structure**

The specific outline for an essay will change depending on the topic, genre, and audience, but general guidelines are useful, especially as you shape your raw notes into a crafted argument. An essay is a holistic work, so it will not contain extraneous or unnecessary materials. You should make sure every sentence and paragraph counts and contributes to your purpose – if the relationship between an idea and your thesis is unclear, either cut the material or make the relationship clear.

**Introduction:**

1. You must introduce the purpose and topic of your essay.
2. You should have a clear thesis. Typically, this is one sentence that states your purpose and intent, though it may be longer for some essays. Be as specific and direct as possible. While it is not graceful, “This essay does X, Y, and Z using R and S” is clear.
3. Do not rely on broad generalizations! While you might need to establish context for your introduction, cut all materials that do not directly relate to your purpose.
4. For shorter essays, you can introduce the specific points your essay discusses.
5. By the end of your introduction, your reader should know your purpose, how you will pursue your topic, and the general materials you will use or consider.

**Body:**

1. Begin by sketching the order of the points you need to make (this may change). It may be useful to lay out quotations and references to critical materials while sketching – if you are responding to other texts, this may clarify the sequence that your own argument will take.
2. While writing the body of your paper, be willing to change paragraph order. Each topic (which may cover more than one paragraph) should appear in the order that best supports your argument.
3. Only summarize in order to establish the background for your audience. Your paper is an argument and not a list.
4. Be sure to establish the relationship between paragraphs very clearly. If you cannot use “therefore” or “furthermore” to clearly demonstrate the
development from one paragraph to the next, you have likely skipped a step or are moving into a topic that does not relate directly.

5. Ensure every paragraph relates clearly (not just implicitly) to the thesis.

Conclusion:

1. You must summarize the purpose and topic of your essay, followed by a general sense of its significance or context (ie: restatement of your thesis followed by a conclusion).

2. Again, do not generalize. Be specific! If it does not relate to your thesis, cut it.

Your conclusion should make sense of the preceding materials and give your reader a summary of what your paper has done, as well as offer a direct statement of the conclusion that your evidence leads you to.

Final Examination & Quizzes

The final examination for this course will be conducted as a viva (interview format) online through Skype, telephone, or other audio or video communications (this is subject to change) as well as face to face. Students must have access to either a telephone or computer system that supports audio/video conferencing or skype. The exam will consist of an oral defense of your final essay as well as a discussion of the course materials. Students are evaluated on three criteria ranked in order of importance: (1) demonstrated completion of the course of studies, (2) demonstrated understanding of the critical concepts of the course, and (3) the capacity for creative or innovative thought.

For each Course Unit, you will have an online quiz to confirm your understanding of the key points. You may retake the quizzes as many times as necessary before submitting the results, but each quiz must be completed and submitted before the deadline (normally Sunday, midnight, PST, at the end of the week). Make-up quizzes for late or missed work are not possible without formal documentation of extenuating circumstances, such as a medical emergency, so early completion is advisable. Start each quiz early! Quizzes will cover both the primary readings as well as secondary lecture, video, and reading materials provided online through WebCampus.

Study Guide

This course is designed to offer you an introduction to Postcolonial Literature.
Each Unit covers one or two weeks in the course and a specific text or set of texts. You should read the Study Guide materials first then proceed to the primary texts, though you can certainly read ahead in the primary materials if you wish, unless the Study Guide directs you otherwise. Audio and video materials, as well as print materials, will be made available through WebCampus.

Recordings and videos of lecture materials or similar resources will be available through WebCampus or linked from WebCampus.

Each Unit (or week) will open in WebCampus the week before it begins and will offer a Study Guide chapter. The Study Guide will keep you on track, remind you of upcoming assignments, and will lead you through the difficulties of the readings. You may wish to keep the print copy in a binder, and an electronic version will be in WebCampus as well, including hyperlinks to explanatory materials in FDU’s Online Library resources.
Introduction

Objectives

1. Recognize colonialism as a part of literary and world history.
2. Identify definitions of the postcolonial in relation to literature.
3. Relate postcolonialism to decolonization.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

We must identify and tentatively define three key terms before beginning this course: colonialism, decolonization, and postcolonialism (Böröcz and Sarkar 228–233). On the surface, this seems quite easy. Identifying the terms and setting them in relation to each other is direct. However, defining each of them means setting limitations and functions on each term, and this becomes more complex. Colonies and colonization have existed for millennia, but the historical impact of Roman colonization of Britain has a very different relationship to geopolitics and literature today than does, for example, the British colonization of India. Likewise, the Viking colonization of southern Greenland (circa 985–1500) has none of the conflicts we associate with the term “colonialism” today, nor did it lead to a “decolonization” or postcolonial experience as we define it.

For our purposes, all three terms (colonialism, decolonization, and postcolonialism) relate in a literary context to the effects of European colonialism on other parts of the world, primarily but not exclusively what we today refer to as the “Global South.” Postcolonial studies has grown to include many other experiences of colonialism, but for our readings we will focus primarily on European colonialism, leading to the literature created in times of decolonization and postcolonialism.

Postcolonialism

When we say “postcolonial,” we call up a host of potential meanings. In early discussions of the idea of postcolonialism or postcolonial literature, there were
even debates about how the compound word should be compounded: “postcolonial” or “postcolonial.” The crux of the matter is the sense of colonialism having ended, which is hardly the case. Nonetheless, parts of the discussion over how to define postcolonial literature circled the concepts of colonialism itself, the process of decolonization, and what comes after independence from a colonial power—all of these set in relation to the body of literary works that emerge from a society experiencing these stages of history. However, definitions are often contested and may change over time, which prompts a harder but more fruitful question: whose interests do such definitions serve and what ways of thinking do they promote? For our purposes, what interests are served by understanding a body of literature primarily in relation to the history of colonialism? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a key figure in postcolonial studies, has said “Don’t call me postcolonial” (this was the working title for her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*). What she meant had to do with the power of definitions more than what might seem like a rejection of postcolonialism itself. In other words, in addition to asking what “postcolonial” means, we must also ask who has the power to apply that label to others and why.

The first issue for our course is what we mean by “colonialism,” and that does mean defining our interests, but hopefully we will do so with enough flexibility and self-consciousness to be aware of the power-relations involved in giving definitions. Colonialism admits to many definitions, but in relation to colonial literature we tend to mean any literary works written in a relationship with or about the experience of colonialism. Colonialism itself is the domination of another territory, nation, or people by way of conquest followed by ongoing governance, typically for economic interests. Even this takes many different forms. For example, not all conquests lead to some form of ongoing governance by the conqueror. When a form of remote governance by the colonizer is established, it may or may not involve a significant settler community. It might also seek to exclude Indigenous populations from governance or even expel them from the colonized territory. This means that experiences of colonialism can differ significantly. In our course readings, the British Raj in India sought economic advantage from colonization, but the role of settlers was less important in contrast to other sites of colonialism. In contrast, settler colonialism is at the heart of the European colonizations of North America. Our readings for South Africa also show the pressure, under the Apartheid system, to exclude colonized Indigenous peoples from governance itself through the establishment of Bantustans (territories carved out of the country for black South Africans intended to exclude them from being a part of South Africa itself).

There is a further complication. As the postcolonial critic Edward Said has pointed out, if our definition includes literature shaped by the history of colonialism, then we can hardly exclude European literature. It may sound surprising to some readers, but the quintessentially British social life depicted by Jane Austen was predicated on British colonial territories, and a key dispute in
her novel *Mansfield Park* revolves around the slave colonies that pay for the estate Mansfield Park itself. Even in our imaginations, the leisure involved in sipping tea and playing card games while families with wealth determine whom their sons and daughters should marry is deeply set in the fact of colonialism. The leisure and the wealth seem obvious to this, but so should the tea... Tea would come from India and China based not simply on trade but colonization, as would the sugar used to sweeten the tea and the porcelain ("china") in which it would be brewed and drunk.

This comment on Jane Austen, however, reaches even further. As is implicit in Spivak’s book title *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, the European experience of the Enlightenment (the Age of Reason) was made possible by colonialism itself. This means that much of the philosophical tradition we regard as leading to modern democracy and paradigms of human rights are derived from the social conditions made possible by the subjugation of others through colonialism. Spivak’s title gestures to the philosopher Emmanuel Kant’s book *A Critique of Pure Reason* and his foundational role in the political and social movement that we today call “the Enlightenment.” In a minimalist definition, Kant and many others planted the philosophical basis for democratic and emancipatory movements in Europe and America that led to the American Revolution and the French Revolution (among others) in tandem with the economic transformations brought about by the Protestant Reformation, the birth of modern capitalism, the Scientific Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution. This is a bit of a laundry list... It is also an enormous claim that would be difficult to actually prove. Nonetheless, the general point is difficult to dispute: that the technological and social progress of the West toward democracy and human rights was predicated on the extraction of labor and resources from the colonized East.

**Postcolonial Literature**

In relation to literature, a reductive comparison may help. It is a general habit of mind to assume that the concept of the self or subject changes in European literature of the Middle Ages to the Early Modern world and finally the modern era. For example, the kind of “person” we find in Geoffrey Chaucer is quite different from those we find in Shakespeare – the Wife of Bath in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* does not express the kind of interior thought we find in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, but neither does Hamlet grown and change over time as we would expect any character to do today. As we move into the Eighteenth Century and the Age of Reason or what we call the Enlightenment (Carey and Festa 13), we have Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, which has not only the interior thoughts we associate with Hamlet but also growth and change over time. We call this new genre in the modern era the *bildungsroman* – the novel of growth ("roman" meaning novel and “bildungs” meaning growth). This monumental
change in literature happens while colonialism grows. In this sense, it is impossible to separate the history of literature from the history of colonialism for both the colonized and the colonizers.

For this reason, even when we attempt to define “colonialism” or “postcolonialism,” we run into questions of why we prefer one definition over another and what interests (self-interests) or values we emphasize with each gradation of a definition. For our purposes in this course, we will focus on the literature that emerges as colonialism declines. What kind of literary transformations occur when colonialism is changing? The first implicit issue in this question is how it makes us privilege the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. We are not considering, for instance, the traditional literature of colonized people but instead give our attention to the cultural texts that emerge from the impact of colonialism. Mulk Raj Anand’s novel *Untouchable* is written during the colonialism of the British Raj (not from the period after India and Pakistan’s independence from Britain or the subsequent independence of Bangladesh). We might call it an “Indian novel,” but it is really a novel about India in the context of British colonialism. It is about the relationship between the two and the kind of mental environment that comes from that colonial relationship.

We will also read Lawrence Durrell’s “From the Elephant’s Back” and George Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant.” Both Orwell and Durrell were colonials in the British Raj, but these are not memoirs about being British but rather about being a British colonial in India. They are defined by that relationship with others as well. Later, we compare Chinua Achebe (you may have read him already in UNIV 2001: Cross-cultural Perspectives) with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and while they are both African authors (Nigerian and Kenyan respectively), their arguments about the language of African literature is also about how African cultures deal with the historical legacy of colonialism and emerge from the decolonization movements into a postcolonial state. We are always back to that relationship in postcolonial literature, which is again why Spivak insisted on not being called “postcolonial.”

**Colonization Without End**

At the close of our course, we turn to contemporary literature in our postcolonial world that is still enduring under colonialism, but colonization of a different form. Indigenous literatures of North America find themselves thinking through the legacy of colonialism while colonization is ongoing if not possibly endless. Settler colonialism in North America is different again. The indigenous population finds itself a minority in its own territory, typically dominated for the purpose of resource extraction rather than for access to inexpensive labor. However, the literature of the Native American Renaissance and after, from Indigenous authors of North America, grew in direct contact with other
successful decolonization movements and the emergence of postcolonial theory. When we read Thomas King, we have a writer not only familiar with authors like Memmi and Said, as well as Achebe and Ngũgĩ, we have a writer thinking about decolonization in the midst of a colonial experience that is not ending.

In a similar sense, when we read excerpts from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (about the cultural genocide of the Indian Residential School System), this comes in the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions of South Africa and Chile, both of which were part of decolonization movements (you may have read about these in UNIV 2002: Global Issues). The TRC of Canada, however, exists inside of the settler colonial state, so the concept of the postcolonial is very different again. Without decolonization, this situation reminds us to ask how a postcolonial literature (or culture or world) is still always defined in relation to colonialism and the colonizer. Even in decolonization, colonialism remains as a way of defining and knowing others.

**How to Proceed?**

As we continue into the course, try to ask yourself at every turn how you define the terms and ideas around the “postcolonial.” Why do you prefer one term over another, or what relationships or power structures are privileged by one term’s use instead of an alternative? Is there a point at which the colonized exist and define themselves without the word “colony” sitting at the root of the term? What of the colonizers, who may feel threatened or accused by terminology such as “colonial,” “colonizer,” or “settler” even while applying their reversed form to others as “native,” “colonized,” or “Indigenous.” Can we even have a concept of “India” without it being unified as a nation from the shared history of the British Raj? Can we have modern nation-state identities emerging in former colonies without these being intrinsically related to their history of colonialism? Is being “postcolonial” also implicitly a continuation of colonialism? When the colonized become “modern” or achieve industrial modernity, is this also part of the legacy of colonialism? What about when we remember that “modernity” itself emerged in Europe (along with the Industrial Revolution and modern capitalism) as part of colonialism?

In other words, how much do we see colonialism and postcolonialism around us today, and how much can we see decolonization still underway? Ngũgĩ suggests that we decolonize the mind, and this may be the greatest challenge we face: not to be decolonizing or postcolonial, but to be something else that no longer requires these terms. As Orwell reminds us near the beginning of the course, both the colonizer and the colonized are defined by their relationship with each other, whether they are aware of it or not. They are in a symbiotic captivity. That mutual bond seems to be a definitional part of modernity itself. Where we go to from here is far from certain, and even becoming conscious of it is enough of a struggle. This course’s goal is to help you become
aware of how that struggle unfolds in literature, and in particular how that unfolding in literature is a manifestation of the world we all live in today.

Questions for Self-Review

1. How would you define colonialism?
2. How do you define decolonization, and how might someone else define it differently?
3. How do you define postcolonialism, and how might you want to define it later?
4. Like Jane Austen’s characters drinking tea, how do the effects of colonialism manifest themselves in your day-to-day life today? Find one concrete example.
5. Can you find a non-literary example of another art form (film, television, art, games, etc.) that reflect the histories or inheritances of colonialism, decolonization, or postcolonialism?

Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


Week 1: Albert Memmi & Edward Said

Objectives

1. Describe the colonized and colonizer.
2. Recognize representations of the colonizer and colonized.
3. Describe basic material or economic relationships between the colonizer and the colonized.
4. Identify representations of the colonized in academic disciplines and popular culture.
5. Describe the shift from decolonization to postcolonialism in Memmi vs. Said.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

Please read the assigned readings first and then come to the Study Guide. If you find the excerpts from Memmi and Said challenging, then read across the Study Guide first and return to the primary texts (this is not unusual – they can be challenging texts depending on what you have already been familiarized with). You will have two short video lectures on Memmi and Said. Please read the materials first and then turn to the “lectures,” but again, if you need to, use the lectures to help you read across the primary texts. This would not be unusual, particularly for Said’s “Orientalism,” which presents ideas and challenges we will return to across the entire course.

Albert Memmi (b. 1920–)

Memmi’s “The Mythic Portrait of the Colonized” is excerpted from his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. It is a seminal text in postcolonial studies. Memmi, along with Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon (whom we are not reading), is a foundational figure in theorizing decolonization. All three of these
authors wrote in French about French colonialism in North Africa. Césaire was born in Martinique (in the Caribbean) and was of Nigerian background, and he thought of decolonization struggles in a Marxist framework. This means that Césaire used the language of class conflict and economic exploitation to describe racism and colonialism. However, he abandoned his ties to Communism when the Soviet Union suppressed the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. This year is significant since it also marks a starting point for the rapid decolonization of former colonies in Africa. Fanon, who was Césaire’s student while visiting Martinique, wrote about his experiences in French Algeria and also relies on Marxist theory to describe the conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized. Memmi, as a Jewish Tunisian with Berber ancestry, moved in the same intellectual circles, but he was doubly distanced in a way that Césaire and Fanon were not – after Tunisia’s independence, his Jewish and Berber background set him apart, and he remained in Paris. This is a specific historical context, but all three authors deliberately wished their work to be generalizable to colonialism and decolonization movements anywhere, even though they were written in direct relationship with the decolonization movements of the 1950s and 1960s in North Africa.

A significant part of Memmi’s work in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* is to provide a conceptual framework for the struggles of decolonization movements before they become successful. In other words, while we live in a decolonized world (in some respects), Memmi was writing for the colonized to struggle toward decolonization. Like Fanon and Césaire, it is difficult to remove Memmi from this specific historical context, even though (as of 2018) he is still alive and writing – 61 years after writing this book, he is still active today. This means that his chapter is focused on how those engaged in decolonization might pursue it or understand it, even while we are reading it in a postcolonial context. For Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* was published the year after the Suez Crisis and in the same year as several successful revolutions for decolonization.

A significant part of Memmi’s critical methodology relates to French sociology and Marxist critical theory. For our purposes, even though these terms are charged with other possible implications and associations, this means that Memmi would emphasize how cultural relationships (such as the colonizer’s relationship with the colonized) emerge from material and economic circumstances. Conceptually, this means that he would emphasize material and economic facts as the origin of cultural and social relationships (and not the reverse). That is, colonialism itself emerges not from some (possibly despicable) part of European culture but rather from the economic and material circumstances of the period as a whole. The same would be said for racism, which we today tend to intuitively associate with a cultural stigma or a cultural belief system – Memmi would, instead, look to racism as a manifestation of economic exploitation and class conflict.
More specifically, this means that Memmi thinks about the colonizer and the colonized in terms of social classes, like the workers and the owners (the proletariat and the bourgeoisie). This means that he sees colonizers themselves as very often (or even primarily) the disadvantaged workers of Europe who are pushed outward into the colonies by an elite class (the bourgeoisie) who do not themselves physically live in the colonies even though they receive the greatest benefits from colonialism. This means that Memmi shows us the colonizer and the colonized in relation to each other without letting us easily set them as “good” and “bad.” They are both being shaped and influenced by other forces beyond both of their control. While there is a relationship of domination between the colonizer and the colonized, they both exist underneath other social classes and other social pressures that they are helpless to change.

We should also recognize who Memmi sees this relationship between colonizer and colonized as “mythic.” By this, he means that a mythical cultural representation emerges that is itself already simply a manifestation of the same material and economic conditions that led to colonialism. Said in a simpler way, the “myth” of the colonizer and the colonized grows out of their economic relationship rather than some “real” (non-mythical) identity. Both the colonizer and the colonized find themselves performing a role that neither of them fully controls, and both are unfairly coerced into their circumstances by economic pressures. Crucial to Memmi’s perspective is the colonizer as a second-class citizen of the Empire, typically moving to the colony for greater economic opportunity than could be had at “home.” For both the colonizer and the colonized, the people in control of these economic pressures do not reside in the colony itself, so both of them are in a sense coerced from a distance. They are not equal, but they are not independent either.


Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978), from which we are reading only an excerpt, comes twenty years after the decolonization movements that inspired Césaire, Fanon, and Memmi. Said was also American, although he was fluent in French and drew on the same intellectual traditions. Said was born in Palestine and educated in Cairo and Jerusalem before relocating to the USA to complete high school and university studies at Princeton University and then Harvard University. His parents were Orthodox Christian Palestinians, and his father was an American citizen and served in the US military.

For our purposes, what sets Said apart from Memmi is his expansion beyond the materialist methodology that saw decolonization in terms of class conflict. Said instead inherited the critical traditions of Michel Foucault (another French philosopher) that question *styles* of knowledge just as much as the conditions from which knowledge or belief systems emerge. Our instinct is often to think of knowledge in terms of “facts,” yet facts are never without a social
context. For example, in the context of a classroom, if a teacher calls attendance in the order of students’ surnames, this may seem neutral but is not. How are those names ordered for students who do not use the same surname tradition? Chinese names would use the opposite sequence, so changing it for calling attendance imposes a Western European “style” of knowledge on what might seem a neutral fact. What if the teacher instead called names in the numerical sequence of student numbers? Would this alienate or institutionalize students, or is it “neutral”? What if the names were in sequence of student height, or gender, or according to skin color? We may find such “styles” of knowledge profoundly unfair, unethical, or disturbing even though the content has not changed at all. A less obvious example is how academic departments are organized in a university. For Fairleigh Dickinson University, the School of the Humanities places History, Literature, Languages, Philosophy, and Humanities together as a group that share values in some way – traditionally this would also have included Mathematics as an Arts discipline, but today we instead place Mathematics with the School of Computer Science and Engineering. Does this help us to better understand Mathematics itself, or does it instead help us to understand how our contemporary society thinks about mathematics? Of course, math itself has not actually changed, but its style is altered significantly. This is a simplified example of what Foucault and Said mean, but it shows how “neutral” knowledge is never without a social context.

This is the mode of thinking that led Said to explore an academic discipline we no longer think about today: Orientalism. Where we have departments of Classics or Classical Studies (meaning the languages, history, literature, and art of the Roman and Greek worlds of antiquity), we also used to have departments of Orientalist Studies. Orientalism was the study of the “Orient,” which meant the Middle East (primarily) as well as the Near and Far East (it did not imply the American slang of “Orient” for Asia). Said’s interest was in how this academic discipline within the university related to geopolitics and styles of knowledge, all intimately caught up in the relationships of colonialism. While we may tend to think of our university studies as “neutral” today, this is of course not the case. A simple example is the rise and fall of Russian or Arabic languages programs based on geopolitics (less funding after the end of the Cold War), or the rise in funding for Area Studies in the USA after 9/11. Studying the history of universities and of academic disciplines is deeply caught up in the economic and political histories of any era.

For the British and French Empires, this meant that universities educated the future colonial officials who understood the colonies based on knowledge that has a specific “style” to it. This is Said’s interest: Orientalism as an idea or style of knowledge that exists on its own, independent of the actual fact of the East itself (or even the unification of the “East” into a coherent singular subject, which it of course is not). When we study Orientalism, we learn a great deal more about the Occident (the West) and its interests than we do of
the supposed subject matter. By paying attention the style of knowledge in Orientalism, we see what powers and interests are at stake in the West. As with the example of classroom role call for styles of knowledge, you may learn a little about a class of students from the list, but you will learn a very great deal about the school based on how that list is organized. Are your student numbers at FDU your Social Security Number? If not, what does that mean about who is welcome at FDU? If student IDs at another school are a student’s SSN, then who is not welcome at that school?

As you read through Said, consider how he places geopolitical conflicts in the aftermath of decolonization in relation to academic disciplines in the modern university. Students often think of their education as a pathway to a career (this is true in part, but it is certainly only one, possibly very small, part of the education system). Likewise, teachers often think of education in relation to academic disciplines. However, governments and international bodies think of education in terms of resources and contemporary struggles.

For Said, you might take as a more contemporary example, the foundation of the academic discipline American Studies. During World War II, Norman Holmes Pearson worked in American intelligence in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) where he helped to recruit James Jesus Angleton, who went on to become the chief of CIA Counterintelligence from 1954 to 1975. Pearson, after the war, returned to academia and founded the program of American Studies at Yale University but remained collaboratively engaged with the CIA. William J. Casey, with whom Pearson worked in the OSS, moved to sit on the board of directors for James Laughlin’s Intercultural Publications (related to today’s New Directions Publishing in New York City, which has specialized in American Literature), but he moved back to the CIA during Ronald Reagan’s presidential term. To separate the academic discipline of American Studies from geopolitical interests would be to ignore the history of the scholarly discipline itself — and specifically, while Said was interested in critiquing the relations of power in such disciplines, it is also simply an essential fact of how they operate and come into existence.

Colonization Without End

By reading Memmi and then Said, we see two of three “waves” in postcolonial theory. The first, for which Memmi is an exemplar, relies on a materialist theoretical paradigm deriving from Marxist understanding of class struggle and economic conflict. It is, in effect, a conflict-oriented theory of history. While we may have many different instinctive reactions to the term “Marxism,” its premise that culture is a flexible response to material conditions and economic pressures is a widespread belief today and sits at the core of contemporary social sciences. To view decolonization in this manner is also very helpful for those
living through a decolonization movement. Memmi, Fanon, and Césaire are among the most widely cited authors in the first “wave” of postcolonial theory. Said represents for us a second “wave” of theory that instead takes Foucauldian theory (from Michel Foucault) to consider how styles of knowledge and disciplines of knowledge also play a role, and how not only economic demands but institutional pressures shape knowledge and cultural organization. Universities are one kind of institution (we may add many to this list), and they produce not only knowledge but also identity. If institutions confer identity, it is through systems of analogy: this is like that. We adopt forms of identity based on be analogous or alike. For us, the most obvious example is how a class of students at Fairleigh Dickinson University all become similar to each other by virtue of being part of FDU, no matter which campus we are on or where we all come from. We become like each other through analogy: we are FDU people. We as “subjects” (the “self” in its social position) share an identity because of the institution, and while this may change when we leave the classroom, it deeply shapes how we think and behave while we are together.

The “third” wave draws on the body of theory called deconstruction, originating in the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (who was born in Algeria but primarily lived in France and the USA). While it is beyond our focus in this specific course, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (who translated Derrida) developed this body of theory with detailed attention to language and how language perpetuates and naturalizes systems of oppression – the most obvious of such is the continued use of the word “colonial” to define the postcolonial world, which is thereby always seen in relation to the colonizer rather than on its own terms. And this is why we should not call Spivak “postcolonial”… Even though we are not reading Spivak and similar critics, her influence will appear in the scholarly resources you access during the semester.

Questions for Self-Review

Please respond to any of these questions on the discussion board in WebCampus. Remember, you have 1 point for your own comment and 1 point for responding to a classmate’s comment.

1. How do you think Memmi might define colonialism?
2. How do you think Said might define colonialism?
3. In what ways does Said’s argument about Orientalism as an academic discipline make you rethink other disciplines in which you student, such as English, the Sciences, or even University Core?
4. What do you think is the most important difference between Memmi and Said?
5. How do you define Orientalism, and how do you think something like it exists today (or do you think it is now gone)?
Works Cited & Supplemental Readings


Week 2: George Orwell & Lawrence Durrell

Objectives

1. Describe the colonized and colonizer.
2. Recognize representations of the colonizer and colonized.
3. Describe basic material or economic relationships between the colonizer and the colonized.
4. Identify representations of the colonized in academic disciplines and popular culture.
5. Describe the shift from decolonization to postcolonialism in Memmi vs. Said.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

George Orwell (1903–50) and Lawrence Durrell (1912–90) were both colonials, knew each other, and corresponded. Orwell, whose real name was Eric Arthur Blair, was born in British India, as was Durrell. However, they had very different experiences of the British Raj. Orwell’s father came to India to work in the Opium Department of the Indian Civil Service, and he returned to England as an infant – he later returned eighteen years later in 1922 to work in Burma, the experience of which led to his essay “Shooting an Elephant.” In contrast, Durrell’s parents and grandparents were born in British India and he was raised there. Also, his father was not a colonial official and worked in private business as an engineer, most often with Indian business partners. Durrell was only sent “home” aged eleven in 1924 by his parents, who had never yet been to England, and he never returned to India. Because his parents were not born in Britain, Durrell was later designated as a “non-patrial” during British efforts to reduce emigration by British subjects from India, Pakistan, and the
West Indies. This meant that while he had a British passport, he needed a visa to enter the United Kingdom and did not have the right to settle there.

Orwell’s essay “Shooting an Elephant” articulates his experience serving in the Burma police, and it was published in 1936. Orwell’s elephant is an artefact of the period of British rule, even though it symbolizes the coming collapse of the British Raj. Durrell’s essay “From the Elephant’s Back” first began as a lecture in 1981 in French (Durrell left England in 1935 and had lived in France for 25 years by this point). Durrell’s elephant was published 35 years after Indian independence and is a part of the postcolonial period, even though it looks back to remember the British Empire. Hence, they are quite different.

Orwell’s Elephant

Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant” is one of his most widely taught essays, perhaps second only to “Politics and the English Language.” The first thing for us to recognize is his ironical tone. The opening of the essay adopts a voice unusual to Orwell’s essays with its pettiness, but this makes more sense when we remember the anti-heroes of his novels – Orwell’s protagonists are often quite unlikable. They are petty and trivial, very often nursing hurt feelings over perceived wounds, and they tend to treat others quite poorly. Orwell, in his essays, typically takes a very different voice that seeks social justice, so the opening complaint of being discriminated against as a colonizer will strike his readers as unusual. Orwell objected to British imperialism, so the opening image of the author saying “In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves” (Orwell 7) is unexpected. After all, the Burmans are the victims in this relationship, not the Europeans who exploit and police them…

This posture begins to make more sense when we remember Orwell’s primary audience: the English at home, reading in England. He seeks their sympathy, and the key ambition of his essay is to show how both the colonizer and the colonized are mutually degraded by their colonial relationship with each other. The colonized Burmans are degraded by being dominated and could only resist “in an aimless, petty kind of way” (7). However, in the same relationship, Orwell as the sub-divisional police officer charged with dominating them becomes increasingly petty. He turns this opening in the second paragraph by recovering his more expected analytic tone that is much more like what we expect from him. As Orwell presents the problem, he become of two minds because of the situation he was in with the Burmese: “I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible” (7). In this, “beasts” is of course ironical in context – this is the kind of racist insult Orwell would hear others make sincerely, and his repetition of it in the situation shows how his own thinking
increasingly took on that racism even as he critiqued it and “was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British” (7).

After presenting this mutually degrading relationship in which two sets of people take on roles they despise (the colonized and the colonizers), Orwell then gives us the story itself, which is an allegory. This opening, however, should prepare us as readers for the meaning of his story of the escaped elephant. Orwell, after all, took on his job because he had fewer reasonable economic opportunities at home. That is, he was not in Burma to be a loyal British subject forwarding the Empire—he was there because he needed a job, and this one paid... Likewise, the Burmese who mocked him (in his argument) take on their servile role also because it is the only kind of resistance available to them. They are both caught in the trap of colonialism itself, although obviously one has a much more lucrative and easier position within that trap.

This problem then frames the shooting of the elephant. As Orwell writes, “As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him” (9) yet he “has got to appear resolute” (10) in order to hold onto his position of authority over the Burmese. The lengthy indecision that takes nearly two pages shows this conflict in detail before Orwell ultimately decides to get on with what we already know, from the title of the essay, is inevitable: the shooting. How we read this process is the crux of how we read Orwell’s views on colonialism, or at least how he could show those views to a British readership that would not tolerate being told them explicitly.

The closing gesture of the essay tests us further as readers. Orwell has already said in the opening of the essay that in his naïveté of youth, “I did not even know that the British Empire is dying” (3). This cues us to read in the elephant’s death, the Empire’s coming death as well. It is as inevitable a part of the colonial relationship as are the roles taken on by the colonizer and the colonized with which Orwell opens the essay. As the elephant is shot for the third and final time, and while it is dying,

in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upwards like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skywards like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. (11)

This suggest that Orwell’s moment in Burma, in which his dominance over the colonized seems total, is also the moment of the elephant’s death, towering upwards in the act of falling. The recognition Orwell experiences in this moment is that it is “dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die” (12) like the Empire itself, which could neither cease its colonization and exploitation nor change the inevitable collapse that colonialism drove it toward. The Empire itself is “towering upwards in the act of falling..., powerless to move and yet powerless to die.” And then it dies.
Durrell’s Elephant

Durrell takes a profoundly different approach from Orwell. His opening speaks to potential reconciliations. Rather than setting up an opposition, Durrell writes of himself as “Anglo-Indian” (“From” 13). He remembers himself as a child in British India as well as the elephant as a child, named Sadu. The elephant is an orphan; its parent having been shot. Without adults between them, Durrell’s argument is toward integration. It is a syncretic approach, and this reflects Durrell’s novels just as Orwell’s irony does his. As an example, when Durrell describes his father’s railway (the “toy railway” climbing the hills near Darjeeling, which still operates today), he immediately compares it to the “railway lines of the Gard” in the south of France where he lived (17). Likewise, the school he attends in Canterbury when he is sent away to England “resembled very closely the school I had quitted in Darjeeling” (17). In Durrell’s response to colonialism, places and people are linked to each other rather than set in conflict.

Our challenge as readers is to consider how Durrell’s syncretic thought works. In one respect, he avoids the darkness of colonialism by only using its scenarios from scenes of his childhood. This permits the building of bonds and relationships. When he returns to it more seriously, it is to argue for an emerging modern recombination of East and West, but he does this by drawing from the discourse of “two cultures” (20). His reference in this is specific: C.P. Snow’s lectures on the two cultures of Science and the Humanities, which became the book The Two Cultures & the Scientific Revolution (1959). Snow’s argument was that Western cultures have separated scientific and humanistic thought so much that people with advanced knowledge of one rarely have a rudimentary knowledge of the other. In a sense, this is precisely what the General Education curriculum or University Core at FDU work against in an attempt to ensure literacy in several fields for students. The example most often drawn from Snow is comparing Shakespeare to the Second Law of Thermodynamics to ask how many people with a deep familiarity with one also have a rudimentary understanding of the other. The answer is relatively few without a Liberal Arts general education… You may think back to Said’s argument about Orientalism and Foucauldian “styles” of knowledge for this issue, such as how Mathematics either is or is not an “Arts” subject (at FDU it is housed in Computer Science and Engineering). Is the style of knowledge that separates the Humanities and the Sciences helpful or harmful? Should we strive for, at least at the undergraduate level, students to have a wide familiarity with both intellectual fields? Should that broadening of intellectual capabilities also include practical training or skills for jobs? You, as a student, likely have strong feelings about this.

Durrell’s point in referring to Snow is that these pursuits are not entirely separate from each other, and the great challenge is for us to find their points of reconciliation – this is a syncretic way of thinking. It seeks integration across
difference or finds ways to compromise between differences. In a sense, it seeks what different groups have in common and compromises where they are distinct. The gesture that emerges from this in Durrell’s essay is that the former colonizer and colonized likewise must work to find their points of reconciliation. His examples of this are specific: “Valéry studied mathematics, Eliot was familiar with the precepts of Patanjali, Rilke, and Yeats also” (20). These are the poets of his time period, and he is pointing out that they all engaged in other pursuits as well, including the scientific and the religious, the modernist and the esoteric. T.S. Eliot studied Sanskrit and the Upanishads while at Harvard for his PhD, and Yeats collaborated with Shree Purohit Swami on a selected translation of the Upanishads. Durrell’s reference to Heraclitus is in the same tradition, emphasizing the ancient philosopher’s fame for harmonizing forms of difference and accepting instability as normal.

This Heraclitean or syncretic paradigm has much appeal, but it may also risk effacing or minimizing forms of difference. Where it finds commonality, it is less able to find genuinely irreconcilable cultural differences. However, the opposite tendency we see in Orwell’s emphasis on difference also has the potential to lead to conflict and social divisions such as racism.

Decolonization vs. Postcolonial

In the previous week, we compared Albert Memmi to Edward Said. This meant comparing their approaches to colonialism, such as the inevitable historical class conflict in Memmi’s argument and the institutions and styles of knowledge in Said’s analysis. They differ, and part of this comes from their writing in, respectively, a decolonizing moment and a postcolonial moment in history. Orwell and Durrell give us something similar. The inescapable roles Orwell describes for the colonizer and the colonized are easy to read through Memmi’s paradigm. Likewise, Said’s emphasis on the production of knowledge and the styles of knowledge helps us to approach Durrell’s syncretic vision.

In a sense, this means that as we see Memmi and Said committed to projects of decolonization and postcolonialism, respectively, we have the same distinction in Orwell and Durrell. We may, therefore, find Memmi most useful to approaching Orwell and Said most helpful coming to Durrell. The greater challenge, however, is how we consider the differences among them and ways of moving back and forth between both paradigms.

Questions for Self-Review

Please respond to any of these questions on the discussion board in WebCampus. Remember, you have 1 point for your own comment and 1 point for responding to a classmate’s comment.
1. Durrell and Orwell argued with each other whenever they interacted. From reading their essays, why do you think this was so?
2. What do you think is the most important difference between Orwell’s and Durrell’s elephants?
3. How do Orwell’s representations of the Burmese make you feel?
4. How does Durrell’s reconciliation of Orient and Occident make you feel?
5. Are these colonial or decolonizing essays? Why?

Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


Weeks 3–4: Anand’s *Untouchable*

Objectives

1. Distinguish between caste, ethnicity, race, and religion.
2. Use Memmi to describe inequality in Anand’s novel.
3. Describe class/caste conflict using theories of decolonization.
4. Situate Anand’s *Untouchable* in its specific historical context.
5. Distinguish between Anand’s critique of colonialism and that of Orwell and Durrell.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

Please read the assigned readings first and then come to the Study Guide, reading the section for Week 3 once you reach the mid-point of the novel and the section for Week 4 once you have finished the novel. If you find Anand challenging, then read across the Study Guide first and return to the primary text. You will have two short video lectures for each week. Please read the materials first and then turn to the “lectures,” but again, if you need to, use the lectures to help you read across the primary texts. This would not be unusual.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004)

Anand was born in Peshawar during the British Raj in what is Pakistan today. He attended Khalsa College in Amritsar where he became involved in non-violent resistance against British rule. Based on his academic performance when he graduated from the Punjab University in 1924, he was given a scholarship to study in Britain at University College London and then completed his PhD at Cambridge University in Philosophy in 1929. For our context, his doctoral dissertation was on the British philosophers John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell in relation to the British Miners’ Strike. Of these philosophers, only Russell was alive at the time, and Anand moved in the same
social circle as Russell, which we call “Bloomsbury” after the London neighborhood in which many of the “Bloomsbury set” lived. As a brief example, for literary culture, the Bloomsbury set includes E.M. Forster (who wrote a Preface for Untouchable), Virginia Woolf, and T.S. Eliot. Their social life (in particular Woolf’s) would include close friendships with the likes of Russell, John Maynard Keynes (the economist and a director of the Bank of England whose theories became Keynesian Economics), and Lady Ottoline Morrell. This means that Anand moved among the intellectual elite of British society, while during his returns to India he would meet with Jawaharlal Nehru, who would become the first Prime Minister of India, and Mahatma Gandhi. However, he was also somewhat outside of these circles and frequented the Fitzroy Tavern in Fitzrovia, a less “posh” neighborhood. This was the same tavern frequented by both Durrell and Orwell, both of whom Anand knew well. Anand’s Untouchable and Durrell’s Pied Piper of Lovers were both published in 1935, both books being about India and their author’s first novel.

The context of Anand’s doctoral dissertation is important. He wrote on labor strikes using the philosophical work of Russell, which carried a socially progressive perspective. He also relied on the same materialist paradigms that inspired Albert Memmi’s critical work thirty years later. We see the caste system in India depicted and understood, therefore, in a way that makes particular sense through social class. Just as Memmi understood racism in relation to class conflict and economic forces, Anand was predisposed from his studies to think about caste (hierarchical status, called “varna,” as well as tribe tied to employment, called “jati”) through social class and class conflict. That is, Anand used the same conflict-based theory of history as Memmi did.

Anand also met the English actress Kathleen Gelder in 1932. They did not marry until 1939, but her Communism and activism influenced his thoughts while writing Untouchable. This means that the struggle of the Dalit caste (the titular Untouchables who are born into a hereditary role as “sweepers,” meaning latrine or toilet emptiers and cleaners) is presented in the novel in a manner much akin to a Marxist understanding of class conflict. The novel was also written during the conflicts between Gandhi (Bania caste, or merchants) and B. R. Ambedkar (Dalit, or untouchable) leading to the “Poona Pact” in 1932, which also influences the novel’s work.

Untouchable was followed the next year by his novel Coolie (1936), which carried similar themes. He also participated in the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, volunteering for the Republicans (leftists) but primarily doing journalistic work as the Nationalists (monarchists and fascists) won the war. He and Gelder had a daughter in 1942 in London, during World War II. Anand travelled between Britain and India until 1946, at which point he returned to India and made it his primary residence, just prior to Indian Independence in 1947. He and Gelder divorced in 1948, and his major literary works after this point revolved around his five-volume autobiography.
Week 3: Consciousness

A key concept in Anand’s approach to consciousness reflects what we have read in Memmi. To fully understand how consciousness works in Anand, we also need a precursor theoretical concept. For both Memmi and Anand, notice how elements of self-consciousness are based on the material conditions in which a character or figure finds himself or herself. For example, in Memmi, the colonizer comes to think of himself as colonizer because of the material experience of living as a European in a colony. That is, the mental habits of thought are not intrinsic to the person or self but rather are manifestations of the economic position he inhabits in his society. We see the same issue for Bakha’s experience as a Dalit or Untouchable in Anand’s novel. This is not an intrinsic part of his consciousness. It is a product of his social position, yet it determines how his mind and thoughts work.

For both Anand and Memmi, this is based on a key element of Karl Marx’s social theory. We find it implicit in his early activist writings like *The Communist Manifesto* as well as his more theoretical analyses of social conflict such as *Capital*. For example, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx asks

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man’s ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man’s consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life? (Marx, *Communist 21*)

The clearest articulation, however, is in his Preface to his more practical work *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. For Marx,

The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarised as follows. In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx, “Preface” 107)
In context, “superstructure” here refers to the material composition of society, such as its economic resources, the “means of production” (anything from tools through to roadways or seaports, etc.). This is distinct for Marx from “infrastructure,” which is ideological, such as courts, universities, and the belief systems of the people living in the society. The crux, in this statement, is that those material and economic conditions determine all ideology and consciousness.

Recall, in this context, how for Memmi the colonizer must eventually confront his social position as a colonizer. This the moment of class consciousness, or the moment in which a person recognizes the material conditions that have given rise to a form of thought or that determine thought. Naturally, this is an uncomfortable moment, and the urge (according to both Memmi and Marx) is for a person who benefits from this structure to prefer returning to a condition of unconsciousness. When there is no direct economic or material pressure to change, the consciousness itself reverts to its “determined” form. In contrast, for the colonized or for the exploited classes, this moment of self-recognition is driven by the experience of exploitation and hence the experience of class-consciousness may drive an attempt at social change, such as revolution or decolonization.

As you read through Anand, notice these moments of (and the language of) consciousness and unconsciousness. Also recognize that in Anand’s Bloomsbury set, the works of Sigmund Freud were widely discussed: Lytton Strachey’s brother was translating Freud’s work and Virginia and Leonard Woolf were publishing them. Anand is very close to people who would have used this language in a very specific way. We see Bakha daydreaming and unconscious as well as in moments of self-recognition. These would have signaled a very specific interpretive paradigm for Anand’s readers in Bloomsbury.

For example, we see in Bakha the same patterns of consciousness as Memmi describes in the colonized. After his experiences of inclusion, even an exploitative sense of recognition creates in him not a resentment at being exploited but rather loyalty:

Charat Sing’s generous promise had called forth that trait of servility in Bakha which he had inherited from his forefathers, the weakness of the down-trodden, the helplessness of the poor and indigent, suddenly receiving help.... A soft smile lingered on his lips, the smile of a slave overjoyed at the condescension of his master, more akin to pride than to happiness. (Anand 17)

Likewise, the language of the “unconscious” appears around his religious experiences (60) and words such as “yawn” and “unconsciously” occur around his experiences of being a sweater who does not recognize his position as debilitating and exploitative (66). This is in contrast to Bakha’s occasional recognition
that the tools of his oppression are primarily ideological or psychological, such as groups that are “defiled” by touching him but that bully him by not allowing him to pass (48) – the reality that Bakha recognizes, momentarily, is that he is bigger and stronger, and that they would suffer the consequences of touching him, not the other way around (48). Of course, he immediately forgets this.

This leads to a culminating moment of self-consciousness for Bakha in which the conflict created by his oppression coincides with his consciousness of being oppressed. Unlike the colonizer, this moment has a radical potential to drive to revolutionary change. Amidst his dreaming of “becoming a sahib” in conflict with his “hereditary life” as a sweeper (52), Bakha has his recognition:

> Like a ray of light shooting through the darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance of his lot dawned upon him. It illuminated the inner chambers of his mind. Everything that had happened to him traced its course up to this light and got the answer.... ‘I am an Untouchable!’ he said to himself, ‘an Untouchable!’... Then, aware of his position, he began to shout... (Anand 52)

This shout does not actually lead Bakha into a revolutionary struggle for freedom, but it is an indication for the reader of how to approach this conflict. It also suggests how we approach the closing of the novel following on Bakha’s discovery of Gandhi’s non-violent resistance in the satyagraha movement.

**Week 4: “Fashun” & Material History**

A complication in Anand’s novel comes from the relationship between the caste system and British imperialism. As we see in Bakha, the primary oppressors in his direct experience are his fellow Indians. While we, the readers, may have a very different perspective, Bakha experiences the British “Tommies” as a part of the community that is outside of the caste system and that therefore does not see him as untouchable. This is deeply problematic since the struggle for Dalit rights was negotiated during the writing of the novel between the British, Ambedkar, and Gandhi, so British colonialism was directly a part of Bakha’s experiences, even if it appears distant from his perspective in the novel. Again, in a Marxist context, we could refer to this loosely as “false consciousness.” As with the preceding discussion of consciousness in Anand and Memmi, this concept relates to material conditions of oppression and the forms of thought these conditions give rise to. Specifically, it is the forms of thought that are amenable or helpful to a system of oppression – for Bakha this is his feeling of inferiority and his admiration for those who oppress him. As with Memmi, we might look to examples in colonialism, such as how a colonized people might feel inferior or might look to the colonizer with admiration and desire.
An example of the importance of British colonialism comes in Bakha’s admiration for British “fashun” or clothing. This is a politicized example in the novel, when we put it in its historical context. Textiles (fabrics) have long been a classic case study for theories of colonialism and exploitation. Marx and Rosa Luxemburg both rely on textile industries to give examples of colonial exploitation. Where this appears in Untouchable is the production of cotton and indigo (an important fabric dye) in India, which was then shipped to Britain (in particular Lancashire) for textile production. Britain banned the import of fabric from India, so India was only able to export raw materials for production in British factories. The machinery for the industrial production of textiles was also kept in Britain rather than in the colonies. Unsurprisingly, indigo was the origin of one of the first decolonization revolutions in India, and Gandhi used Indian-produced fabric as a key point of non-violent resistance against British rule. In the paradigm of false consciousness, “good fabric” would mean British fabric, and good fashion would be British rather than Indian, connoting higher social rank or station. In this way, British rule was economically reinforced by the economic consumption of British products by the colonized themselves.

For Bakha, this means that by aligning himself to British values and fashions, he symbolically feels as if he has greater freedom, even though we as readers see this as cementing his role as the colonized. It also does nothing to actually resist the conditions of the caste system. It is purely symbolic with regard to his benefits, but it is economically real with regard to his condition as a colonized person. Notice, for example, how we as readers briefly inhabit Bakha’s consciousness (even though we are supposed to understand things that he cannot yet understand):

He felt amused as an Englishman might be amused, to see a Hindu loosen his dhoti to pour some water first over his navel and then down his back in a flurry of ecstatic hymn-singing. And he watched with contemptuous displeasure the indecent behaviour of a Mohammedan walking about with his hands buried deep in his trousers. (19)

While Bakha is socially inferior to both of these people, by virtue of his English “fashun,” he feels himself to be momentarily superior to them. It is as if by consuming British goods and adopting British habits (while abandoning his own culture), he hopes to become British himself, and thereby the colonizer looking down on those within his own society who dominate him. This is, of course, not going to happen for Bakha, but by elevating British culture and consuming British products, he solidifies British colonial rule. We should also note the inappropriate slur “Mohammedan,” which the British might use but that Bakha himself would not normally adopt.
Another simple example of this cultural transformation appears in the tea ritual. Britain adopted tea from India and China, but we see Bakha abandoning his own indigenous habits of tea drinking in order to adopt those of the British.

His tongue was slightly burnt with the small sips because he did not, as his father did, blow on the tea to cool it. This was another of the things he had learnt at the British barracks from the Tommies. His uncle had said that the goras didn’t enjoy the full flavour of the tea because they did not blow on it. But Bakha considered that both his uncle’s and his father’s spattering spits were natu habits.

In this very short scene, Bakha not only replaces his own authentic tea drinking with the habits of a colonizer who had borrowed the ritual of drinking tea, he also enjoys his tea less by doing so. Bakha burns his tongue by attempting to emulate the British habits, so his elevation of all things British leads directly to his diminished pleasure. His uncle, by criticizing the British way of drinking tea as incorrect or less enjoyable, is then criticized by Bakha in a way that makes him feel superior but leaves him with a burnt tongue and small, less flavorful sips of tea. This scene symbolically stands in for Indian consumption of British culture and products in general, and most specifically textiles.

Gandhi’s Swaraj movement included the Swadeshi policy to boycott British fabrics and rely on the Khadi movement that would have decentralized, charkha (hand-held spindle) woven fabrics produced locally in India. This was a key element of the non-violent resistance against British rule. Indian and British readers alike would recognize the importance of textiles to this struggle, so the role of “fashun” and clothing in the novel would have been immediately obvious to them when the book was first published – the relationship between the British Raj and fabrics would be as obvious and natural to them as the relationship between the Iraq War and oil is to people today. However, by relying on British habits and products in order to feel good about himself (this being a direct consequence of his subjugation in the caste system), Bakha directly subverts Gandhi’s independence movement. Anand cannot say this explicitly in the novel, lest it become a lecture rather than a story, but it is a clear point.

We as readers, if we adopt this historical context, then notice how closely Bakha’s mistreatment by his fellow Indians relates to his abject glorification of all things British, and likewise how closely this is connected to the problems of consciousness:

[Bakha] drifted in his unconscious happiness towards the cloth shop where a big-bellied lalla (Hindu gentleman), clad in an immaculately white loose muslin shirt, and loin-cloth was busy
writing in curious hieroglyphics on a scroll book bound in ochre-coloured canvas, which his assistants unrolled bundles of Manchester cloth one after another.... That was the kind of cloth of which the sahibs’ suits were made; the other cloth that he had seen before the yokels he could imagine turning soon into tunics... All that was beneath his notice. But the woollen cloth, so glossy and nice! so expensive looking!... He remembered that he had promised to pay the babu’s son for the English lesson. (44–45)

In this scene, we would do well to notice how the Hindu shopkeeper is dressed in locally produced and locally styled clothing, even though he sells British goods to other (his economic interests lead him to subvert Indian independence), while at the same time Bakha can feel superior to his Indian oppressor by admiring the British wool cloth. Of course, wearing wool in Bakha’s climate would be challenging, but by admiring the British fabric he looks on those who shun him as “yokels” and immediately is reminded of his English lessons. That Bakha invests his scant income on English lessons, shows how his pursuit of Englishness is actually part of what keeps him subjugated. Likewise, this passage opens with the keyword “unconscious.” The unthinking happiness brought on by his unawareness of his domination is precisely what leads Bakha to the textiles shop and his direct support for British rule and subversion of Indian independence, both of which are contrary to his own best interests.

Morgensen & the Settler University

As an expansion on our readings in Anand, and in preparation for our turn to concepts of indigeneity in Alex La Guma, please reading Morgensen’s article “Destabilizing the Settler Academy.” It is short and clear but will require a good deal of concentrated attention because it addresses difficult concepts. In particular, think back to our readings in Edward Said and his comments on Orientalism as a style of knowledge and as an academic discipline. Morgensen’s argument take a similar approach to discussion of indigenous identities within settler-colonial academies (universities). The problem in this is knowledge itself, how we come to know things, and just as importantly what things we come to not know. The styles of knowledge and the operations of power (with knowledge as one of power’s principle products) is the key to Moregensen’s argument in this article. While it is somewhat distinct from Anand’s approach in Untouchable, you may also ask how Anand’s imposition of Marxist (Eurocentric) critical ideas on an essentially Indian caste problem can itself be seen as a product of his educational background at English institutions, both in India and in England. Said slightly differently, is Anand’s Marxist approach to his own Indian culture itself an instance of Orientalism? Morgensen will ask us to
question the nature of our own studies in settler-colonial universities of North America, including our potential reluctance to identify as settler-colonials.

Questions for Self-Review

Please respond to any of these questions on the discussion board in WebCampus. Remember, you have 1 point for your own comment and 1 point for responding to a classmate’s comment.

1. How do you see Anand and Memmi as similar or different in their thoughts about colonialism?
2. Why would Anand’s novel, written during colonial rule, be important to postcolonial literature?
3. In what ways do you engage in thoughts or consumerism today that could be comparable to Bakha’s “fashun”?
4. What example can you think of today that works like consciousness in Anand’s novel?
5. How much Edward Said read Anand differently than Memmi would (or we have in the Study Guide)?

Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


Week 5: Chinua Achebe & Ngugi wa Thiong’o

Objectives

1. Distinguish language from literature as cultural products.
2. Relate language change to colonial history.
3. Identify language’s role in community for cohesion or division.
4. Relate changes in language usage to colonization and decolonization.
5. Contrast Ngugi’s and Achebe’s positions on language and literature.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

Please read the assigned readings first and then come to the Study Guide. If you find the excerpts from Ngugi and Achebe challenging, then read across the Study Guide first and return to the primary texts (this is not unusual — they can be challenging texts depending on what you have already read). These texts should fit together as they form a statement and response, so please read Ngugi’s “The Language of African Literature” first and then Achebe’s response to it in “The Politics of Language.”

Ngugi wa Thiong’o (b. 1938–)

Ngugi’s “The Language of African Literature” is drawn from his book Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (1986), for which it is the opening chapter. We are reading only an excerpt from that chapter. In order to understand his project in context, the essay can be seen as expressing a moment of change in Ngugi’s writing. He wrote his first novel Weep Not, Child (1964) in English and wrote his second and third novels while in England studying for his Master of Arts (although he had already at least drafted a
part of his second novel while still in Kenya). His fourth novel, *Petals of Blood* (1977) was his last written in English – it was published while he was in prison but was written earlier. He was imprisoned for the political content of his writings after returning to Kenya, and he turned to Frantz Fanon’s critical writings to articulate his home country’s decolonization. While in prison, he wrote his fifth novel *Devil on the Cross* (1980) on toilet paper (we will see this again later with Alex La Guma) – based on Fanon’s influence, he had reverted his name from “James Ngugi” to the traditional Ngugi wa Thiong’o (Ngugi, son of Thiong’o) and began writing in his mother tongue Gikuyu. This means that *Devil on the Cross* was the first modern novel written in the Gikuyu language. After Ngugi’s release from prison at the very end of 1978, he and his family left Kenya, but he continued to write his creative work only in Gikuyu. He became a Professor at Yale University, then New York University, and finally settled permanently at the University of California, Irvine.

Ngugi’s shift to writing in Gikuyu was part of the critical argument set out in “The Language of African Literature.” He believed that a crucial element of decolonization is linguistic – keep this idea in mind for later in the course as we turn to indigenous authors of North American, in particular Richard Van Camp. For Ngugi, writing in English was a continuation of the colonial project and imposed colonial values and a colonial mentality on the now independent population. For this reason, reviving African languages is part of “decolonizing the mind.” Based on Fanon’s Marxist arguments about decolonization, Ngugi also prioritized the African peasant population as holding the cultural heritage of language, mythology, and folk traditions. His novels in Gikuyu are meant to bring this working-class culture back into the urban centers of decolonization (to the high culture consumers and to universities). His children’s books serve the same purpose.

A challenge for Ngugi, however, was the reality of a limited reading population for Gikuyu, and his novels were translated into English (his first and third Gikuyu novels were translated by Ngugi himself, and the middle novel by Wangui wa Goro, who also translated Ngugi’s children’s books). There is also the European nature of the novel form itself, which Ngugi challenges. The history of the modern novel as we understand it comes out of the Enlightenment. Rather than simply a series of events, as early novels might be, we see the novel as deeply entangled with ideas of subjectivity and change or personal growth. This is part of the *Bildungsroman* tradition (the novel of growth). In this, we see characters grow and change over time (the *Bildung* of the *roman*, which simply means “novel”). This means embracing the Enlightenment ideas of growth, rationality, reason, and self-contemplation, all of which developed (as literary concerns) in Europe concomitant with the growth of colonialism, in part because of the wealth and leisure that colonialism could make possible (think back to our discussion of these issues in Weeks...
1 and 2). In this, we may ask how it is possible to decolonize language without also decolonizing the novel form itself...

It is also important to recognize that while we see Ngugi in argument with Achebe in this week’s readings, they were also friends and mutually supported each other. Achebe was largely responsible for the publication of Achebe’s first novel in the Heinemann African Writers Series, and they interacted across their writing careers.

**Chinua Achebe (1930–2013)**

Achebe may be most familiar to FDU students from UNIV 2001, which typically includes his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958). He was also granted an honorary Doctor of Letters (PhD) by FDU in 2002. In contrast to Ngugi, he is from the West African country Nigeria (Kenya is on Africa’s East coast), and the two countries have very different histories after colonization. Kenya, while ethnically diverse, maintained English and Swahili as official languages and was a relatively stable democracy after independence. Nigeria is a much more populous country with a bloody civil war following on its independence. In part, it can be argued that his was due to the greater geographical division of Nigeria’s different ethnic groups. This is particularly important to Achebe’s works since the region that seceded as the Republic of Biafra was his home, and he strongly supported Biafran independence. The Biafran Rebellion (1967–70) led to enormous suffering by the civilian population and a humanitarian crisis (Doctors Without Borders, as an aid organization, was created as a response to the war atrocities and starvation of the civilian population). While Achebe supported Biafran independence and was part of the persecuted Igbo minority population, he also saw the importance of national culture and the utility of English as a language that would not naturalize power in a single linguistic group in Nigeria.

Achebe’s novels were all written in English, with vocabulary drawn from Igbo and other languages. While he and Ngugi shared a view of the arts and the novel form as a way of building a modern, decolonized community, they differed with regard to language. A concrete example of their differences is Achebe’s most famous work, *Things Fall Apart*. While the novel is about Igbo culture and the first stages of colonialism, by virtue of being in English, it is widely read across African countries with very different cultures, communities, and languages. This embodies much of Achebe’s argument: that English is an inheritance of colonialism but should be retained since it can produce a post-colonial unity among communities that are ethnically and religiously diverse. Nigeria’s official language is English, which means the mother tongue of a single ethnic group does not privilege one group over another in government (such as Igbo in conflict with Yoruba). In contrast, Kenya has two
official languages, English and Swahili, but Swahili is (like English) a common bridge language used widely beyond the ethnically Swahili community.

While Achebe shared much of Ngugi’s critical/theoretical approach to decolonization, such as deep interests in Fanon and Césaire, his arguments are focused more specifically on the national context of Nigeria. This national framework means that Achebe seeks a way to speak across communities that do not have a common language other than English – to find a national identity in Nigeria after British rule meant to speak in English lest communities be excluded from each other. The role of Swahili in Kenya (even if Ngugi wrote in Gikuyu) meant that another language was possible as a bridge. Of course, like the *Bildungsroman*, the idea of the nation state and of national sovereignty is also of European origins, most often traced back to the Peace of Westphalia treaties in 1648, just as the Marxist theories of decolonization that were interpreted by Achebe and Ngugi are of European origin and fitted to a Western social paradigm.

Achebe and Ngugi

Achebe and Ngugi first met in 1961 when Achebe visited the English department in which Ngugi was a student – Ngugi showed Achebe his first published story in the department’s literary magazine *Penpoint* (so don’t be shy about sending your work to *Knightscape* either!). However, their more propitious meeting was the next year at what is now a famous conference. This was the “Conference of African Writers of English Expression,” which became the recurring African Writers Conference, at Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda. At this conference, the seeds for the dispute we see between Achebe and Ngugi were planted. Several authors at the event questioned how the conference title excluded many African writers based on language.

Part of the discussion in this historical moment came from the decolonization movement moving quickly (think of the timeline for African decolonization movements from Week 1). This opened the issue of language and nationalism. In this articulation, writing in indigenous African languages was thought of a part of a specifically nationalist movement that would reconstruct or restore national identity. As we see later in Achebe, this sense of the “nation” can be complicated when the nation state includes diverse groups that were not previously held together by a pre-colonial collective identity. Hence, they inherit a nation that exists as a distinct whole only because of its shared colonial history.

Obiajunwa Wali argued that the English language emphasis set African literature as a subset to European literature, always mimicking it and echoing essentially European movement and aesthetics (13–14). In effect, Wali argues that the use of English measures African literature by a standard
that continues the colonial legacy by effacing African literary history and re-
placing it with English history (14). As a response to the conference of 1962,
Wali offers us a way of thinking about Achebe’s and Ngugi’s dispute as a piece
of a much larger and ongoing debate. If we expand beyond Achebe and
Ngugi, or rather if we see them as taking part in a larger discussion, then we
have a mobile framework that may be helpful with other texts.

Questions for Self-Review

Please respond to any of these questions on the discussion board in
WebCampus. Remember, you have 1 point for your own comment and 1 point for responding to a classmate’s comment.

1. How does the Achebe-Ngugi dispute relate to our readings from Mulk
   Raj Anand?
2. Is the use of English by African writers a continuation of colonialism
   or a path to independence?
3. What languages do you hear in your community? Do they have a colo-
   nial history or do they relate to social hierarchies?
4. Can we discuss literary style in the same way as Achebe and Ngugi
discuss language?
5. Can a culture communicate itself (or perpetuate itself) in a new lan-
guage, or does changing languages change a culture or community?

Works Cited & Supplemental Reading

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Arnove, Anthony. “Pierre Bourdieu, the Sociology of Intellectuals, and the

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Week 6: Durrell’s “Oil for the Saint”

Objectives

1. Relate the travel narrative in “Oil for the Saint” to postcolonial theories of power.
2. Define and identify irony.
3. Relate “Oil for the Saint” to its physical and historical context.
4. Recognize the pilgrimage theme in “Oil for the Saint.”
5. Identify the importance of language and representation in the story’s outline of imperialism and power.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

Please read the assigned readings first and then come to the Study Guide. If you find Durrell's travel narrative challenging to understand, then read across the Study Guide first and return to the primary texts (this is not unusual – it can be a challenging texts depending on what you have already read and your familiarity with the Mediterranean).

Irony?

We have one central question when we read Durrell’s “Oil for the Saint”: is this story an ironical critique of colonialism or a sincere expression of colonial privilege. It’s clear that Durrell was selling his story to a British readership that would enjoy a nostalgic reminiscence of the privilege of colonial history, but at the same time things don’t add up. By putting the story more specifically within its landscape and colonial history, we will open this question to inspection. It is also entirely possible that this is really two stories: one for read-
ers hungry for colonial nostalgia, and another for readers eager to critique colonialism and its legacies.

**Corfu**

Few landscapes can make as strong a claim to an overt colonial influence as the island Corfu in Greece. It is “beautified” by a replica of Paris’s Rue de Rivoli, built by the French; it has two Venetian fortresses (and a Venetian cityscape); British government buildings and a church; and even an Austrian mansion. Corfu offers up a cosmopolitan palimpsest of urban landscapes to countless tourists every year. This overlaying of histories, cultures, architectures, and even personal experiences is the crux of Lawrence Durrell’s pilgrimage tale, “Oil for the Saint; Return to Corfu” (1966), which is a work of autobiographical-historical fiction that sits atop the material fact of the island itself and its colonial landscape. Durrell, as the “returning native,” subverts the colonial mindset that allows him to define and depict a foreign landscape for foreign readers. At the same time, the story is an attempt at reconciliation—a pilgrimage quite literally—between his various adopted homes: Greece, France, and Britain.

By drawing on a close examination of the landscape and history of Corfu in contrast to the biographical information about Durrell’s actual visit to the island, we discover that Durrell “tricks” the trusting reader into a series of misconceptions. In effect, by performing the role of the colonial traveler completing a pilgrimage to a real shrine, Durrell’s narrator (who goes by Durrell’s name) gives a disturbingly exact rendition of the tourist-reader’s expectations of such a voyage and place. He even creates obvious contradictions that are oddly difficult for readers to notice. In so doing, the text subverts the reader’s easy acceptance of the travel narrative as a means to “knowing” a place or people in a colonial context.

**Colonial &/or Post-colonial?**

Durrell’s place in colonial literature is debated. Some interpret his works as the height of colonial exoticism and power-laded misrepresentations of colonized locations under the domination of Empire, but at the same time others regard Durrell as an ironical critic of the violence of colonialism and the misrepresentations it leads to. To an extent, this kind of conflict comes naturally to an author with Durrell’s confused nationality and political history, being a British official but defined as a British non-patrial (born in British India to parents born in British India and hence unable to enter or settle in Britain without a visa). Moreover, regardless of Durrell’s personal intentions or aims, his texts can have effects independent of any supposed intentions.
In this context, “Oil for the Saint” encourages the reader to create an imaginary land, or to imaginatively recreate familiar terrain. It acts as a tour guide, but one that appears to carry a secondary purpose of castigating and critiquing tourists themselves (its primary audience). “Oil for the Saint” has been used to promote tourism on the Greek island, Corfu, has been used as a tour guide, a biographical source, and a means to claiming knowledge of the sites it describes. For this reason, our examination here is based doubly on the work’s playfulness with the pilgrimage-travel genre and its role as a deceptive record in the colonial tradition on the island. Whether it is an example of colonial exoticism or it is an ironical critique of colonialism remains the reader’s decision.

The Palimpsest

The palimpsest, as a concept, brings together all these levels in the text, where the colonial ‘genre’ performs, the text interacts with its paratexts, and the reader encounters an unsettling re-enactment of real and imagined landscapes. In a literal sense, a palimpsest is a piece of writing that has been scraped clear (such as scraping off the existing writing on a piece of vellum [sheep’s skin paper] and then writing over top of it). Students can create a palimpsest by writing on a piece of paper in pencil, erasing it, and then writing over it again—the earlier writing is never completely erased... While this idea of the literal palimpsest in the manuscript is engaging, the concept of archaeological layers is more useful for the story’s structure and depiction of the landscape. This means that the story shows one history set on top of another nearly erased or scraped off history, such as history of colonial occupations buried under a new history of foreign tourism. The palimpsest as a concept is suitable for this story because it is also a key theme in Durell’s two larger works, The Alexandria Quartet and The Avignon Quintet. By applying the palimpsest to the landscape, we remain within the larger context of Durrell’s oeuvre.

Durrell makes the significant claim at the beginning of the work that

This island was where I first met Greece, learned Greek, lived like a fisherman, made my home with a peasant family. Here too I had made my first convulsive attempts on literature, learned to sail, been in love. Corfu would have too much to live up to. (“Oil” 287)

The word “peasant” is not necessarily as derogatory as one would think at first (especially since “horia” is still commonly used in Modern Greek), although Durrell’s choice of the word is telling for his audience. More important is the last line of this passage. If “Corfu would have too much to live up to” (287), then the reader is notified at the beginning that there is a previous impression.
in the narrator's mind, and this impression may even influence new perceptions that build on top of it. This suggests—and it soon becomes obvious—that the aesthetic of the landscape is being compared to a work of art: Kalami “ha[s] a formal completeness” “whose confines were all there to be enjoyed and measured” (“Oil” 296). Moreover, like a painting, the surface of the landscape of memory (or a real landscape) can be repainted, while like a palimpsest there is an inevitable, archeological ‘bleed-through’ from one layer into another. Each layer partially covers the previous, but allows us to see its predecessor and its influence. Memory bleeds through into experience just as expectations shape the reading experience and the foundations of an older building can determine the dimensions of the new.

The narrator’s new experiences in Corfu and the action of “Oil for the Saint” constantly juxtapose against and refer to his own earlier books about the island, often with the assumption that the reader is familiar with these previous works. We are treated as experienced readers who will recognize his own references to his earlier books about Corfu. This memory is re-invoked shortly after the quotation above, but now mixed with direct perception and representation:

But now the town was approaching and here once more the early sunlight traversed to pick up the curves of the Venetian harbour, the preposterous curvilinear shapes of its belfries and balconies. We docked to the boom of the patron saint’s bell—Saint Spyridon of holy memory. (“Oil” 288)

Significantly, like Durrell’s own foreignness on the island, the patron saint mentioned here, Saint Spyridon, is also a foreigner. He was brought to the island after death and mummification, only to become a part of the ‘native’ landscape. Corfu has long been a crossroads in the Mediterranean world, and Durrell’s problematizing of the colonial implications of his own “return” must be put in this context in order to be fully appreciated.

It is also important that Durrell travels through major aspects of the island’s architecture in his narrative, and he specifically grounds the pilgrimage tale in references to material objects and sites, as if to give authenticity to his fiction. The “belfries and balconies” in the passage quoted above tell the reader that this is not a Santorini-like Greek island but rather one with a different architecture. In fact, the first lighted shape is the “Venetian harbour.” In this way, Durrell anchors his story in the colonial history that is carved into the very rock of the island, since this architecture makes the centuries of occupation, combat, and cultural hybridity as readable as his own text: a “preposterous” series of Venetian, British, and French sights for a Greek island (288).

In his first specific mention of the colonial architecture of Corfu Town, Durrell again draws on the artistic metaphor that is implicit in his ref-
ferences to memory. Moreover, this overview of the cityscape foregrounds the concept of the palimpsest:

Though the town is a series of unfinished intentions, Venetian, French, British, it remains a masterpiece; I doubt if there is any little town is as elegantly beautiful in the whole of Greece. Each nation in turn projected something grandiose to beautify it—and then fell asleep. (“Oil” 289)

These “unfinished intentions,” which is a rather careful phrase, also reflect the numerous colonial occupations of Corfu as a vitally important military site in the Mediterranean Sea. These “unfinished intentions” include the Venetian Empire that controlled it for 401 years, as well as the French and the British Empires.

We should also notice Durrell’s equally careful phrase “Each nation in turn projected something... and then fell asleep” (“Oil” 289). Given his longstanding interest in psychoanalysis, observable as early as his first novel in 1935, “projected” is a loaded word for him to have chosen, especially in the context of his delicate phrasing that avoids the nasty details of prior colonial occupations. Moreover, in the context of the cityscape itself, “projection” is literally the matter at hand. The French have projected an image of Paris onto their colony, the Venetians have done likewise, as did the British.

Furthermore, the narrator’s suggestion that colonizing nations have “beautified” the island allows the reader—who is presumably a Western and English-speaking Holiday magazine fan—to comfortably avoid the complicated and potentially disturbing political details hiding beneath the surface of the palimpsest of these admittedly lovely “unfinished intentions.” Durrell had first-hand experience with the British colonial project, being both a stranger to Britain and an official in the British foreign office. His first novel, Pied Piper of Lovers, describes his childhood in India and the deep conflict between competing national identities that he could not reconcile. Much later, he fled his home and position on Cyprus fearing for his life during the attempted union with Greece. These and other incidents in Belgrade, Cairo, Alexandria, Athens, Buenos Aires, and Rhodes suggest that Durrell is not only familiar with the uncomfortable political details he chooses not to allude to, but also that he is intimate with them. He lived in Belgrade under Tito’s Communist regime while it broke from the Soviet Cominform, in Argentina under Péron’s rule, on Cyprus during its revolt from British occupation, and in Alexandria & Cairo as a refugee during World War II—in each instance, he also represented the British government.

With “Oil for the Saint” written after his retirement from the British Foreign Office, the “beautifying” contention and the “falling asleep” of these colonizing nations are intriguing phrases that sidestep the political affairs in
which Durrell had considerable direct experience and for which he held an open distaste. What he has chosen to leave unexcavated in the story’s archaeological dig is informative to the close reader. We visit all the sites the give evidence to the colonial violence of the island, yet none of this history is ever directly mentioned.

The Tour in the Text

Durrell’s meandering reminiscences of the cityscape continue as his pilgrimage from sea to shrine progresses. He notes: “The Venetians fell asleep over the citadel, though they remembered to leave the winged lion there” (“Oil” 289), and this attests to an exploration of the New Fortress adjacent to the harbour, where the Venetian emblem still guards the walls and gates. Notably, the citadel itself is British, added onto the Venetian New Fortress, although both of Corfu Town’s two forts bear the winged lion. Also, as Durrell’s first specific architectural reference, the fortress is informative—the purpose of the two intimidating fortresses in Corfu Town is obvious, and their contribution to the military history of the place is told all too clearly in their wounded and bullet-marked exteriors. As, by far, the largest constructed features of the entire island, the two fortresses make the most palpable statement about the colonizing powers that have “slept” there and the sometimes brutal force that such powers exercised in their restless doze.

The layering of histories continues in the story when Durrell mentions, “the French built half the Rue de Rivoli and then discontinued it” (“Oil” 289). The Rue de Rivoli is one of the most famous streets in Paris, running past the Musée du Louvre, one of the largest and most recognized museums in the world. Under Napoleon, the French built a replica of the Rue de Rivoli in the centre of the Medieval Corfu Town (a Venetian city). Nonetheless, rather than “discontinued it,” in Durrell’s careful phrasing, he could more accurately say the French were forcibly expelled from Corfu. As a diplomat and officer in the British Foreign office, Durrell was intimately involved in political strife in Greece, especially in Athens and Cyprus, so his choice of words here should again be taken as very specific. Moreover, he is visiting Corfu not as a British subject of Indian nationality, as he was during the time depicted in his first book about Corfu, Prospero’s Cell, but rather he came in 1966 as a French resident and soon to be French citizen who had lost his access to Britain when immigration from India and Pakistan were limited in the 1960s. Hence, Durrell as the tourist embodies the French and British colonizers of the island, so his continuing reminders of the colonial history are uncomfortable—he is neither celebrating nor condemning the history but instead brings it to the reader’s attention.

Moreover, in the “Splenada” (Rue de Rivoli), we have physical proof of the French presence, but in its incompleteness, we also have evidence for the
curtailed duration of their stay. The French began it but were expelled before their could finish. In this very brief overview of the architecture of Corfu Town, Durrell has already established the multinational and political context of the island that will inform the pilgrimage portion of the narrative that takes him outside the city-centre.

Lastly, Durrell continues, “The British elaborated the stylish Government House with stone especially imported from Malta—but did not stay long enough to enjoy its amenities fully” (“Oil” 289). As the most recent colonial power on the island, apart from tourists, Britain has left a sizeable impact, despite its relatively short stay. Again, the reader should pay close attention to Durrell’s wordy rephrasing of the ejection of the British as “[they] did not stay long enough to enjoy its amenities fully” (“Oil” 289. After the Ionian islands unified with Greece, the British gave the building to the Greek state, while at the same time the Old Fortress’ walls were dismantled or exploded, despite protests based on its historic value. The Government House served, for a time, as the summer residence of the Greek royal family, but is now the Asian Art Museum with extensive materials from Korea, Japan, China, and visiting exhibitions from Afghanistan.

Home & Abroad

Durrell is implicated in multiple aspects of the colonial history of the island, and even at this relatively late point in his life, ‘home’ and ‘nation’ are difficult terms to integrate into his works. The term “home” is just as problematic for Durrell as is his self-description as a “native,” and likewise these architectural sites are uncomfortably “Corfiot” even after they are reclaimed. Durrell contends: “all these motifs blend perfectly and become in some subtle fashion neither Venetian, British, French nor even Greek. They become Corfiot” (“Oil” 289). In the same respect, for the traveling resident, can one consider issues of hybridity and reclaiming in the terms “home” and “native”? If so, is there a meaningful way to distinguish between the cumulative creation of the Corfiot landscape and the foreign resident who becomes the returning native? What claim do these foreign constructions make on the land they occupy, and how can the native and landed population identify with this reconstructed landscape?

After surveying these politically charged landmarks of the city, the pilgrimage of the narrative takes over and Durrell describes personally charged landmarks from the places where he lived. Moreover, while we have seen the palimpsest of the landscape successively overwritten by different colonial architectures, this nostalgic return to Kalami and the Shrine of Saint Arsenius (the saint of the title) takes place over the text of Prospero’s Cell and hence continues the palimpsest in a more literal sense.
On returning to the White House, where he had lived with his first wife Nancy, Durrell is told by his old landlord Athenaios, “The foreigners that come. So many, you will see. Every Sunday many caiques come from town to see the house. Many British; very nice people. Each one has a radio which is very loud. It is marvelous” (“Oil” 297). Durrell mocks such tourists throughout the story as a whole, despite the audience of the magazine that the work appears in, *Holiday*. It is as if in doing so, his own tour (and the one his reader is on) is somehow ostensibly above such brash “trade in itinerant celebrity hunters” (“Oil” 297). Athenaios’ wife makes the pilgrimage of these tourists more explicit and more like the modern pilgrimage: “‘Later we will start a hotel,’ said Kerkira. ‘And then they can stay here all the time with their radios. Already we have many who rent your room—remember where you used to work?’” (“Oil” 297). The monetary aspect of Kerkira’s speech is important here such that the tourists are welcome to these peasants; however, the reader is clearly meant to dislike the commercial transformation of rural Kalami into a rented resort with radios. Immediately after this speech, Durrell’s “heart sank slightly” (“Oil” 297), which is as if to say ours should sink as well. Durrell is playing off the stereotype of the tourist who wants to tour a place before it is “ruined” by tourists.

**Reality & Imagination**

However, there is a second significant point in this same moment with Kerkira endorsing tourism. It is only through Kerkira, who is the primary proponent of increasing tourism, that Durrell creates a voice that contradicts his narrator and that speaks for the island. Moreover, the story ostensibly tells of Durrell’s unaccompanied return to Corfu—in reality, the work sits over three such trips in the summers of 1964 through 1966 (MacNiven 539-548), during all which he lived on the Western side of the island near Paleocastrizza with his wife Claude as well as (for the 1964 trip) his daughter Sappho and Claude’s two children. This is far from Corfu Town, and the family circumstances contradict his travel narrative. Such an image is far from that of the romantic traveller reveling nostalgically in his lonely memories, and whom the reader encounters in the work.

More significantly, “Kerkira” is also the Greek name for Corfu, which is oddly absent from the rest of the text. Durrell is quite honest in the story when he mentions his fluent Greek. Durrell completed and published several translations from Greek authors and poets, including some of the earliest translations of Seferis and Cavafy, and he spoke the language fluently, even writing in Greek for newspapers. This is surprising.

For this reason, we as readers must consider two problems. First, why do the foreign words for Kerkira—Corfu (English) and Corcyra (Latin)—appear in the story, while the Greek word does not? This is particularly sur-
prising given the fact that Durrell has specifically told the reader several times that all of his conversations are being carried out in Greek—his “fluent Greek puzzled” the taxi driver (“Oil” 289)—and he apparently delights in using selected Greek words familiar to the tourist, such as “ouzo,” “retsina,” and “caique.” At the conclusion of the story, the reader is even told: “It is a great thing’ said Niko sagely, ‘to be a creator.’ He used the ancient word ‘demiurge’ which is still current in modern Greek” (“Oil” 302), and this word is repeated a number of times over the next page. Why is language so tightly controlled and the endorsement of tourism spoken by a woman named for the island without Durrell ever explaining this to this readers? Second, if these conversations are in Greek, why, when Durrell meets his “peasant friends,” does the dialogue echo pidgin English (the simplified language one might expect from Greeks talking in English, a language they would know poorly, rather than the complex language that both Durrell and the Greeks both speak in). It would appear that for the sake of the narrative in Holiday magazine, Durrell often uses rustic, broken sentences to approximate the tourist’s expectations. A careful reader would find this silly while a casual reading or tourist would accept it as natural and normal—why would Durrell constructor this difference for two distinct types of readers? In this playfulness with Greek and English cognates, Kerkira is quite literally the voice of the island.

The Pilgrim & Pilgrimage

As the pilgrimage (and our retracing of the text) winds to a close, the reader is slowly led to the shrine of Saint Arsenius, near Kalami, and Durrell completes the archetypal journey with the reconciliation between France, Britain, and Greece. In this way, “Oil for the Saint” is the reconciliation between nations that picks up after the intercultural violence of the island history of warfare and suffering. Durrell writes that he “think[s] only that the shrine with the three black cypresses and the tiny rock-pool where we bathed must still be left” (133). While Durrell is never explicit about cultural hybridity in the course of the story, it is significant to note at this climactic point, and given his interest in archetypal theory and his earlier correspondence with Carl Jung, the journey as a form of appeasement seems inevitable. As the story is entitled, “Oil for the Saint,” at the conclusion of the pilgrimage the discussion surrounds the mixing of Greek and French olive oil in the religious lamps of the Shrine of Saint Arsenius: “I entered the little chapel, after so long, with emotion…. I unstoppered my phial of green oil and reverently tipped it into the glass bowl” (“Oil” 300). Moreover, Niko explains to him:

‘If it lights the first time… it means you are welcome and that [Arsenius] has no outstanding complaints against you.’….. The wick flamed up and Athenaios clapped his hands softly. All of
Saint Arsenius’ presumed pleasure in the tribute of the French oil points to a reconciliation of the colonial history of the island that has been indirectly presented across the story, as well as the complex interplay between the architectural artefacts of colonial domination and their reclaiming in a distinctly Corfiot identity. This same hybridity may apply to Durrell’s thorny assertion of himself as a returning “native” with a sense of nostalgia for a place that most properly cannot ever be his “home.”

Returning to the architectural ‘palimpsest’ we discovered in the opening of the story, the Shrine of Saint Arsenius is also a site of mixing, with its pagan and orthodox history. Immediately after filling the lamps, Durrell states: “There was one more visit to be made—to the little underwater cave in which we used to hide.... I slipped overboard into the cool water and swam into the bay. Once we had made a clay statue of Pan and set it up in the cave” (“Oil” 302). The juxtaposition of the Saint’s shrine above the water (orthodox Christianity) against the Pan that lies underneath it (Pagan Greek religions) is striking. Even though the real cave is not directly beneath the shrine, Durrell chooses to make it so in the story (they are in the same cover but not directly vertical to each other, so this is Durrell’s own added emphasis in the story). Unfortunately, the reader discovers that “the winter sea had long since licked out the cave” (“Oil” 302; emphasis added), but even this is another instance of textual layering, as it stands over Durrell’s earlier letter that tells his friend Henry Miller, “The cave is still there but our statue has been licked away by the winter sea” (Durrell-Miller 403; emphasis added). Their letters were being published while he was on Corfu, just prior to writing this story, so he was aware that his readers would eventually notice this.

The simplicity of the pilgrimage belies the complexity of the intercultural context of both the location and narrative. Likewise, the nostalgic tone of the work draws on concepts of ‘home’ that are based in the imaginative landscape of memory, which makes Durrell’s key discussion of “projection” from the Imperial power to the colonized island highly significant. Moreover, by using the reader’s expectations (nostalgia, exoticism, and Imperialism), the text disturbs self-reflection. While the text traces the palimpsest of the landscape and cityscape over earlier writings, the landscape recreates the text into something more than it was at first and forces an inward examination of the mirroring of expectations onto the foreign terrain. Durrell draws on his reader’s expectations of a factually true travel narrative by an author who has become associated with the Hellenic world and the exotic Middle East, and by
using these various expectations, he ultimately places the reader in the position of the narrator staring at his own uncanny photograph; the pilgrimage forces the hard discovery of oneself.

Questions for Self-Review

1. What is the difference between what the story “shows” you and what it “tells” you? Does it show more than it actually tells?
2. How to location and power work in this story?
3. In what ways is colonialism important to Durrell’s story?
4. Is this story criticizing colonialism or celebrating it?
5. Is there any particular political importance to tourism or a tourist’s impression of a former colony?

Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


Weeks 7 & 8: Alex La Guma

Objectives

1. Identify modernist aesthetics in La Guma’s *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End*.
2. Describe the historical context of Apartheid era South Africa.
3. Identify the Cold War political context of anti-Apartheid work.
4. Recognize elements of *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* that are historically accurate.
5. Relate indigeneity to rootedness in place in La Guma’s novel.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

Please read the assigned readings first and then come to the Study Guide, reading approximately half the novel before reading the first section of the Guide for Week 7. If you find La Guma difficult to historically contextualize, then read across the Study Guide first and return to the primary texts.

Alex La Guma (b. 1924–1985)

Alex La Guma was born into segregated South Africa and was twenty-four years old when Apartheid became formal government policy. He had joined the Young Communists League the prior year and joined the South African Communist Party in the same year. The party was made illegal in 1950, La Guma was imprisoned in 1962, and he fled to London and went into exile from South Africa in 1966. He became the African National Congress’s Chief Representative for Central and Latin America in 1979 and resided in Cuba for the rest of his life.

His first collection of short stories, *A Walk in the Night*, was published in 1962 and presents the experiences of “colored” South Africans in the District Six slum of Cape Town. His third novel *The Stone-Country* (1965) was written in prison and about the experience of imprisonment. Like many of his characters, according to the definitions used under Apartheid, La Guma was colored, meaning he was of mixed-race background. Much as we saw in Mulk Raj Anand, the concept of class consciousness is a central theme in all of La Guma’s
works, and he is always coming to the conclusion that only collective action by the oppressed could force and end to Apartheid and race-based exploitation. La Guma’s *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* (1972) viscerally depicts the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa by colored and black South Africans as well as the tensions between English and Afrikaner communities.

*In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* presents the anti-Apartheid struggle in a progressive context leading to what is implicitly a violent revolutionary movement at the end of the novel as the escaping activists move to Zimbabwe for insurgency training. Their increasing consciousness of their class position becomes the fuel for revolutionary change. La Guma was an executive member of the South African Coloured People’s Congress and a member of the Communist Party following his union organizing activities, so this theme of class consciousness is far from coincidental – it is a central part of the novel’s aim. The basis for the book derives from La Guma’s anti-apartheid work, incarcerations, and his own deep Marxist beliefs. The same themes play out across La Guma’s writing career from short stories to novels. Across *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End*, the fate of an unnamed torture victim in the opening chapter causes much tension for readers who are unsure if the victim is the protagonist Beukes or his close colleague Elias Tekwane (also called Hazel). Both are, of course, false names used to protect real individuals in La Guma’s at least partially historical novel, and both names carry allusive weight. We may see Beukes as La Guma himself, to a degree.

**Week 7: Modernist Aesthetics**

As with Mulk Raj Anand, La Guma’s novel takes place in a single day, and the opening with Beukes’ shaving is a direct gesture to the reason both novels have this timeframe: James Joyce’s modernist masterpiece *Ulysses*. Although La Guma’s novel has a very clear political purpose (to drive up international support for the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa), it is also a response to artistic and aesthetic movements as well. The broken timeframe, the shifting mutli-perspectival structure, and many of La Guma’s stylistic decisions reflect his readings in Joyce and Ernest Hemingway (Field, “Across” 214). This trait is more overt after having read more widely in La Guma’s works, such as his travel narrative *A Soviet Journey* (1978), which includes several references and allusions to Hemingway’s modernist formal innovations. We have seen this in Anand’s *Untouchable* in relation to the Bloomsbury group, and the same spirit of aesthetic and formal innovations is also at work here. While the shifting limited perspective frame we see as we jostle between scenes focused on Elias and scenes focused on Beukes may seem to drive the politics of the novel, it is also a formal technique adopted directly from Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Likewise, the precision of descriptions that refuse to give necessary details to the reader is based on Hemingway’s famous “iceberg technique,” in which the narrative is
the tip of the iceberg (the reader realizes that the majority of the iceberg or narrative remains unseen or unstated, yet assuredly there). This reminds us as well of the deeply-set political motivations behind Joyce, Woolf, and Hemingway in their writings.

**Week 7: Apartheid**

It is difficult to summarize Apartheid and the history of South Africa in a summative manner. From the first European settlements by the Dutch Boers in what would become South Africa in 1650 to the British colony established in 1795, and the Great Trek of the Dutch-speaking Boers in starting in 1836 to avoid British rule, the colonial history has been complicated. For students unfamiliar, the History section of the World Encyclopedia of the Nations entry on “South Africa” provides a useful overview ([https://tinyurl.com/y8oyu3j6](https://tinyurl.com/y8oyu3j6)).

For our purposes, it is important to first realize that the Afrikaans-speaking (a language largely derived from Dutch) and English-speaking white populations are already a conflicted settler colonial population, which resulted in the 1910–1915 Boer War, in which the British Empire was victorious. Shortly after this, in 1910 a formal policy of Apartheid (meaning literally “separateness”) was begun, meaning segregation of the white and black populations, which led in 1948 to a formal legal framework for Apartheid.

Apartheid’s first challenge was defining racial distinctions. It used a four-part classification system: Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Coloreds (meaning mixed race). We should recall, with South Africa as part of the British Empire, the movement of British subjects was common, and South Africa (as well as many parts of Africa) has a significant South Asian (Indian) population, including Gandhi who lived there for 21 years (1893–1914). The first legal fixture of Apartheid was the 1949 Marriages Act, which banned marriages between those of different classifications. This was followed by the 1950 Immorality Act (a revision of the 1927 Act) that prohibited sexual relations between Whites and any other “races.” In the same year, the government passed the Suppression of Communism Act, which we see as part of Apartheid because resistance to Apartheid was largely organized through communist organizations, unions, and political parties. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 segregated the education system (this is the year before the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education ruling in the United States formally struck down segregated education, although the practice still continued for years), and in the 1960s, South Africa established the “Bantustans” to strip the Black population of citizenship by making them citizens of proxy-nations established within South Africa’s borders. However, voting rights for the colored population were already severely limited, resulting in widespread disenfranchisement.

As you have already seen in the novel, these laws also included widespread segregation and a pass system (this topic will return near the end of the
What may be less obvious in the novel are the difficulties of sustaining the Apartheid system of racial classification. Since a part of suppressing dissent from racial segregation involved suppressing Communism, and the Cold War conflict shaped international reactions to Apartheid, many surprising accommodations were made. For example, “Asians” from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan were “honorary whites” and were legally classified as “White.” This only makes sense when we recall that South Africa had diplomatic relations with these nations and that they are part of the Western Bloc in the Cold War, and not the Eastern Bloc. Specifically, the (Mainland) Chinese population in South Africa was classified as either “colored” or “Asian” while the Taiwanese Chinese population was classified as “White.” Of course, China is communist and Taiwan is capitalist (Eastern Bloc and Western Bloc, respectively), and this has as much to do with the distinction as does “race” (both populations are predominantly the same Han ethnic group). For the same reasons, both Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister of Britain) and Ronald Reagan (President of the United States) vetoed many sanctions against South Africa on the basis of its strategic value in the Cold War as an anti-Marxist ally.

Apartheid only came to an end with the general election of 1994.

Week 7: The Sharpeville Massacre & Historicizing La Guma

La Guma’s narrative is set around the 21 March 1960 Sharpeville massacre. During protests against the pass law systems (laws requiring passes or passports for entrance or transport through neighborhoods, cities, regions, and so forth), police fired on the crowds. The caused 69 deaths and 180 injuries. As a reaction, the anti-Apartheid movement and the African National Congress became increasingly militarized, as the ending of La Guma’s novel makes very clear. The United Nations Security Council also condemned the massacre formally, and South Africa became increasingly isolated from the international community. For this reason, the Sharpeville Massacre is often regarded as both a turning point in Apartheid and also as a symbol for Apartheid’s methods of suppressing dissent.

The repeated news story in the novel, about the wife poisoning her husband, is also contemporaneous and is about a real court case, while it is doubly a powerful symbol of the purpose of the pass laws themselves: to slowly “poison” the population until it could no longer resist. At the same time, it is a “leitmotif” in the novel. The leitmotif is a formal strategy in music such that a specific motif or theme becomes associated with a feeling or character, so that whenever it recurs, the listener makes a connection, whether the character (or theme) is present or not. For most readers today, this may be less familiar in Richard Wagner’s operas (the greatest development of the leitmotif) than in the film scores for Star Wars – when we as film-watchers hear Darth Vader’s theme,
even when he is not in the scene, we connect his character or the threat of his character to what is transpiring. The same happens with the newspaper story about the murder, which appears in the background at several moments in the novel, yet binds these moments together symbolically, while also tying the novel to a very specific historical moment.

Week 8: Indigeneity

We have encountered the concept of indigeneity through our reading of Morgensen’s article “Destabilizing the Settler Academy.” Drawing on these concepts, we now consider how indigeneity further complicates conflicts around race in Apartheid era South Africa and in La Guma’s novel.

Much critical discourse on indigeneity has relied on the political and juridical apparatus of state power. The legal fiction of terra nullius is the presumed emptiness of land that permits a state to acquire land by simply occupying it. Recalling Morgensen, the sense of “indigeneity” as “rootedness in place” emphasizes the difference between settler and indigenous communities. David Welchman Gegeo describes this by defining who place works in a Kwara’ae community:

First and foremost, place (kula ni fuli, literally, “place situated in source,” that is, place of one’s existential foundation) in this context refers to the geographical or physical location of Kwara’ae district on Malaita. Second, place refers to genealogy, that is, one’s location in a Kwara’ae kin group, both in the present and reaching backward and forward in time. Third, place means having land or the unconditional right of access to land in Kwara’ae through genealogy and marriage. (Gegeo 493)

Gegeo here emphasizes the embeddedness of the indigenous community in land and the bond between generations that forms a metaphysical belonging to kin and ancestors. For this context, indigeneity, ethnicity, and culture do not operate as synonyms in this paradigm. In this, we have a clearly metaphysical paradigm and a socially-constructed set of meanings, distinct from the kind of attention La Guma would give to the materials conditions of a culture in his Marxist framework.

In the Canadian First Nations context, Len Findlay has given a characteristically succinct yet provocative exhortation to “Always Indigenize!” that again takes up the juridical and political implication of indigeneity as inhering in the vital bond to the land that goes beyond mere residency:

In the (human) beginning was the Indigene. This hypothesis is a necessary but inscrutable pretext for the historical and current
distribution of our species in diverse groupings across the globe. With oral and written histories of a recoverable past have come difference and conflict, competing versions of residency, conquest, settlement, entitlement, and the limited circulation and decidedly mixed benefits of Indigenous status. It seems fair to say that all communities live as, or in relation to, Indigenes. (Findlay 308)

Nonetheless, the language here, if not Findlay’s implication, returns to such matters as conflictual claims to indigeneity or possession of a particular place. The conflict then is between “kula ni fuli, literally, ‘place situated in source,’ that is, place of one’s existential foundation” in Gegeo’s phrasing (493) and the materialist assertion that “there is no hors-Indigène, no geopolitical or psychic setting, no real or imagined terra nullius free from the satisfactions and unsettlements of Indigenous (pre)occupation” (Findlay 309). As Findlay realizes, the conflict between a metaphysical and a materialist paradigm is politically unproductive, and hence he shifts his own project to “a strategically indeterminate provocation to thought and action” (309)—most other critics simply set the two matters beside each other (metaphysics and materialism) without considering their incompatibilities.

Highly kindred conflicts have emerged in geographical and political analyses of indigeneity and western knowledge systems more generally, and this means that they move beyond the language of “class conflict” and “social change” that we have seen so far. Ana Deumert takes up the conceptual problem of migration and explains that

In the South African context, moving from the village to the city does not imply a decisive move from one place to another, but rather the opening up of a new place/home without abandoning the previous place/home. Thus, rural-urban migration is... a series of interlocking, shuffling movements. (55)

Because of this interlocking spatiality and anchor to ancestral space, “the village remains for many the ‘true’ home, the place of the forefathers where important ancestral rituals are practices. The urban home is always second to the rural home as cultural rituals have to be performed at the place of origin in order to be meaningful” (55). As a symptomatic overlap, however, we see the “moving targets” of increasingly deterritorialized indigenes taken up by Breckenridge and Appadurai (i) as well as the generalized homelessness expressed by Edward Said of “exile [as] the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (49) without falling victim to the “spatial incarceration of the native” identified by Liisa Malkki (28–31).
More recently, Sarah Hunt has contrasted her experiences as a Kwakwaka’wakw scholar (of the Pacific Northwest Coast) inhabiting both scholarly and communal spaces (Kwakwaka’wakw art will be recognizable to FDU Vancouver students, most famously the Mungo Martin painted long house beside the Provincial Museum). This leads Hunt to suggest “The situatedness and place-specific nature of Indigenous knowledge calls for the validation of new kinds of theorizing and new epistemologies that can account for situated, relational Indigenous knowledge and yet remain engaged with broader theoretical debates” (Hunt 31). Like Findlay, this “engagement” permits overlapping and contradictory knowledge systems to productively work together. In the introduction they give to the same issue, Emilie Cameron, Sarah de Leeuw and Caroline Desbiens more directly challenge critical reluctance to use “accounts of Indigenous knowledges and practices as evidence of ontological pluralism and as sources of new modes of thought” (Cameron 19), which leads them to bolster the “new kinds of theorizing” called for by Hunt as relational yet “engaged with broader theoretical debates.” Such a relational engagement between indigenous studies and theories of class conflict rely, for Hunt’s geographical interests, in the situatedness of the different discussion, much as La Guma relies on rearticulating indigeneity in a non-indigenous art form: the novel. Hunt contends, in relation to her own experience moving between the sites of knowledge exchange, “it must also be asked what it means for Indigenous knowledge to be moved from spaces of lived Indigenous governance and culture, such as a potlatch ceremony, to a conference session on ontology with very few Indigenous people and little space for Indigenous methods of teaching and learning.” (Hunt 31). Her question has much in common with Morgenesen’s from earlier in the term, and both help us to consider the difference in In the Fog of the Seasons’ End between Beukes and Elias.

Week 8: Indigeneity in In the Fog of the Seasons’ End

While the protagonist Beukes is mixed race, his double in the novel, Elias Tekwane, is amaXhosa. Specifically, “Hazel was the code name for Elias Tekwane. When he was born his mother had really named him after his great-grandfather, but... the missionary, who always found it difficult to pronounce indigenous names, had said ‘We'll call him Elias’” (La Guma 72). This continuous renaming away from his indigenous name, twice over, implicitly reflects the settler practices of displacement and recasting of indigeneity as deviance. Nonetheless, despite the economic inequalities and racial segregation that the character experiences, La Guma uses kinship and repeated images to bind Elias to the land itself and his ancestors’ embeddedness in place: “Elias could not remember his father.... News arrived that Tekwane had been killed in a mining accident near Johannesburg; he was buried hundreds of feet below ground, deeper than any of his ancestors had been buried” (La Guma 73).
repeats several times, and in Elias’ work crew, a man remarks on wanting to attend a funeral for “my brother who has joined the ancestors” (124), and as the scene continues to juxtapose descriptions of ancestral values against the lived experience of apartheid (76–77, 81–82), “The blood stirred in [Elias] in spite of the torpor, and his mind switched to the tales told by the old people of the village, of the battles fought by their ancestors” (124). The effect is a shutter between ancestral embeddedness in the land understood spiritually, set in contrast to material exploitation, which is understood through Marxist materialism and the economic conditions that give rise to the ideology of racism. This is also a conflict: materialism and spirituality. Elias’s bond to the land is metaphysical, yet the mode of social critique in the novel is strictly materialist. Elias moves between his blood in the ancestral land to the class struggle, shuffling between the two ever more rapidly as the novel moves to its conclusion. Even as Elias grows into a labor organizer and a mode of social awareness founded on African Socialism drawn from the South African Communist Party and Congress of South African Trade Unions in the African National Congress, his new role and life in the city is expressed through the spiritual bond to place and ancestors, which marks his indigeneity as distinct from his class position. Beukes, in contrast to Elias, is characterized by endless mobility and rootlessness—he is always in motion.

The class-based Marxist methodology has tended to draw attention away from Elias’s indigeneity. Cecil Abrahams describes the novel’s interests, such as counter-revolutionary bourgeois freedom (a feeling of freedom, such as through the ability to purchase things, the prevents people from seeking genuine freedom), in clearly Marxist terms: “Like the artisans and the lower middle classes that have succeeded in rising slightly above the living standards of the majority of their compatriots in the urban slums and ghettos, many of the oppressed care little about the plight of the majority and instead wrap themselves inside a cocoon of unreality” (Abrahams 110). In a kindred vein, Nahem Yousaf contends La Guma’s “characters very clearly move from a position of unfocused individualism to collective strength, from impotent anger to oblique theorizing about their subordinate positions, before finally arriving at the epiphanic realization that tyranny must be met with collective resistance, even violent resistance” (Yousaf 132). These sentiments find their most explicit expression in David Maughan Brown’s contention that the novel “locates revolutionary activity firmly in the economic and social conditions of the people rather than in the individual’s reaction to his or her personal experience of oppression” (Brown 21). These are increasingly materialist forms of analysis, and as such they are antithetical to the metaphysical claims implicit in the concept of indigeneity expressed in Elias. Jabulani Mkhize cements the framework by convincingly expressing how
the early novels were suggestive of Georg Lukács’s assertion that ‘in any protest against particular social conditions, these conditions themselves must have the central place’ in the narrative, [but] in [In the Fog of the Seasons’ End] it is as though La Guma is saying: now that you have learnt about the socio-economic conditions that the oppressed have to contend with..., interest in this work lies in the forces working towards the changing of the status quo rather than in the exposition of the social contradictions of racial capitalism as such. (Mkhize 915)

La Guma’s insistence on a Marxist paradigm for discussing decolonization and the anti-apartheid movement is abundantly clear in both his works and the critical literature, as is the nuanced and theoretically informed nature of this insistence and its movement toward collective rather than individualist action. That it developed during the growth of Marxist literature of decolonization, such as Frantz Fanon’s and Albert Memmi’s works, should be expected since this was the dominant paradigm of the moment, prior to the Foucauldian expansion of postcolonial criticism by Edward Said later in the decade, moving to institutional forms of domination. However, by developing the critical discourse in this manner, the parallel “bourgeois” or what might even be called by some “primitive” or “pre-modern” notions of indigeneity become a scotoma, a blind spot, that we cannot squint around in order to notice in their vitality and recurring importance to the novel. Indeed, for Mkhize, “Tekwane is initially a naïve country boy whose father dies in the mines” and “his subsequent actions are not guided by political consciousness until he meets a fellow prisoner, Mdlaka,.... [who] serves as his political mentor [and] recruits him to the movement” (Mkhize 921). This understanding of the novel’s most poetic descriptions as naïve is striking, particularly because of the adeptness of Mkhize’s reading and deep sympathies for the aesthetic functions and formal traits of the text. Hence, contrasting his description against the novel’s depiction of indigeneity, land, and kinship traces out the scotoma that such a view induces.

For Elias Tekwane, in the moment of his rise in labor organization as a part of the anti-Apartheid movement (which really must be understood in the Marxist terms outlined above), he also relocates or re-indigenizes himself in the city rather than the country in a manner that does not comfortably work in the materialist paradigm:

Elias had not returned to the countryside after that. He felt that the brown, eroded land, the little dwellings on the scrubby hillside held little for him. Besides, his blood had dripped onto the hard grey surface of a city sidewalk, and it was as if it had taken root and held him there.... Elias recalled the warmth of
the pavement against his face and the smell of dust as he lay there. (La Guma 132–133)

This moment, and several subsequent involving land and blood, may be understood through the amaXhosa question “Inkaba yakho iphi?”, where is your navel? Following on the tradition of burying the afterbirth, the query calls for the ancestral place of belonging, affiliation, status, and social identity (Midgley 40). Elias’ bond to the land arises from this indigenous understanding of belonging, just as he is tied to the land by his father’s burial and again bound to the city after his blood mingles with the place. These are not naïvely misunderstood moments of class conflict confused by a false consciousness of indigeneity—they are a parallel indigenous epistemology on an equal footing with the proletarian epistemology, both cultivated in the novel for the reader. Amidst the organization of labor and the struggle to nurture revolutionary change through an overturning of the class struggle by the rise of the proletariat, the novel repeatedly imagines the spiritual bond between indigenous populations, embodiment, and land. And despite the contradictory nature of these two knowledge systems, they coexist in La Guma’s narrative.

This spiritual element of indigeneity, a grabbing into the land and deep bond to the earth or a place itself, then frames our understanding as readers of the novel’s gruesome depiction of Elias’ bloody torture and death. In a flashback to the same work detail in Elias’ past in which he meets and is radicalized by Mdlaka, “A man who had gone over to wake [Tsatsu] had come back saying, ‘He is not asleep. He has gone to his ancestors, and may they receive him with more kindness than he has met with in this world.’ The old man had lain on the heap of rubble like a bundle of discarded old clothes” (La Guma 156). The repetition of ancestors and the corpse’s entanglement with “rubble” (suggesting he is of the land itself rather than an inhabitant merely on it) would be only a further emphasis of the importance of ancestors and land to the amaXhosa, except that the same man and image repeats during Elias’ torture (172) and again during his death.

The metaphysical imagery repeats in tandem with “the ghosts gathered” and “the ghosts drifted along the hazy horizon and beckoned to him to come to join them” (173). In this manner, Elias’s blood on the floor during his torture mingles thematically with the blood that binds him to the city and the rubble of the old man grabbing into the land itself, just as Elias’ blood marks the country space, the village where he was born, and the kin to and of whom he was born. To make this blending clear, La Guma describes how for Elias while dying “the smell of dust on the paving was in his nostrils; blood trickled into his neck from his scalp where the policeman’s club had caught him on the morning of the strike meeting” (173), and as he drifts to unconsciousness during his torture and remembrance of this previous strike (poignantly recalled in the present tense), his mind returns to the locations of his youth, his home village, the
answer to *Inkabe yakho iphi?* Where is your navel? Then, set off in its own paragraph, “*Uya kuhlasela-pi na?* Where wilt thou now wage war? The ghosts of his ancestors beckoned from afar” (174), and as he lies dying the same shifting language from isiXhosa to English recurs with the image of his return to his ancestors, for “Far, far, his ancestors gathered on the misty horizon, their spears sparkling like diamonds in the exploding sun” (175). If we fail to link the scenes and their thematic import, La Guma reminds us as readers to

Think of something, the pain said; something in which you believe, like love. Old Tsatsu was dead on a heap of rubble by the road, a collapsed dummy, something unimportant left aside. ‘He is not asleep but gone to his ancestors’…. Far down in the darkness, darker than any tomb, another miner was dispersed beyond recognition under infinite tons of fallen rock and gold. (La Guma 172)

Hence, the bodies in the ground, including his father’s in the mine that he ostensibly does not even remember, just as with the buried afterbirth of Elias’ entry to the world, all frame the meaning of his life blood spilling again into the ground as a repetition of how he had bled while beginning his path in underground anti-apartheid labor organizing. The expansion of the spiritual element of his relation between blood and earth is that this time it occurs in service of a revolutionary decolonization movement predicated on materialist understandings of class, though the spiritual meanings are in ample evidence in the same moment.

**Questions for Self-Review**

Please respond to any of these questions on the discussion board in WebCampus. Remember, you have 1 point for your own comment and 1 point for responding to a classmate’s comment.

1. How do you think Beukes and Elias differ?
2. In what ways would you see colonialism in India and South Africa as different, despite both being part of the British Empire?
3. What components of Apartheid still exist in other parts of the world today?
4. Can a novel like *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* be both an aesthetic work of art and a piece of political propaganda at the same time?
5. How do you understand the words “indigenous” or “indigeneity”?
Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


Week 9: The Truth & Reconciliation Commission and Robinson’s “Swallow”

Objectives

1. Recognize the history of the Residential School System in Canada as a tool of colonialism.
2. Identify the legacy of the Residential School System in Canada today in relation to reconciliation.
3. Contextualize the structure of Eden Robinson’s story “Swallow.”
4. Relate “Swallow” as SF genre to indigeneity.
5. Identify indigenous histories Robinson alludes to in “Swallow.”

Reading Assignment


Commentary

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) is the result of the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in 2006. The TRC ran from 2008 until 2015, gathering testimony about the residential school system, funded by a small portion of the $2 billion settlement. It is important to note that funding the TRC was part of the lawsuit and not a government initiative, and its funding was drawn from the settlement itself.
The TRC relates to the full context of Canadian history – Confederation in 1867 was quickly followed by the 1869–70 Red River Rebellion in what is today Manitoba. Canada purchased what was then called Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company, but Louis Riel established a provisional government in the area around Red River in response to the premature imposition of a land survey by the new lieutenant governor, William McDougall. Riel, a Francophone Métis, negotiated the creation of Manitoba as a province within Canada, and in 1870 this occurred with the agreement that Canada would negotiate treaties with the indigenous population. Since he was not granted amnesty, Riel fled to the United States of America. He was elected as a Member of Parliament (equivalent to an American Congressman) three times while in exile but could never assume his seat. Much of western Canada remains contested, never having been ceded by indigenous communities nor conquered, and hence is subject to ongoing treaty negotiations today.

Immediately following the Red River Rebellion, Canada established the Indian Schools, which operated from the 1870s until 1996. Sir John A. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, described the purpose of the residential school system in unambiguous terms as part of the Parliamentary record:

When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself, as head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (Honouring 2)

The Canadian poet Duncan Campbell Scott, one of the Confederation Poets, spent his entire career in the Department of Indian Affairs after being hired by MacDonald in 1879. He was head of the Department from 1913–32 and was instrumental in the operation of the residential schools. He was also unambiguous in stating his objectives: “Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department” (Regan 238). The separation of parent from child was further enforced by the creation of a pass system in 1885 that prevented parents from travelling off the reservation to visit their children. Most of the records of the pass system were destroyed by the government, and it existed as an administrative policy without being enacted as a law or as part of the Indian Act. Only two passes exist in Archives Canada, but more have been subsequently discovered outside of government records.
In 1920, Scott formalized the school system to make attendance mandatory for all indigenous children aged 7 to 15 years. As is detailed in your readings from the TRC, this amounted to cultural genocide, a description uncontested by the Government of Canada. The “students” had a much higher mortality rate than the general population, and the rate of infection from tuberculosis was also much higher, leading to a higher mortality rate after students left the schools. The schools also had much higher rates of sexual molestation and abuse. The Report of the TRC details the available documentation of abuses and the testimony given by both survivors and participants (teachers and administrators) in the system. The extent of the abuses is shocking, but the complete report in several volumes is available for free in the public domain as part of the TRC’s legacy, housed at the University of Manitoba:

http://www.nctr.ca/

A further detail of the residential school system is the geographical distances it encompassed. This not only meant that students might travel hundreds of miles or kilometers to the nearest school, but also that they may very likely not attend the nearest school. The distribution of children so that they would not encounter family or even other indigenous youth who shared a common language other than English or French was a planned part of the school system. Since a part of the school’s purpose was to eliminate indigenous languages and culture (cultural genocide), preventing students from being around others with similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds was part of its administrative structure. As you read Eden Robinson’s story “Swallow” this week, while there was the Elizabeth Long Memorial Home for Girls residential school in Kitimat (where Robinson lives), this does not necessarily mean that students from Kitimat would have attended it.

The nearest residential school to the Fairleigh Dickinson University Vancouver Campus is in North Vancouver, a short walk from Capilano Mall. This was the St Paul’s Indian Residential School, which was also named the Squamish Indian Residential School and St. Francis Indian Residential School. The buildings were demolished in 1959 a year after the school closed. It is 10 kilometers (6 miles) from campus, or about the distance from FDU’s Metropolitan Campus to Bergen Community College.

The legacy of the residential school system continues today. Indigenous children are in foster care at a rate of 3.6% (in comparison to .3% for the general population). Indigenous peoples also experience a 300% higher rate of victimization in violent crime and have significant funding discrepancies for health care and education on reserve. For a sense of context, the author of this study guide, while in elementary school from Kindergarten through Grade 5, lived only a 30-minute drive away from the St. Mary’s Indian Residential School in Mission, BC, which operated from 1867 to 1984 and was formally closed in
1985 as the last residential school in British Columbia. In simple terms (and shifting into the first person), people lived in the residential school system within walking distance of me until I was 11 years old. The last residential school closed in 1996 when I had already completed my undergraduate degree, which included education courses partially about the residential school system.

Truth & Reconciliation

The legacies of the residential school system and the similarities of the pass system to Apartheid era South Africa should be clear in the context of this course. This also underpins our readings. Eden Robinson’s short story “Swallow” in this week offers one response to the injustices Indigenous peoples have faced as a consequence of colonialism. Richard Van Camp’s novel The Lesser Blessed will more directly engage with the inter-generational trauma of abuse in the residential schools, and the inter-generational difficulties of healing and reconciliation are the crux of David Alexander Robertson and Scott B. Henderson’s graphic novel 7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga.

A key component of reconciliation is the acceptance of truth. It may be difficult for many Canadians to accept their role in cultural genocide, yet it is a historical fact. At the same time, there has been no Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the USA, and many Americans are unaware of the USA’s comparable history. This is one of the great challenges in the context of postcolonial literature, since the process of decolonization is very long if it can ever be said to be complete. In many places, decolonization or reconciliation have not yet occurred or are part of a very slow process.

Eden Robinson

Eden Robinson is a Canadian indigenous writer. She first rose to prominence as a writer with her collection of short stories Traplines in 1995. Her first novel Monkey Beach (2000) went on to win the Governor General’s Literary Award, the most prestigious award in Canada. From early in her career, she also worked in speculative fiction and includes science fiction elements in her works. The story “Swallow” is one of these mixed genre, science fiction, stories and comes from the anthology mitewacimowina: Indigenous Science Fiction and Speculative Storytelling (2016). The shift to a popular genre may seem inviting, but the indigenous context also makes us rethink how science fiction works in this instance.

Structure

“Swallow” has a structure that encourages us as readers to pay attention to connections. The opening scene in the trailer, in which our protagonist is imagining
himself floating on the ceiling and wrapped in a green color, returns in the clos-
ing of the story. The structural meaning of this is that the two scenes are con-
nected, one being a depiction of indigenous life in northern British Columbia,
possibly on a reservation, and the other being a post-apocalyptic scene after
some unclear global catastrophe involving mass flooding and the collapse of so-
ciety. Although the two things, life “on Rez” and something akin to a Walking
Dead zombie genre work, seem very different, Robinson encourages readers to
connect them to each other.

This mirroring of one scene in another happens several times in the
story and encourages the reader to make comparisons. The glade with the devil’s
club plant (also called by its Haisla name “owegas”) appears with the grand-
mother and with the grizzly bear. What the story doesn’t tell us is that the Eng-
lish name “devil’s club” is the opposite of its meaning for indigenous peoples,
for whom owegas is a medicinal and spiritual plant. In a sense, the comparison
of the two scenes seems to tell us that the protagonist, Nate, is protected not
only by his workmates with bear horns to scare away the grizzly but also by
remaining connected to his cultural traditions, such as the owegas plant. We
also have a comparison between the plant’s stringing barbs and the jellyfish Nate
encounters when returning from underwater. While the interpretation of these
comparisons may be open to several possibilities, the call for us to be active
interpreters of the text by making comparisons within it seems strong.

We should also be aware of the silences in the text. Some are obvious,
such as the changes in time or place signaled by the visible marker of a gap: the
three asterisks the separate narrative sections. Like in the Thomas King story
“Borders,” we also have other silences here. Where in King we are told that the
narrator is listening to a creation myth about Coyote (and we are not actually
given this story), here we have unanswered questions. Nate asks his grand-
mother about the two brothers in a myth, one who wants to be a shaman but
isn’t and the other who cannot stop even when he wishes to. It seems obvious
that this is a story about Nate and his brother Daniel, but we are not given an
answer to his question. Instead, we as readers must pay attention to that gap,
even if it’s less visible than the asterisks.

**Science Fiction & Apocalypse**

A second element may seem less obvious: “sci-fi.” For mainstream North
American readers, the science fiction genre (SF) or more specifically post-apoc-
alyptic SF is about some unspeakable future. The critic Darko Suvin describes
SF’s quintessential trait as being a form of “cognitive estrangement” (3) based
on its realistic mode in a fantastical future setting. This means that in SF, read-
ers must reconcile “cognition” (a rational or realistic mode of narrative) with a
story that involves “estrangement” from reality (being separated from our nor-
mal world). That is, SF is a realistic unreal, and the contradiction prods readers
to rethink the real world around us. For example, Star Trek (or any SF series) is obviously not “real” even though it’s realistic – that conflict makes us compare its unreal fictional universe to our own real one in a way that other genres do not. A romance novel or a romantic comedy is also fictional, but we are not driven to compare its unreal social world to our own in the same critical way.

For our purposes, this “realistic unreality” means that SF as a genre tends very strongly toward a critical commentary on our contemporary world. William Morris’s novel News from Nowhere is about a utopia in the future, but really, it is a way for Morris to comment on the world around him at the end of the nineteenth century and to critique its problems. The same is true of Star Trek, Battlestar Galactica (filmed beside the FDU Vancouver Campus), or almost any other SF franchise you can think of that frames today’s social conflicts. Remember, the first interracial kiss on television was on Star Trek, and Battlestar Galactica was relaunched in the emotional wake of the “war on terror.” This means that their distant fictional universes reflect the struggles we have in our own. Zombie movies have done something similar by giving realistic narratives in a world that’s clearly not real, and by doing so commenting on the racial and class tensions in contemporary America. This has been a longstanding feature of the genre, and especially so in its post-apocalyptic forms. Therefore, when a SF story has an apocalyptic future, readers tend to see it as a way of expressing our fears about the world around us today.

During the Cold War, these post-apocalyptic SF stories were usually after a nuclear war (Planet of the Apes) or could have some kind of symbolic communist take-over (Invasion of the Body-Snatchers) while others have expressed fears about global pandemics from diseases such as HIV/AIDS or Ebola. In other words, these popular films and books offer us a useful way of critically discussing a social or a historical moment. We see this theme pointed out in “Swallow” through the protagonist’s neighbor, who equipped his house to survive a nuclear apocalypse. However, Robinson turns these genre expectations about unreal futures on their head.

Robinson’s “Swallow” has its apocalyptic SF theme for “after the world was swallowed,” but the ending images of a flooded New York and of the protagonist’s home being underwater from the floods do not point to the “novum” or future we expect. We have something profoundly different. We have history from the past mixed up with fantastical speculation about the future. Smallpox epidemics already decimated indigenous peoples, in places killing more than 90% of the population. Invaders have already closed them into confined communities and took their property, killed them, and left them in an apocalyptic situation. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada readings state, these communities have already experienced cultural genocide (Honouring I). More specifically for Robinson, the world has already been flooded too… The current wave of “cli-fi” (climate science fiction) may express our anxieties about
climate change and rising sea levels, but the floods have already occurred for indigenous communities and are part of lived history, not a terrifying future.

Robinson is a member of the Haisla and Heiltsuk (Bella Bella) First Nations in Kitimat in Northern British Columbia. Their neighbors, the Cheslatta Carrier Nation (Cheslatta T’En, between the Haisla and Heiltsuk territories), were removed by force from their traditional lands in 1950 in order for the Kenney Dam to be built. The Nechako Reservoir for the Kenney Dam flooded all of their territories. The dam’s purpose was to provide power to the Alcan aluminum smelter in Kitimat (students in Vancouver, you probably see Alcan tinfoil in your local grocery stores). The dam is primarily used to produce energy for export today. With only ten days’ notice, the Cheslatta peoples’ homes were burned to prevent their return, and their valley was flooded to create the dam’s reservoir. This also washed away their graves and graveyards, both at the time of construction and in successive floods up to the present day. The Cheslatta T’En had been in continuous habitation of their territories for approximately 10,000 years, which Robinson reminds us of through reference to the Ice Age in “Swallow.”

This historical context profoundly changes how we approach Robinson’s story. What does it mean that the opening and closing mirror each other in images? What does it mean to use a post-apocalyptic SF genre when it draws on images of apocalypses that have already happened? Does “indigenizing” SF change what it means so that we confront the world around us not only through an imagined future but also from a real past that we hadn’t realized existed? How might you imagine a Cheslatta T’En person reading Robinson’s story, and would they understand it as “speculative fiction” about the future or as realistic fiction about a past that has already happened and an apocalypse they are still trying to survive?

Discussion Board

How are you responding to the information in The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada? What does it change? Are you changed? And what about histories of colonialism for which there have not been a truth & reconciliation commission? How do you read Eden Robinson’s “Swallow” in the wake of the TRC report?

Please login to the Discussion Board in WebCampus and respond to this prompt (1 point) and offer feedback or a response to a classmate (1 point).

Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


Weeks 10 & 11: Richard Van Camp

Objectives

1. Recognize the major themes and approaches in Indigenous Studies as a field of study.
2. Identify the legacy of the Residential School System in Canada in Van Camp’s novel.
3. Contextualize Van Camp’s novel using theories of place and indigeneity from Glen Sean Coulthard.
4. Relate storytelling in *The Lesser Blessed* to cultural practice.
5. Recognize holophrasis as a technique in *The Lesser Blessed* and related it to the novel’s major themes of trauma and recovery.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

Please read at least the first half of Van Camp’s novel and then the Study Guide for Week 10. If you find you need more context to understand the novel, then read the Study Guide first. For Week 11, complete the novel and then complete the Study Guide chapter.

Richard Van Camp (1971–)

Richard Van Camp is a member of the Thëhô Dene (Dogrib) Nation and is a writer from the Northwest Territories, Canada. *The Lesser Blessed* (1996) was his first novel, and he did not publish another for 19 years. His second novel, *Whistle* (2015), is an epistolary continuation of *The Lesser Blessed* and is intended primarily as a YA novella for student readers in high school as part of Pearson’s “Well Aware” series focused on mental health for teens. Van Camp has focused on children’s books and the short story form, as well as graphic novels, since his first novel. He is also a storyteller and stresses the importance of oral storytelling traditions to his writing.

Many of Van Camp’s stories, and his novel *The Lesser Blessed*, are set in the fiction northern town Fort Simmer, which is based on his hometown Fort Smith on the Slave River, Northwest Territories, Canada. Fort Smith is south
of Great Slave Lake – traditional Dogrib communities are north of the lake between it and Great Bear Lake. A continuous theme in his work is how Indigenous characters make two worlds co-exist: the contemporary and the traditional. He also frequently draws on popular culture while connecting it to Indigenous traditions, such as characters sharing a family meal of KFC in his short story “NDNs” or a zombie apocalypse caused by the oil sands of northern Alberta (directly south of Fort Smith).

**Week 10: Indigenous Studies**

Indigenous Studies as an academic discipline has a clear history since the 1960s and set of approaches that have become standard in the academy. We typically divide the discipline, particularly inside the United States, into the Native American Renaissance tradition and subsequent Localist, Nationalist, and Cosmopolitan paradigms. As we cover Indigenous Studies as an academic discipline within the modern university, recall our discussion of Edward Said at the beginning of the course and the complications we have considered in relation to Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge and academic disciplines like Orientalism. This is to say, the rise and development of scholarly disciplines, university departments, and academic publications (or even simply the brick and mortar of libraries and their acquisitions) is always bound up in institutions, governments, and social forces.

The Native American Renaissance is a 1980s critical term used to describe primarily 1960s Native American literature. In the 1960s, the Red Power movement emerged as Native Americans sought through political agitation to claim self-determination. The movement emerged in part as a reaction to the termination of US recognition of many tribes and bands as nations with tribal sovereignty, which included terminating recognition of Native status for these communities. At the same time, Native American writing began to reach a wider and mainstream readership, in particular following on N. Scott Momaday’s novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968), which won the Pulitzer Prize. This body of writing presented the reclamation or persistence of Native culture as a way of healing trauma. Tradition and community are emphasized in these works, and perhaps the most frequently used example (as a representative text) is Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Ceremony* (1977), in which the protagonist recovers from his post-traumatic stress disorder after serving in World War II by re-engaging with his Laguna Pueblo community and culture.

The term “Native American Renaissance” then developed during the 1980s through Kenneth Lincoln’s book of the same title (1983). It was widely adopted as a critical approach to the growth in interest in Native literature, and we should recognize it as a 1980s critical paradigm for interpreting literature of the 1960s and 1970s. However, as many critics have recognized, the term itself if implicitly Eurocentric (the Renaissance) and implies a rebirth after the
communities had “vanished,” which they had not. In part, these recognitions are also because as a critical paradigm, the Native American Renaissance was led by settler critics and scholars, such as Lincoln.

The subsequent response, largely by Indigenous scholars, developed “Localist,” “Nationalist, and “Cosmopolitan” paradigms. A key component of this branch was to extend the discussion of community and culture through the importance of place to indigeneity. By privileging the key role of place to Indigenous knowledge systems and communities, these paradigms recognize experiences of migration or displacement as trauma and as a radical rupture in community. While many theoretical paradigms of the latter half of the twentieth century focus on radical mobility and cosmopolitanism (the idea of being a world citizen), these paradigms in Indigenous Studies also imply displacement and harm, such as the Trail of Tears in the US or resettlement of Indigenous peoples across the Americas. “Localist” paradigms recognize the importance of specific locality to Indigenous communities, and “Nationalist” paradigms recognize self-determination implicit in being a nation (a direct challenge to the Indian termination policy of Congress that terminated recognition of Native tribes as nations – we see this paradigm expressed in the terminology of First Nations in Canada). “Cosmopolitanism” in this context sought a wider sense of Indigenous identity across nations and cultures in the Americas. Scholars such as Jace Weaver have sought to bridge these perspectives. By drawing on Sean Kicummah Teuton’s book Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel (2008) and its arguments for an Indigenous cosmopolitanism, Weaver makes an impassioned plea for participation between the two conflicting perspectives on the Native American Renaissance: “Indigeneity is about rootedness in place” and (not versus) “radical mobility” (Weaver 33).

In a Canadian context, further paradigms for Indigenous Studies appeared. Pressing questions included the difference between national borders and Indigenous sovereignty, in particular as the American and Canadian border divides communities recognized by both countries as being nations. Canadian national culture also deploys the concept of the “native informant” whereby a person of Indigenous background is regarded as an expert on their own culture, able to inform the public at large or government without actual participation of the community itself. Settler colonialism also plays a unique role in Canadian national history. As a response to this, several Canadian Indigenous Studies scholars have turned to other critical paradigms.

Glen Sean Coulthard, who is also Dogrib, has integrated the concept of locality and of indigeneity as “rootedness in place” with the kind of decolonization paradigms we have already seen in Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon. Coulthard’s Red Skin White Masks (2014) draws its title from Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks (1968) and uses Fanon’s Sartre-influenced Marxist methodology. This means his critical frame relies on articulating the decolonization project much like during the rapid decolonization of Africa at the mid-century.
From Fanon, Coulthard specifically draws on chapters 26–32 of Marx’s *Capital* on primitive accumulation. However, Coulthard refocuses the argument to deal with indigeneity specifically as a relationship with or an ontology (a way of being) built out from land. While Fanon’s focus is on negotiating race through discourses of class, Coulthard extends the project to accommodate forms of subjectivity that are predicated on grounded concepts of indigeneity as belonging or rootedness in place. He also presents this rootedness in place as anti-capitalist and disruptive to the nation-state.

For indigeneity, Coulthard contends, via Vine Deloria Jr., that “one of the most significant differences that exist between Indigenous and Western metaphysics revolves around the central importance of land to Indigenous modes of being, thought, and ethics” (Coulthard 60). Because of this, Indigenous populations, culture, literature, and resulting critical paradigms will privilege place, locality, and embeddedness in place as an ontological framework. In contrast, the West differs insofar as colonial narratives “derive meaning from the world in historical/developmental terms, thereby placing time as the narrative of central importance” (60). Therefore, “place is a way of knowing, of experiencing and relating to the world with others” (61). This contrast between time and place is central. Hence, Indigenous forms of knowledge and ontology are always relational. As with Margaret Noodin’s Anishinaabe work, Coulthard articulates this relational focus on place as also embedded in language. In Coulthard’s his work, this language is Dogrib (we will come back to this in Week 11 for Richard Van Camp, but please note, “Dogrib” is the translation of Tłı̨chǫ, meaning “Dog Flank People”).

Coulthard closes by offering five theses:

1. Direct action
2. Anti-capitalist action as Indigenous resistance & identity affirmation
3. Dispossession from land through urbanization leads to dispossession via gentrification
4. Indigenous feminisms as a form of decolonization
5. Skepticism within the nation-state hegemony

These can be interpreted as first, the need for direct action, second the efficacy of anti-capitalist actions as Indigenous resistance and affirmation of identity, third dispossession from land as driving urbanization as a preface to urban dispossession through gentrification, fourth the vital importance of Indigenous feminisms to decolonization and renewal, and fifth a call for skepticism amidst the hegemonic necessity of negotiations within the nation-state apparatus. A question for us as readers is how Coulthard’s five theses might inform a reading method for approaching Indigenous texts. For instance, the twinned ontologies based on time and place may suggest ways of approaching Larry’s trauma and recovery.
Week 10: The Blue Monkeys of Destruction

The opening story that Larry Sole shares with us as readers of *The Lesser Blessed* is the Blue Monkeys of Corruption. We have several lessons to learn from this story and how it fits within Van Camp’s novel, but before that we also learn about our narrator Larry.

I have this lousy memory because of my accident, but if you were to tell me a neat story, I’d be able to tell it back to you years from now, word for word. For example, the last time Jed was here, he told us about a trip to India. I’ll tell it to you. It goes like this:

(Van Camp 11)

The first thing for us to recognize is that stories make community by reinforcing bonds and divisions. Communities are defined by who is a part of them and who is not, and with the Blue Monkeys this process unfolds through storytelling. By sharing a story, we are part of a group involved with that narrative, and in a sense this is also like our role as readers of the novel. We also learn from Larry that remaking narratives for a community’s contemporary needs is normal. The desire for “authenticity” is an imposed concept – storytelling helps a community to persist because it creates community through the telling. Each story, then, serves that central role of bring people together. Furthermore, storytelling communicates not only narrative and culture but an epistemological system. That is, it teaches a way of knowing or of having knowledge. All of our stories do this in many ways by creating what is possible in the narrative world and by forming styles of knowledge (recall our earlier discussions of Michel Foucault and how knowledge and power are organized).

The final lesson we learn from Larry’s first story is that after telling, stories can migrate: “That’s the story he told me. It’s yours now. Tell anyone you want” (Van Camp 14). Larry’s ability to instantly memorize any story he’s told and tell it again is a key part of the novel, and we are reminded that in sharing a story it is also given away for others to share. Therefore, we must ask what stories are we not told. Can we be attentive enough to notice the stories we are not given? For example, the word “accident” (11) for Larry is a story that we are never directly told throughout the novel (the implicit molestation of Larry by his father as a consequence of his father’s experiences in the Residential School system). Why are we not told this story? We can sense that it is there, and the novel certainly does not hide that Larry has been abused, but we are never explicitly given this story. Why? Because it is not our story to share.
Week 10: Dogrib and Place

“Dogrib” is the English translation of the Tł̨ı̨chǫ Dene people, meaning literally “dog-rib” or “dog flank.” This helps us to understand the stories we are told in *The Lesser Blessed* as well as the colonial history the community has experiences. The Dene are Athabaskan speaking peoples, and the Tł̨ı̨chǫ Dene traditional lands are between Great Bear Lake and Great Slave Lake. For these place and people names, it is helpful to know that “Slavey” is the Cree word for Dene, so the Slave River and Great Slave Lake, or the language “Slavey” we read about in the novel are all based on English colonizers learning names from a different Indigenous community further south (the Cree). Along with this knowledge comes our recognition that Larry, in Fort Simmer (Fort Smith) is outside of Dogrib traditional territories, so he is displaced from tradition and his stories are about a different place.

When we read dialogue between Larry and Johnny, this twinned issue of displacement and Indigenous identity come to the fore. Johnny has repeatedly referred to “fool blood” rather than “full blood” – the phrasing points to the problem of a “blood quantum” for being part of an Indigenous nation rather than belonging to the community (in a sense, a biological essentialism that Indigenous communities quickly critique). Johnny is mocking this, although he is Métis, meaning he is of mixed ancestry in this context. Their discussion of the matter comes near the middle of the novel:

“So tell me about being full blood,” he said. I sat down.

“What-taya wanta know?”

“Well, what tribe are you? Chip? Cree?”

“Dogrib.”

“I thought they were from around Yellowknife.”

I got a little nervous. “Yeah.”

“What’s the scoop?” (Van Camp 62)

The phrasing may emphasize the “Sixties Scoop” of Indigenous children from their families to place them into foster care or adoptive homes, but the most direct matter is Larry being “nervous” around the issue of his dislocation from traditional Dogrib territories. He is displaced or out of place in Fort Simmer. Johnny, however, has asked the question that suits the location: is Larry Chipewyan or Cree?

Their conversation then leads to Larry’s storytelling, and his story is a sensitive one for him to share. It is a creation myth:

“Well, Jed told me that our tribe came from a woman who gave birth to six puppies.” I eyed him [Johnny] while I said
that because I knew some people would laugh. He didn’t, so I continued....

“She could hear her pups yapping like this: Yap! Yap! Then she could hear them laughing like children. After a while she could hear kids running around the hut and choo! Out from the hut run six kids, all naked.”

“Whoah!” Johnny said.

“Yeah! So she watches them and they’re playing in the snow all laughing... Three make it and turn back to pups. A girl and two boys don’t. She catches them. They stay human and they’re the first Dogribs. She raised them to be beautiful hunters with strong medicine.” (Van Camp 62–63)

Larry sharing this story with Johnny should remind us of the opening story with the Blue Monkeys and how stories can be shared. Once given to Johnny, it may be given again by him, so this telling is also a relationship of trust and of relationship-building. Larry can remember the story perfectly, as he has told us he is always able to do, and by sharing it with Johnny (and Johnny’s spirited engagement with the storytelling), we see them bonding. We may also ask how the girl and two boys of the story reflect the girl and two boys of the novel: Juliet, Johnny, and Larry whose surnames remind us hope, soul, and stream or way. But of course, in this instance, Larry cannot remember the ending of the story...

Week 11: Trauma & Healing

As we proceed through the second half of The Lesser Blessed, we discover more about Larry’s history and the stories he does not tell. We also are given an expansion of the creation myth that Larry has shared with Johnny as a way of bonding and creating community. Recall that this is a continuing theme for Larry, both remembering and repressing memory. Larry, who does not remember, asks his step-father Jed, for whom this is a story outside of his own community, what happens to the other children who did not become the two boys and a girl who were the first Dogrib (born from the flank of a dog):

“Jed? ‘Member the Dogrib story you told me? The one about how we came to be?”

“Yeah.”

“‘Member those kids that made it back to the bag?”

“The ones that turned back to the pups?”

“Yeah. What did the mother do with them?”

“I didn’t tell you?”

“I don’t think so. I can’t remember.”
This moment is as shocking as when we learn why Larry and Jazz the Jackal are enemies and fight. “Jackel” is an epithet that Larry gives to Jazz (55–56), thereby linking him to these puppies, and Larry’s “allergy” to puppies is also connected to his repressions of these memories. The conflict between Larry and Darcy as “enemies” is also based on Larry taking care of Darcy’s pet puppy, which comes to close to the hunting dogs and is killed by them (103–104). Just as there are stories we are not told by Larry, and we should notice this, we as readers should also notice the slow unfolding of his memories that he prefers not to recall himself.

As we have seen for the Native American Renaissance, a major recurring theme in Indigenous literature is recuperation through the recovery or persistence of community and tradition. Van Camp’s novel develops this theme as well. The traumas as many. Larry’s responsibility for the death of Darcy’s puppy is a significant memory for him to recover and bring to narrative, to make into storytelling. We also have Larry’s “accident” that slowly unfolds across the novel as a trauma visible on his scarred body from burns. The central memory that slowly re-emerges, though without becoming an explicit narrative, is Larry’s molestation by his father and his father’s abuse of Larry’s mother and aunt. This is the crux of Larry’s recovery through re-engaging with tradition, even though he is displaced from the larger Dogrib community. However, even in this we also have the inter-generational trauma — Larry’s father was also abused and molested as a child in the residential school system. While we do have received any extended narratives about Larry’s father’s traumatic experiences as a child, we see how his abuse in the residential schools leads to a cycle of abuse in his own family later and to Larry specifically. This theme will be developed most overtly in David Alexander Robertson and Scott B. Henderson’s graphic novel 7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga.

Larry’s “remembering” of trauma and healing are textually worked out in two scenes. In the first he overcomes the block on his memory of abuse, and in the second he finds comfort in Juliet Hope, whose name tells us that her role in the novel is more than simply a high school crush. How the two scenes are bound together is a textual trait in word recurrence. In the first, Larry is abused by his father, murders him while he is passed out drunk, and burns down the house (and burning himself at the same time):

I could taste the blood in my mouth... I could hear my father shiver again as I brought the hammer down and down and down...

If I could ride the waves of pain, I could remember things. I could feel them. I got a flash of Rae and our house; me standing over him; fire roaring from room to room; me standing in the
crowd with a box of matches; oh God in Heaven forgive me, my hammer, my secret tusk; me standing over Dad and bringing it down, slamming it down, knowing Dad's passed out, knowing he's dreaming. I wanted to take it all away, the sin and dirt and cum and blood in my mouth. I couldn't breathe. My eyes were crying. My lips were split. I wanted to sew stitches through my lips. (Van Camp 90–91)

This is a very difficult scene for the reader, and our empathy for Larry is intense. As a book for communities with a long history of abuses, it can also be triggering. However, Van Camp offers only this single scene of the central trauma Larry suffers. His healing then finds ways through word recurrence to show the transformation of shame and the toxicity of sexuality into in the passage above into something rich and positive for the young man.

When Larry and Juliet have a single night together before she leaves Fort Simmer (and while she is most likely pregnant with Johnny's baby), we see a very different possible future ahead of Larry. While it is on the surface a love scene in a teenage novel (we could compare it to dozens of novels in the genre for this, from Tea and Sympathy to Twilight today), the language used in the scene tells us that far more is occurring for Larry than we are explicitly told:

I rolled on top of her and her hand placed me there. She was soft giving flesh that I took with my tusk and she was hotter than the centre of the sun, like a long never-ending swallow. I couldn't go deep enough. She shivered inside and bucked under me and I was buried in her hair. She was in my mouth in my throat and she raised her ass under me and (call her snowbird) our meat baby-blush pink (call her raven) the monkeys slept and I swam under her shirt... and I filled my mouth with her a warm dove I filled my throat with her and she was in my lungs... she established territory.... There was no shame in being loud and crying... like flames like blades of wicked fire... “I was sewn into the belly of an animal.” (Van Camp 124–126)

The language of sexual desire and experience here repeats the language of trauma, but to an entirely different effect. The phrasing of “over/on top of” shows the parallel between the two scenes, as does the unusual word “tusk,” the obvious repetition of “fire” in its literal and then metaphorical senses, Larry's breathing and lips, and the transformed meaning of “sewn.” Where Larry had wanted to silence himself in trauma and sew his lips shut, with Juliet he finds hope and the recovery of tradition by becoming the Dogrib child sewn into the dog flank to be reborn anew.
Week 11: Raven Talk & Holophrasis

A further element of Larry’s recovery is signaled by language. Where the linguistic recurrences in his trauma and healing help the reader to recognize the wider meaning of the scenes, another linguistic trait also signals change across the novel. If we recall Glen Sean Coulthard’s argument that in approaching Indigenous literature we should regard time as colonial and place as Indigenous (one cultural tradition emphasizing historical time and the other emphasizing rootedness in place as ontological differences), then we are faced with a key problem. How can Larry find recovery without place? That is, how can Larry heal while he experiences radical displacement. Fort Simmer is outside of traditional Dogrib territories, and his stories and cultural traditions are about a different place. The ongoing trauma of displacement to indigeneity is a problem without a clear solution, but if Larry’s traditional stories about places he no longer inhabits, then a shift in how language and narrative work may offer him a different form of healing. This is what happens across the novel.

Larry’s language and narrative take on three traits: storytelling itself, even in English, becomes itself a form of cultural expression and persistence; place is manifested through narrative rather than actual locality; and holophrasis in the Dogrib language, Ḥiłchǫ Yatìi, works to sustain cultural traditions in a new language. We should recall reading Ngugi wa Thiong’o in thinking through the problems of translating a culture into a colonizer’s language.

Holophrasis is most connected to the character Donny, who we can easily overlook when first reading the novel. However, as we recognize how holophrasis is at work, going back through the text to see where Donny is and what he is doing makes a second narrative visible. As a linguistic trait, holophrasis is when single words are also complete sentences. Mareike Neuhaus has written most extensively on holophrasis in Indigenous literature, but the terminology has a long history in often problematic anthropological approaches to North American Indigenous languages beginning in the nineteenth century.

Holophrasis relates to the polysynthetic nature of languages, meaning that words take on affixes or stems that alter their meaning, which is a complex grammar (this is why, as a loose measure, we might say that a statement in Latin or Greek would typically require fewer words than the same statement in English). Lyle Campbell expresses this as “holophrasis had to do with the meaning of words (the expression of a complex of ideas in a single form)” (Campbell 40). An example Neuhaus gives of this is “Take ‘kiwāpamew,’ for instance. That’s Cree for ‘he or she saw him or her’” (Neuhaus, “Holo” 66) – this would be like if English had subjects and objects as affixes to verbs in a sentence in addition to prepositions as affixes as well. For obvious reasons, many of the values embodied in on language can be difficult to render in another, such as Dogrib in English. Neuhaus is more specific by distinguishing strict holophrasis in linguistics and what she calls “holophasitic reading” as a method:
Holophrastic reading… is concerned with reading for holophrastic influences in English-language texts by Indigenous storytellers and writers in order to invest these texts with meaning…. [T]he purpose of holophrastic reading is… thus to grapple with the challenge that is at the heart of much Indigenous writing: to think outside the English language while simultaneously using that language. (Neuhaus, *Decolonizing*)

This is what Larry and his friends in the novel call “raven talk,” their slang language that compresses words.

The most obvious example Neuhaus points to in Van Camp is “Sol later” meaning “See you all later,” the concept of relational word clusters means that in English, we as readers need to be aware of repeated phrases. To read holophrastically is to notice how an Indigenous text attempts to render in English a concept or phrasing that is based on a different linguistic tradition:

“Hey Chief,”… [Donny] said. “You gonna remember me tomorrow?”
I nodded and was still out of breath.
He smiled. “You gonna remember me in two weeks?”
I nodded and felt my ribs.
He started to laugh. “You gonna remember me in three months?”
“Yeah,” I said.
“Knock knock.”
“Who’s there?”
He kicked snow in my face. “Forgot me already, chief.”
… Donny stood up and yelled, “We’re off to Yellowknife!
Sol later, chief!” (Van Camp 132–133)

This passage ends with the “raven talk” from Donny “Sol later,” and this should prompt us to rethink how Donny and Larry have related to each other across the novel as a whole. What emerges is a persistence of “raven talk” between the two and Donny’s presence at key moments for Larry’s growth across the book. While we may not think of him as a major character, if we watch for how he uses language, he seems to become much more important.

There are also several relational word bundles that recur several times, and Neuhaus has pointed to these. For instance, Larry is always “busy finding Juliet Hope.” He is also, in a teenage fixation, always talking about “doggy-style,” but a holophrastic reading would make these recurring word bundles more important. With Larry’s “allergy” to puppies, attention to dogs, his Dogrib creation myth, and with the monkey in his dreams calling him “Son of
Dog,” it seems impossible not to see “doggy-style” as a pun that hides a much more serious reassertion of cultural identity. We also have the “Blue monkeys of corruption” and “Listen to my black teeth scream” recurring in text. Moreover, the comparison of two passages earlier for Larry’s trauma remembering his abuse and his healing with Juliet Hope, may now stand out as an example of holophrastic reading – the transformation is based largely on recurring word clusters.

While the novel may a distinctly Western literary form, as we have seen in relation to other authors in our readings, for Van Camp we see a struggle to revise how the novel form and the language work, right down to the linguistic structure.

Discussion Board

Van Camp’s *The Lesser Blessed* is about characters likely close to you in age, and it is frequently taught in high school. How might you have related to the novel in your graduating year of high school? How do you relate to it differently today? Why do you think Van Camp wrote this novel for this audience? Also, if you consider the novel’s title (from a British folk rock band referring to Biblical giants), how do you see it (or do you see it) moving in a multicultural paradigm? You might instead want to consider how our previous readings shape your responses to what you have learned about Van Camp, such as Ngugi on languages, the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, or Durrell’s syncretism in contrast to Orwell’s emphasis on differences.

Please login to the Discussion Board in WebCampus and respond to this prompt (1 point) and offer feedback or a response to a classmate (1 point).

Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


McKegney, Sam. “‘Beautiful hunters with strong medicine’: Indigenous Masculinity and Kinship in Richard Van Camp’s *The Lesser Blessed*.”


Week 12: Thomas King & Rebecca Roanhorse

Objectives

1. Identity instances of storytelling as a cultural practice.
2. Recognize how storytelling creates forms of community through inclusion and exclusion.
3. Contextualize irony and humor as tools to Indigenous storytelling.
4. Relate concepts of “genre” to traditional storytelling.
5. Identify specific histories in “Borders” and “Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™.”

Reading Assignment


Commentary

Both Thomas King (1943–) and Rebecca Roanhorse (1971–) bring a self-conscious reflection on Indigenous literatures to their work. This means that both are actively aware of the critical legacy of the Native American Renaissance in literary studies and as a literary movement, and at the same time both are actively aware of how tropes in such a body of literature are consumed by the general public in North America. King wrote his research-based doctoral dissertation on the Native American Renaissance at the University of Utah in 1971, focusing on oral storytelling traditions. Roanhorse, a lawyer, studied at Yale University and a graduate degree at Union Theological Seminary (adjunct to Columbia University). In other words, for us as readers, we should see both as not only authors but as scholars fully aware of the critical concepts we are only discovering in this course.

Both King and Roanhorse also make us consider modern and hybrid Indigenous identities in a way that is distinct from how we have approached Eden Robinson and Richard Van Camp. Where both Robinson and Van Camp are members of specific Indigenous communities in Canada (Robinson is a member of the Haisla and Heiltsuk Nations and Van Camp is a member of the...
Tłı̨chǫ Nation), King and Roanhorse are from hybrid backgrounds and are not members of the respective Nations from their self-identified heritage. This may sound complex, but it means that King self-identifies as of Cherokee, Greek, and German background but was not raised as part of the Cherokee community nor with direct connection to one of the three recognized Cherokee tribes. Roanhorse self-identifies as of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo and African American background. Both were also raised without the parent of Indigenous background in their life – King’s father left the family when he was young, and Roanhorse recounts first meeting her birth-mother as “a woman whose family comes from the Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo of Northern New Mexico” (Roanhorse, “Postcards”). This does not mean that King and Roanhorse are somehow less legitimate but rather that they write from different experiences and positions from the authors we have read so far.

Genre

Both King and Roanhorse are keenly aware of how their work speaks in a tradition distinct from the Indigenous cultures they both seek to express. For King, this productive tension resides in the differences between oral storytelling and Western narrative norms. For instance, in his novels the narrator may begin to argue with the characters, and the interactive and spontaneous elements of oral storytelling make frequent appearances in his short story collection One Good Story, That One, in which “Borders” is collected. This means that readers of King’s works, especially beyond the single short story we are covering in this course, are continually reminded that different audiences will interact with a story and storyteller differently, and some parts of stories may be left out or changed depending on the audience. This is a continual tension in his work between the generic traits of oral storytelling and written narrative norms in the European tradition.

For Roanhorse, genre becomes even more specific. Her work has primarily been in Indigenous Futurism, a science fiction sub-genre. In this sense, genre takes on its more familiar meaning to us, such as “fantasy,” “mystery,” or “romance.” Roanhorse, as a newly emerging writing, has lengthy traditions to draw from, and her approach will send us back to rethink Robinson and Van Camp. As she argues in her essay “Postcards from the Apocalypse,” “Indigenous Futurism rewrites the past to reimagine the present” (Roanhorse, “Postcards”). This is much like our reading of Robinson’s “Swallow,” in which the post-apocalyptic cli-fi genre is transformed by the remembrance of the Cheslatta T’En people’s flooding for the Kenney Dam – the time direction here is important as well. This kind of Indigenous genre writing “rewrites the past” in a way that transforms it into a speculative fiction about our world today through imagining the future. We are not, as readers, leaving the past behind to imagine the future, as is typical of science fiction as a genre – instead, we are remembering the past.
in a more specific way so that it becomes the fictional future that makes us understand the present differently. This is a more overt and direct embracing of what we have seen Darko Suvin describe as the “cognitive estrangement” in science fiction.

This approach to Indigenous Futurism leads Roanhorse to ask a provocative questions for us as settler readers: “What if I told you that there had been a zombie apocalypse? What if I told you that you were the zombies?” (Roanhorse, “Postcards”). If we carry this back to our reading of Robinson’s “Swallow,” it tells us what we know is history: that the horrors of the closing of the story are a part of history rather than an imagined future. This also explains Roanhorse’s own novel Trail of Lightning (2018), which recalls but transforms the historical Trail of Tears. To answer her question “What if I told you that you were the zombies,” genre itself gives us a partial answer. The zombie genre has a very specific history, beginning in its contemporary form in 1968 (the “voodoo” zombie is quite different). That genre contained Western anxieties about the Cold War, communism, and American race relations – this is to say, “we” are the survivors fighting against the zombies. Using zombies to comment on contemporary social conflicts carries on to today in The Walking Dead and other zombie franchises. Zombies invade our homes and destroy our social institutions. In this way, “genre” is an answer to our anxieties and fears. The inversion casts the colonizer as zombie, consuming the living, and this is also an answer to anxieties and traumas. The challenge is for settlers to recognize in themselves the cause of fear and harm.

“Borders”

King’s story “Borders” was first published in Saturday Night in 1991 and then collected with other short stories in One Good Story, That One in 1993. We are reading a reprint of the story in World Literature in 1992 through FDU’s institutional subscription. This means that we lose some of the context provided by the other stories with which King collected it, especially the meta-literary reflections that the stories express – this means that the stories of One Good Story, That One are both stories and reflections on what storytelling itself means and how it works. For example, the opening story of the collection has a storyteller sharing a narrative with anthropologists, but the story is an exaggerated transformation of the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. The point of the story, then, is that narrators may conceal or trick the audience, and that some stories have different meanings for different listeners. One audience may recognize irony while another may think the story is sincere. Ultimately, King does not argue that a specific interpretation is “right” but rather that the shifting meaning of stories is part of their importance, especially in an Indigenous context.

The story in “Borders” is relatively straightforward. The Canadian Blackfoot family wants to visit a family member on the American side of the
border, but they are prevented from crossing when they will not declare citizenship. After the conflict continues for a while, they are eventually allowed to pass. This questions how modern borders may divide various populations, or specifically how imposed borders divide a single community (the Blackfoot) even if they have treaties with both the Canadian and American governments (Treaty 7 from 1877 in Canada and the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 with the USA). The story even gestures to real locations, such as Stand Off, Carway, and Sweet Grass, all south of where he lived and taught in Lethbridge. However, as King shows, beyond these historical elements of the story and its setting in Southern Alberta, there are other problems being questioned.

The narrator tells us, quoting his mother, “It’s the water. From here on down, they got lousy water” (269) and “I had to dress up, too, for my mother didn’t want us crossing the border looking like Americans” (269). The repeated suggestion is pride in their Canadian identity as contrasting against America, even though they also reject Canadian identity during the border crossing. This suggests the difficulty of negotiating an identity between community, nation, and state. Even as they reject American or Canadian identity, forms of pride appear in their comparisons (the mother’s and Laetitia’s) between the size of the malls, the mountains of Utah and Alberta, and what they like about their respective settler colonial communities.

Another theme that emerges is liminal space, as well as liminal identities. The border, and the space between the respective nations, is liminal – this means that it is neither inside or nor out of either country. It is a transitional space and moment in time. The narrator emphasizes this: “Between the two borders was a duty-free shop where you could buy cigarettes and liquor and flags. Stuff like that.... We left the reserve... and drove until we got to Coutts” (270). The reserve (reservation in America) is one liminal space, named “Stand-off” here and “Stand Off” in reality, and then during the confrontation with border guards they are again in the liminal border space between Canada and the USA. However, even when they decide to leave and return to the reserve, the family is made to confront how both spaces are liminal:

“Where you coming from?”
“Standoff.”
“Is that in Montana?”
“No.”
“Where are you going?”
“Standoff.” (271)

As readers, we can know that Stand Off is a real community south of Lethbridge in Alberta in the Blood (Kainai) Indian reserve. The fictional spelling of the community, however, emphasizes that it is in a space-between, outside of other spaces. It is a standoff. Even in leaving the standoff at the border and the liminal space of the border line, to return to the reserve is to enter another standoff and liminal space.
King also emphasizes how language and storytelling are a part of community building and the maintenance of culture. While the family is in the liminal border space, the mother tells our narrator a story:

“Coyote went fishing, one day. That’s how it all started.”

We sat out under the stars that night, and my mother told me all sorts of stories. She was serious about it, too. She’d tell them slow, repeating parts as she went, as if she expected me to remember each one.” (272)

The first thing for us to notice as readers is that we do not actually know what happens in this story of coyote. We know it is being told, but we do not know its contents. Like the opening story of the collection One Good Story, That One, we know that there are some stories that hold a community together, and if we are not a part of that community, we will not hear them. Families do similar things, and not all parts of family life are open to the public, unless they become a part of the family. Language plays a role in family tensions as well, such as when mother and daughter interact:

“You can see the mountains from here,” my mother told Laetitia in Blackfoot.

“Lots of mountains in Salt Lake,” Laetitia told her in English.” (269)

For anyone in a bilingual family, the nature of this exchange is clear. The mother speaks in the language of the home, but the child answers in the colonial language of English. This is a generational disagreement and also a statement of affiliation and preference (urbanization rather than remaining on the reserve). It speaks to a distance or conflict between mother and daughter.

We may apply similar readings to the flags, guns, and guards we see in the story. The conclusion may present a different possibility to us though. While the family is negotiating its difficulties within itself, between the mother and her daughter, the problem of borders and imposed divisions is resolved in the conclusion to the narrative, which we may read as a metaphor:

It was almost evening when we left Coutts. I watched the border through the rear window until all you could see were the tops of the flag poles and the blue water tower, and then they rolled over a hill and disappeared. (273)

In this, while the border has not actually disappeared, it seems to point to a border-less future in which the land remains but the divisions in it “disappear.” While the story is in a realist mode, it points to a future.

“Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™”

Roanhorse’s story “Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™” draws on, and disrupts, some of the longstanding tropes of native literature. The so-called “vanishing Indian” is the first. From the earliest colonial encounters, the
trope of the vanishing Indian has recurred with imagery of the “noble savage” and other deeply problematic depictions, but these are always paired with a “fading away.” The main problem with the trope is that it sets Indigenous peoples as vanishing out of existence and as doomed to be a part of the past rather than a part of the future (or even excludes them from being a part of the of the present in many instances). This is the bitter twist of the epigram Roanhorse uses from Sherman Alexie, who both mocks the trope and has been criticized for using it. Indigenous Futurism, however, intrinsically refutes the trope by showing “survivance” of Indigenous peoples into the future. “Survivance” is a portmanteau coined by Gerald Vizenor to indicate how the survival of Indigenous peoples and culture is also a form of resistance to colonialism – it is interpreted as combining “survival” and “resistance” as well as “survival” and “endurance.” As we know in this course from the TRC of Canada and other readings, this repeated image of the “vanishing Indian” is deeply political and the product of assimilationist programs of cultural genocide. The repeated image of the fading away or vanishing over the horizon is a manifestation of a colonial wish perhaps most widely recognized in James Fenmore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans (1826), which ends with the victory of Europeans and the end of the time of the Indigenous peoples. Roanhorse’s project is to subvert this trope and to reveal it as a fantasy that covers the brutality of colonization.

The second trope is cultural appropriation, which has gained increasing public recognition in recent years. Appropriation here means taking without consent, such as the appropriation of another people’s cultural traditions for one’s own use or enjoyment. The most prominent examples of this, and the most debated, are when non-Indigenous artists claim Indigenous identity or use Indigenous traditional art in their own works. It could (and often does) apply to many other cultural groups as well. There are a number of hotly debated examples of cultural appropriation today, but the most well-recognized is the author Grey Owl (1888–1938), who was actually the British-born Englishman Archibald Belaney.

As an adult, Belaney moved to America and Canada, adopted the name Grey Owl, and claimed to be Indigenous, going on to appear in documentaries and write books pretending to be Métis. With his self-created identity, he would explain Indigenous cultures to outsiders and speak on behalf of Indigenous communities. This appropriation of another community’s identity (and even of its self-representation) is obviously an abuse of power that left Indigenous communities without a voice of their own and allowed a colonizer to speak on their behalf and without their consent. However, where interest, homage, and abuse overlap can be more complex to debate. Roanhorse’s story does not provide us with a definite answer, but she raises the problem of a “blood quantum” for identity and how belonging to a community is distinct from a genetic history (ie: her husband is Navajo and they have lived on reservation, but she has also been accused of cultural appropriation). In an important way, this is
part of how King and Roanhorse differ from our readings of Van Camp and Robinson – the former are not members of an Indigenous nation or community, but have ancestry that connects them, while the latter are members of living communities. For Roanhorse, this is a part of the question of “authenticity” that is an intimate part of her story.

Roanhorse challenges her readers to engage with this twinned problem of the vanishing Indian and cultural appropriation. Most obviously, the story is addressed to “you,” the reader. Also, where King and Van Camp have shown us that not all stories are going to be shared and that not all stories are real, Roanhorse is actively drawing attention to how an inauthentic story or cultural experience can be deliberately crafted to cater to the expectations of an audience or even what that audience may need. This is the problem of the “authentic” in the story, as if a distant past is somehow more real than a contemporary present, or if a mysterious “blood quantum” is more real than being a part of a community. Something that does not match our stereotypes will not feel “real.” These stereotypes tell us much more about the audience that consumes them than they do those to whom such stereotypes are applied or how such people may perform these stereotypes for income or to survive. Our readings in Edward Said and Albert Memmi make the same point by showing how the stereotypes of the colonized actually reflect the anxieties and predilections of the colonizer, who is projecting them onto the colonized peoples for a position of authority.

The challenge for us as readers is the shifting sense of the “authentic” or real in the story, which is both metafictional (it is about fiction itself) and unresolved. We do not know if the “you” of the protagonist is the person giving or receiving the “Experience” in the science fiction setting. The closing, moreover, broadens our possibilities outward once more. The experience of being appropriated, driven away, and of having “your” life ruined may itself be the “authentic experience” the story offers in its title. The “you” would imply this: that the reader and hence the protagonist is not a part of the community and is instead the person who is purchasing an “authentic” Indian experience. Someone from without the community (like our ostensible narrator) would be “I” and not “you.”

Discussion Board

In an English course we expect to encounter stories. What is different in how King and Roanhorse present storytelling itself? If storytelling is a unique part of a culture or a community, how does the telling of stories itself become a pay of preserving culture. King summarizes this gnomically in the phrase “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (Truth 2).

Please login to the Discussion Board in WebCampus and respond to this prompt (1 point) and offer feedback or a response to a classmate (1 point).
Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


Weeks 14 & 15: Robertson & Henderson’s 7 Generations

Objectives

1. Recognize comics as a literary medium.
2. Identify the “system” of comics through the “gutter,” juxtaposition, and “arthrology.”
3. Relate comics as a form to Indigenous concerns.
4. Relate “general arthrology” as a formal concept to the inter-generational trauma in 7 Generations.
5. Discuss the “indigenization” of the comics artform in 7 Generations.

Reading Assignment


Commentary

We have two components to the Study Guide for weeks 14 and 15: (1) understanding how comics work as a medium and (2) relating this to the retelling of Indigenous history in 7 Generations. Robertson has written several graphic novels on Indigenous topics, and in particular in relation to the residential school system and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. A secondary theme in 7 Generations is Indigenous masculinity and the multigenerational effects of trauma. Please make sure that you are reading 7 Generations during Week 14 even though the Study Guide will only address it in Week 15.

Week 14: Comics as a Medium

Comics and comic studies have seen a tremendous expansion of critical activity over the past decade. This section of the Study Guide includes an interpretive focus on comics and the graphic novel, in particular the legitimization of these materials through recent criticism and their access to “high culture” status. The discussion here of comics as a medium also covers the most prominent critical paradigms, ranging from Scott McCloud’s Understanding Comics, W.J.T. Mitchell’s Picture Theory, Thierry Groensteen’s Système de la bande dessinée, and R.C. Harvey’s “Describing and Discarding Comics.” This includes the
paradigms of sequential art, closure, the gutter, and both general and restricted “arthrology” as well as the more general concept of “remediation” when any media product is remade in a new form, such as a novel becoming a film or (in our case) a black & white comic book becoming a colorized graphic novel.

Week 14: From the “Gutter” to “Arthrology”

The history of critical works on comics is relatively compact and tidy. In 1947, Coulton Waugh published *The Comics*, which was followed in 1973 by David Kunzle’s *Early Comic Strips*. The works that continued to be cited began in 1979 with R.C. Harvey’s seminal article “Aesthetics of Comics” followed by a major descriptive turn in Will Eisner’s “Comics and Sequential Art” in 1985. The emphasis on sequentiality would become crucial to comics studies. The most popular work remains Scott McCloud’s comic book *Understanding Comics* in 1994, which discusses a theory of comics in comic book form. The following year, W.J.T. Mitchell published *Picture Theory*, which adopts the same theory of sequentiality. The most recent major works are Thierry Groensteen’s *Système de la bande dessinée* (System of Comics) from 1999 and R.C. Harvey’s “Describing and Discarding Comics” from 2000.

Waugh began with “sequence” as the key criteria for comics. This means he saw comics as, essentially, a form of “sequential art.” The sequence is at the center of this way of understanding comics, and this concept broadened the definition of comics and brought it into conflict with other sequential forms of visual art. For instance, in 1731, William Hogarth produced a series of six paintings, *A Harlot’s Progress*, that became fantastically popular when they were reproduced as engravings the next year. The six paintings show, *in sequence*, the fall and eventual death of a young woman who moves from the countryside to London only to take on lovers, become a prostitute, be taken to prison, and finally die of venereal disease. He followed the series with *A Rake’s Progress* that tells a similar tale of downfall with a moral caution to the young consumers of these extremely popular works.

Because scholars realized that narrative exists in visual art already, they instead began to emphasize sequence in a single work or page to distinguish comics. Richard Kyle coined the term “sequential art” as a way of describing comics in 1964, but we may wish to consider the social status of comics in relation to the development of this terminology. For instance, Hogarth’s *The Rake’s Progress* was later made into an opera and is “art” while we tend to think of comics a little differently. Is this difference meaningful? The difference may largely relate to how we consume these artworks and how they are reproduced, so it may become largely a matter of social or cultural interpretation, yet it still exists. The most obvious difference is the association of comics with children or adolescents and sequences of paintings, like Hogarth, with adults.
Comics have been considered childish since the 1950s or even earlier, and hence they have been subject to the largely fictional “Comics Code Authority” to approve their content for children. In 1954 the Comics Magazine Association of America was created to calm fears over inappropriate content in comics. With this juvenile association, the term “sequential art” restores some degree of higher status to the works, much as we have recently moved from “comics” to “graphic novels.” Eisner and McCloud makes “sequential art” central to comics, although by privileging “sequence art” as the definitional practice of comics, we disregard single panel comics. This is not a description without status markers.

Orion Kidder, in his article “Show and Tell,” remarks on the Comics Code as a hegemonic force that produces the kind of uniformity that expresses a society’s expectations of normativity, even in wildly unrealistic narrative materials:

The historical circumstance of the Silver-Age style is the creation of the self-censorship system called the Comics Code, which was instituted in 1954, revised in 1971, and then finally abandoned by mainstream publishers over the course of the 1990s. It made American comics explicitly authoritarian; it removed the consequences of violence and specifically omitted gun-play, which essentially killed the genres that relied on gore or the real threat of death (horror, war, crime, etc.); and it all but removed overt sexuality. In [Roland] Barthes’ (1973) terms, the Code constitutes the underlying mythic structure of American mainstream comics, and despite the absence of the Code in post-millennium comics, many of its stylistic conventions and authoritarian presuppositions remain. (Kidder 249)

This “underlying mythic structure” reflects the series of expectations we have of comics, which is just as much a part of the structure of the work as are the conventions of sequence, frames, and panels.

Scott McCloud offers a number of other conceptual terms to understand the process by which comics come to convey meaning. He focuses on “Closure” (the reader’s imposition on the text). Sequence requires “closure” imposed by the reader in order to link together the action between two panels or images – this can given an impression of motion (even though comics are static) or a narrative coherence where the actual process remains invisible between the panels. In a sense, this is true of all narrative (think about chapter breaks, cuts to new scenes in films, gaps, aporias, and so forth).

Closure is the reader’s addition “in” or “between” panels. We add actions, narrative, images, body parts, legs, motives, and a host of other materials.
Is this “projection” on to the text? How guided is it? Does this make comics uniquely prone to a reader’s fantasy? Wolk gives his version saying

Comics suggest motion, but they’re incapable of actually showing motion. They indicate sound, and they even spell it out, but they’re silent. They imply the passage of time, but their temporal experience is controlled by the reader rather than by the artist. They convey continuous stories, but they’re made up of a series of discrete moments. They’re concerned with conveying an artist’s perceptions, but one of their most crucial components is blank space. (Wolk 125)

For McCloud, this is “The phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (63:1). However, this means that no two readers ever see the same “whole.” The gutter then becomes important. The gutter, for McCloud, is the blank space between panels, and this is a relatively unique trait to comics in comparison to other sequence art forms (such as stained glass windows). Comic creators must then be uniquely aware of how they only make “parts” not wholes.

McCloud’s strongest presentation of closure is two contrasting sets of panels. One is a few dozen images in sequence, first beginning with a character Carl promising his mother that he will not drink and drive – the remaining dozens of images show his day before he finally decides on his drive home to open a can of beer, which leads to his immediate death. The contrasting set of images is comprised of only two panels – in the first Carl promises not to drink and drive, and in the second we see his tombstone.

![Image](image_url)

(McCloud 85)

The point is clear. Readers will impose “closure” on the two panels in order to construct a narrative of Carl consuming alcohol while driving. However, it is impossible to impose closure with certainty, and we are at risk since the closure only exists in the reader and not the comic itself. We are largely unaware of our reading habits while imposing closure, so becoming self-conscious of it is difficult.

Theirry Groensteen, in *Système de la bande dessinée* (1999), which was only translated into English in 2007 as *System of Comics* proposes a new theoretical basis for comics. He privileges the concept of “Arthrology,” which expands our options as readers by recognizing habits we already naturally engage
in. The term “arthrology” refers to articulation (joints): arthron. Students might think of two-part buses as “articulated” buses. The moving centre of the bus would be its joint. Groensteen disputes purely linear articulations, from one frame to the next in a fixed chronological sequence. Unlike films, in which associations between scenes are purely a reader’s recognition, comics can actually juxtapose such images on the same page so that they coexist at the same time, just not adjacent in the “flow” of time that a reader constructs or adds to the image on a page. For Groensteen, “closure” becomes plural with the “negative capability” of multiple simultaneous interpretive activities and readings. Readers may “articulate” a relationship between any two panels anywhere in an entire comic, though obviously this is most likely to happen between panels on a single page that are not contiguous with each other. That is, we are able to link together images on a page even when they are not “beside” each other in what we assume to be the chronological sequence of the panels. A single panel may run the length of the page with several running beside it in chronological sequence. Likewise, the sequence of panels may revolve around a central image. In essence, this means we should notice both the narrative sequence we impose on the page as well as the singular page itself on which all the images coexist all at once.

For Groensteen, this leads to a definitional distinction. “Restricted arthrology” is in strict sequence while “general arthrology” is the full set of a multi-frame (a whole page or more) or the linkages between two images that are not in adjacent contact with each other. This could take the form of a tall frame running the length of a page such that it contacts all frames on the page (Robertson & Henderson 18:7), or it could be two images several pages apart that connect with each other for one reason or another (repetition, showing parallel events in a different timeframe, and so forth, as detailed in Week 15).

These ideas from Groensteen may seem complex, but for students with a particular interest, his book is available for download through the Fairleigh Dickinson University Library, and its extremely systematic division of complex ideas into small, manageable subdivisions will certainly help.

Week 14: Remediation

We will use the term “remediation” to mean the transformation of one media product into another medium, such as a book into a film, although this might also be a film into a DVD or YouTube video, or a record into an .mp3 file. We are accustomed to thinking of an .avi file as being the same thing as a DVD, but they are significantly different and qualify as a “remediation.” One is a physical object and the other is data typically on a hard drive. We are less likely to throw away a DVD than we are to delete a file, and we are more likely to purchase a DVD than we are a file. We also tend to consume them differently. In this particular instance, the DVD and the .avi file presumably have the same
“data,” but the remediated form significantly changes how we as consumers relate to that content.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin articulate a notion of “remediation” that falls between the two competing senses of the term. As Bolter and Grusin argue, “the logic of hypermediacy [which is the blurring together of several different mediums] expresses the tension between regarding a visual space as mediated and regarding it as a ‘real’ space that lies beyond mediation” (334). This is a complex way of saying “remediation” is a problem that sits somewhere between “reality” and “representations of reality.” For the typical media consumer, a war documentary’s scenes of blood and carnage lack “reality” because it does not use the same sound effects and visual cues we are used to finding in fictional representations of reality, such as war movies (as distinct from documentaries). Real gunshots don’t sound like movie gunshots, so reality may seem less “real” to us. Reality disappoints us in innumerable ways because it fails to live up to our mediated expectations. Moreover, for Bolter and Grusin, “the representation of one medium in another” is the definition for what they term remediation, and they “argue that remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media” (338).

This remediation could be “passive,” such as a DVD of visual art works that seeks to provide the same viewing experience as an art gallery. The digital remediation attempts to be as “passive” as possible in the viewer’s experience, meaning that we are not supposed to notice that there is a difference between a computer or television screen and the original artworks hanging on the wall of a gallery. This remediation is “passive” even though the bias in time and space as well as industrial production has changed the social relations of the cultural product significantly. The social relations I have to a “tweet” or email are different from the relations I have with a hand-printed book with woodblock engravings for illustrations and a hand sewn binding, even if the contents are precisely the same. I may be inclined to duplicate and distribute the “tweet” and less likely to give away my limited edition book. As another example of remediation, I might also say that a postcard of a painting or a film adaptation of a novel changes the contents from one medium to another.

Remediation may also be “aggressive,” which happens when the new medium “can try to refashion the older medium or media entirely, while still marking the presence of the older media and therefore maintaining a sense of multiplicity or, as [they] have called it, hypermediacy” (Bolter & Grussin 340). A film adaptation of a Jane Austen novel might, for instance, dispense with chapter headings to break up scenes even while reminding viewers of the film’s origins in a novel by placing a copy of the original book surreptitiously on a desk or bookcase.

Our consumption of 7 Generations is remediated. It was originally published in 2010 as a series of four black & white comics. We, however, are reading a single graphic novel published in 2012 that is fully colorized in “vivid
color.” In other words, we have two very different remediations of the same text. The graphic novel form tends to be treated more seriously than a black & white comic, and even the shift in terms from “comic book” to “graphic novel” shows how readers adopt a meaningful difference in approach. There is also a difference in cost, and the price of a product often changes how we consume it. For example, fast food and a fine dinner for a special occasion may include the same ingredients, but we tend to eat the fast food while waking or driving (or while distracted) but give our attention to a fine meal that comes with a higher cost.

In order to emphasize this difference (and to make it easier to print this Study Guide, quotations from the text are from the black & white 2010 edition of the comics rather than the colorized graphic novel).

**Week 15: 7 Generations & Indigenous Comics**

Comics would seem to be a quintessentially Western art form, although this has certainly been disputed by some critics. Why, then, do we see so many Indigenous artists turning to comics as an artform? Van Camp has written several comics, including *A Blanket of Butterflies*, which is also illustrated by Scott B. Henderson, and the best-selling book about the Residential School System (and following after the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*) is Gord Downie’s combination comic and album *Secret Path* (illustrated by Jeff Lemire). However, with Groensteen’s concept of general arthrology in our minds, how might we approach Robertson and Henderson’s *7 Generations* and its intergenerational history of colonial trauma? Does Groensteen’s theory of reading comics allow us to read the relations among the past and present?

In an interview, Robertson points to the kind of visual work that he and Henderson planned for the sequence of panels on each page. In the opening pages of the book we see Edwin’s suicide attempt by a drug overdose. This narrative element captures our attention and we enter the book *in medias res* (in the middle of the action). However, our first panel in the entire comic is the photograph of Edwin (not an image of Ewin himself, but an image of a picture in a broken frame (3:1) – the parenthetical citations here uses page:frame, so page 3 and frame 1. However, the broken glass of the picture frame around Edwin also signals what will become the major theme of the graphic novel: his connection to tradition as a pathway for healing. The same pattern of broken glass repeats when Edwin’s mother finds him passed out from a drug overdose and, as Robertson points out, it reflects the dream catcher hanging over him in the window (4:2). Juxtaposing these two scenes at the very opening of the book makes the planning involve more obvious, and we should also consider how this invites the reader to connect the visual form of the comic with its narrative purpose and its thematics. Also, compare this to your colorized graphic novel remediation and notice how different the images are – remember, your remediation is significantly transformed by colorization, not simple with the addition
of color but also the addition of images that the inclusion of color makes necessary:

This parallel between the panels is a part of what Groensteen calls general arthrology. Rather than reading in a strict sequence, the reader finds connections between panels across the comic as a whole. Very quickly, this becomes a connection across time as well, with panels about Edwin’s ancestors being “articulated” with panels about his life in the contemporary world. In this sense, Robertson and Henderson are indigenizing the comic art form.

Consider how the image of Edwin’s ancestor, Stone, from the story his mother tells him connects to his own pathway to healing. The story of Stone is
his mother’s way of helping him understand “where you came from” (7:1) and that “Our past has shaped us all. You, me… all of us” (6:4–5). Compare the image of Stone at the beginning of the first book with the final image of Edwin at the close of the narrative as a whole (11:1, 128:1).

The most obvious issue of recurrence appears in the form of inter-generational trauma from the Residential School System experience. We see Edwin’s father, James, defending his younger brother from abuse, but the younger brother dies despite this. The recurrence comes with Edwin’s father about to beat him in the same way (92:1, 96:6–7, 103:1). Using Groensteen’s sense of general arthrology, we see these panels connected to each other or “articulated” despite their not being adjacent to each other. Notably, this articulation is across generations in the family, which reminds us of the graphic novel’s title, 7 Generations. Less obvious is the recurrence of a dead brother. Stone loses his brother, just as James loses his. We then see Edwin and James’s brother Thomas (Edwin’s uncle) overlapping:

(Robertson & Henderson 121:1)

If we recall the discussion of the Native American Renaissance from Week 10, the focus for both N. Scott Momaday’s and Leslie Marmon Silko’s novels was on healing and on recuperation coming from a reconnection with tradition. We see precisely the same message in Robertson & Henderson’s 7 Generations, as with Van Camp’s The Lesser Blessed. Furthermore, the structural traits of 7 Generations make this entanglement of the present with the past more obvious
through the “general arthrology” that the panels encourage the reader to adopt. In this, Robertson & Henderson indigenize the comics form to more effectively show how the past and the present relate to each other, both aesthetically in the work of art and culturally in Cree beliefs. The repeated moral lesson is to turn away from revenge and toward healing, and this healing comes from a re-engagement with community and family through traditional culture.

For the image of Stone’s journey (10:1), Debra Dudek notes that “Bear, Stone, and Edwin face to the right, which signifies a movement to the future, to Edward’s implied narrative future and to the reader’s future engagement with the book” (Dudek 41). When we compare this to the close of the graphic novel and the articulated image of Edwin, we should notice that this orientation of the faces to the right (with Stone looking backward to connect with all of them by facing left) has changed. In the second instance, Stone and Bear are looking to Edwin while Edwin’s family (including his uncle) are looking to him by orienting to the left. This interconnection of generations, including White Cloud’s survival of the smallpox epidemic as well, emphasizes the entanglement of the family’s generations (Dudek 43–46).

**Discussion Board**

Like Van Camp’s *The Lesser Blessed*, Robertson & Henderson’s *7 Generations* is about characters likely close to you in age, and it is frequently taught in high school. How might you have related to the novel in your graduating year of high school? How do you relate to it differently today? Why do you think Robertson & Henderson wrote this graphic novel for this audience? Also, for Week 14, consider how what you have learned about “general arthrology” shapes how you respond to or read the graphic novel. For Week 15, how has your approach to Indigenous literature changed across this semester?

Please login to the Discussion Board in WebCampus and respond to this prompt (1 point) and offer feedback or a response to a classmate (1 point) for each week.

**Questions for Self-Review**

1. What is the difference between what the story “shows” you and what it “tells” you? Does it show more than it actually tells?
2. How does *7 Generations* indigenize the comics form?
3. How does Groensteen’s theory of arthrology (connecting spaces on the page) become a way of connecting different times? Is it important that Robertson & Henderson use a spatial technique to structure temporal relations?
4. How is *7 Generations* similar to or different from Van Camp’s *The Lesser Blessed*?
5. While 7 Generations speaks most obviously to the Plains Cree’s experience of the trauma of colonialism near the city of Winnipeg, it is published for a wide readership across North America. How does the story of Edwin connect to readers in other communities, Indigenous and/or settler?

Works Cited & Supplemental Reading


Week 16: Review

Objectives

1. Recognize intentional and incidental learning through the course, class discussions, and personal readings.
2. Identify recurring traits of postcolonial literature.
3. Describe how decolonization movements may shape literature and story-telling, both in form and as activities.
4. Discuss how decolonization relates to our world today.

Reading Assignment

There are no assigned readings this week.

Commentary

This week is dedicated to review and catching up any missed readings. We have only Monday before the reading days dedicated to missed classes and your own review followed by the beginning of the examination period.

Colonialism, Decolonization, & Postcolonialism

We began this course with questions about colonialism, decolonization and postcolonialism. That is, we opened with colonization as a political fact that impacts artistic production and culture, went on to the struggle to end colonization and its influence on cultural traditions, and finally to consider what follows after an end to colonization. We quickly realized that all three areas overlap and that all three co-exist in our contemporary world today. We also recognized that the colonizer and the colonized are in a mutually-transformative relationships, and while it is unfairly negotiated and imbalanced, both are changed by it. This means that this is both and export and import of cultural traditions caused by cultural appropriation, conversion, hybridity, modernity, and the imposition of imperialist cultures. Hence, it is impossible to discuss the postcolonial without discussing both colonizer and colonized. This creates an imbalance in our discussions as well, often treating colonial centers of power as their own cultures distinct from those they exploit, even though the colonizer could not exist as such outside of the fact of colonization. Likewise, it means that the colonizer is always present in discussions of the postcolonial, which may hinder
our efforts to center voices and experiences of the formerly colonized. Working toward a symmetry in the postcolonial relationship is a part of the postcolonialism and should shape all of our work here.

For your own experiences, there are intentional learning outcomes in any course of studies, as well as incidental learning outcomes. The intentional components are listed as objectives in each week of the Study Guide. You may wish to review these as preparation for the final examination. However, just as I have other unstated learning objectives for you, ones that are often easier to approach through a side-door or while you are not consciously thinking of them as a goal, you also surely have unexpected or unintended learning as well. Some of this may come from readings outside of those assigned (such as secondary works from the Annotated Bibliography assignment), but they may also be from ancillary components of our readings. Please take time in the Discussion Board (ungraded this week) to share what you have learned or to pose questions to your classmates.

**Viva Voce Final Examination**

The final examination for this course will be conducted as a “viva voce” (interview) online through Skype, telephone, Blackboard Collaborate (the video conferencing system built into WebCampus), or other audio or video communications. Students must have access to either a telephone or computer system that supports audio/video conferencing or such technology. Three questions will comprise the examination:

1. You will be given a challenge to your final research essay. This means you must complete the essay before you can take the exam. The challenge will query one part of your essay or an assumption you make in it. The goal is for you to defend your position and argument and to show your ability to discuss your work meaningfully.
2. You will be asked to take your methodology, theoretical paradigm, or approach from your essay and use it to discuss another course text. For example, if your final essay uses Albert Memmi’s approach to decolonization to consider Robertson and Henderson’s *7 Generations*, for this second question you may be asked to use Memmi to talk about Richard Van Camp’s *The Lesser Blessed*.
3. You will be asked to compare to course readings that you have not yet discussed in the final examination. For the examples given above, you could be asked for the final question to compare Mulk Raj Anand with Thomas King or Eden Robinson with Alex La Guma.

Evaluation of your performance in the examination is based on three criteria ranked in order of importance:
1. demonstrated completion of the course of studies,
2. demonstrated understanding of the critical concepts of the course, and
3. the capacity for creative or innovative thought

More succinctly, the exam will test if students completed the course and achieved a reasonable level of comprehension of the materials. If you find that you are unable to answer a particular question, you will be offered alternatives until you are able to demonstrate what things you have learned, although there may be deductions for each question left unanswered. This means that the viva voce examinations are both rigorous and generous. They are rigorous because they show very quickly what work has been done and what work has not, but they are generous because you are always able to demonstrate what you have learned and ensure that your learning does contribute to your final grade.

Please notice that the questions will demonstrate your ability to discuss your own work, your understanding of the paradigms in the course, and your completion of the assigned materials. If you cannot answer a question or have not completed one of the readings, this becomes clear very quickly – you can then ask for a different question with the goal of getting to a point where you can show what you have learned.

The aim of this format for the exam is to give you the opportunity to accurately show the scope of your learning during the course. In a written final examination, it is possible to avoid answering questions when you do not know the answer, but in a “viva voce” format this becomes obvious very quickly. Rather than wasting time making general comments on unread materials, this means we can quickly get to what you do know and have learned. Also, where traditional examination are meant to be a demonstration of learning, the viva voce exam aims to be a part of the learning process so that you conclude the course by discovering your own process of knowing and (hopefully) leave the exam itself knowing more than you did going in.

The exam will be conducted by skype, phone, or in person (if you are on the Vancouver campus). Use the sign-up section in this week to choose your time. There should be several times possible, but email your instructor if you cannot find one. Also, if you prefer to do the exam by telephone, please email your instructor the number you will use (I will call you so that you do not have long distance charges).

Questions for Self-Review

You may ask any questions in the Discussion Board, both for the instructor or for classmates. Please use the venue as a place to reflect on your learning across the semester or to pose questions about the examination and future studies. You may wish to use the “Objectives” above as a guide for your self-review.