

# Topics in Comparative World Literature

## Section 01

### COLT 122

Fall 2024 4 Unit(s) 08/21/2024 to 12/09/2024 Modified 10/23/2024

## Contact Information

---

### Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Dr. Meghan Gorman-DaRif
Office Location:	FOB 216
Email:	meghan.gorman-darif@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	Wednesday, 10-11 via Zoom, and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	TTH, 3:00-4:15
Classroom:	Sweeney Hall 242

## Course Information

---

### The Pirate and the Freedom Fighter in Contemporary Postcolonial Fiction

This course focuses on the tradition of resistance literature in postcolonial texts, focusing on the figure of the pirate and the freedom fighter in novels and plays from India, Kenya, and Nigeria. Through a study of how authors choose to represent such resistant (and violent) figures, the course aims to examine the function of literature as site of political resistance and to consider the following questions: How do the authors choose to frame contemporary struggles? In what ways does literature reframe, revise or resist dominant notions and assumptions? How might the study of such literature itself cultivate practices of resisting oppressive social, cultural, and political structures or open new horizons of hope?

## Course Description and Requisites

---

An exemplary theme as treated in various literatures from different national sites, e.g., war, love, freedom, colonialism, environmental disaster.

## Classroom Protocols

---

**Late Work:** Unless arrangements have been made well ahead of time (at least 2 days prior to due date), late work will be penalized by a grade reduction of 10% per day and will not be accepted after a week.

**Attendance:** Your success in this class will largely be dependent on your attendance and active participation in our class discussions, as well as your keeping closely up to date with our reading schedule. Staying on top of lecture and reading material will result in a better understanding of the material, which will translate into higher grades on assignments and quizzes. Please plan accordingly and develop a schedule to manage the variety of assignments for this course, including readings, blog posts, and written assignments like papers, close readings, and research summaries.

**Scholastic Honesty:** Turning in work that is not your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty, will result in a major course penalty, possibly failure of the course. This standard applies to all drafts and assignments, and a report of the incident will be submitted to the appropriate Dean's office on campus.

## Program Information

---

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

### **Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)**

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.

3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

---

#### Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: [www.sjsu.edu/english](http://www.sjsu.edu/english) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: [english@sjsu.edu](mailto:english@sjsu.edu) (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

## Course Goals

---

### Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to demonstrate the following:

- 1) Analyze, contextualize, and critically respond to the content, structure, and style of literary texts through close reading.
- 2) Use interdisciplinary research to explicate the meaning of texts, especially through their relationship to their social, political, and historical moment.
- 3) Develop rhetorically sophisticated writing out of critical reading, as appropriate to upper-division university discourse.
- 4) Compare how literature from different national sites takes up a common theme, with close attention to and comparison between how literary expression has developed in different historical, geographical, cultural, political, and social contexts.

## Course Materials

---

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

Mahasweta Devi, *Mother of 1084*

Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland*

Nurrudin Farah, *Crossbones*

Helon Habila, *Oil on Water*

# Library Liaison

Peggy Cabrera Email: [Peggy.Cabrera@sjsu.edu](mailto:Peggy.Cabrera@sjsu.edu) Phone: 408-808-2034

## Course Requirements and Assignments

---

### Blog Posts

You will be asked to contribute to the course blog at least once a week. Your contributions will include both an original post (300 words) and a response to a classmate's post (50-100 words). **Original posts are due Monday at midnight; responses are due Thursday by the time class meets.** Blogs should center on the course readings for that upcoming week, focusing on critical analysis through close reading skills and/or addressing texts' social, political, and historical contexts to produce analytical readings as discussed in class. Blog posts should make an argument about some element of the text, as well as providing support for the argument with textual evidence and your own interpretation and analysis of the evidence to support your point or idea. The audience for this will be your peers - educated readers familiar with the text - therefore, the goal is to produce a value-added piece of writing for the class that hinges on persuading your readers that your interpretation is valid (though debatable). Examples might include: a pattern or theme you have noticed developing in the text, and what you think the author is trying to reveal through it; a close reading of a particular scene in an attempt to get at its possible meaning or implications; the use of outside research to contextualize the text and make an argument about it; a consideration of how the text's conditions of production may relate to or influence its meaning, etc. These posts are designed for you to be able to practice your analytical skills, and receive substantive weekly feedback on your writing and critical thinking in preparation for our longer writing assignments, and to encourage attentive reading practices to facilitate class discussion.

### Close Reading Exercises and Research Summaries

Over the course of the semester you will be asked to complete structured close reading exercises to practice and fine-tune this skill leading up to essay assignments. In addition, you will also be asked to complete several research summaries in preparation for the research component of papers. These summaries will include an MLA citation of the summarized source, a brief review of the venue of the text, and a concise summary of the text's argument. These assignments are intended to provide support for developing ideas for essays, as well as to provide frequent opportunities for feedback on close reading and research skills necessary for successful completion of the larger writing assignments.

### Quizzes

You will be quizzed on reading, viewing, and lecture materials covered in readings or during class time. If you are regularly attending class and keeping up with readings, these should be an easy way to keep your grade up – I see them as built-in accountability to encourage you to stay on top of materials.

### Participation

As you may have discovered, active participation is key to success the classroom. Active participation will help us develop a community to discuss ideas, collaborate, and discover new insights into the texts through the perspectives of others. Participation includes more than merely attending class, as I expect each of you to arrive prepared by having carefully read assigned readings, and to actively participate in full class discussions and smaller group discussions and in class projects and activities. Part of this active engagement in class and participation in the group dynamic of the classroom is to keep your cell phone away and your computer screen only open to Canvas or note-taking software.

### **Paper One: Textual Analysis**

Length: 1000-1250 words double-spaced. Use standard margins and 12-point Times New Roman.

**Essay Guidelines:** This essay focuses on close reading skills to develop a textual analysis of two or more of the course's texts (*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, *Mother of 1084*, *The Lowland*). First, you will select a topic and gather evidence from the texts related to your topic to conduct close readings on your selected passages, focusing on stylistic and formal elements of the prose. Your paper will then make an argument about the meaning or message of the texts' representational choices related to your topic. You may select any topic of your choosing across two or more texts, including: representations of the state/police/authority; the depiction of freedom fighters; the representation of class/wealth and its impact on identity; definitions of freedom; gender and the freedom struggle; etc. **In addition to stating *what* you think your evidence means, your thesis should also explain *how* the authors create that meaning.** This means that your thesis should address which features of the text you'll be discussing in your paper and note their function in developing the larger meaning.

Note on **Audience:** As with the blog posts, remember your audience will be others familiar with the poem, so the idea is to add value through your specific interpretation and analysis of the poet's diction, style, use of figurative language, etc., and to persuade your readers that your interpretation valid through the inclusion and analysis of relevant evidence from the text.

### **Final Paper: Contextual Analysis**

**Length:** 1250-1500 words double-spaced plus a separate Works Cited list. Use standard margins and 12-point Times New Roman font.

**Essay Guidelines:** The purpose of this essay is to analyze how a pair of texts responds to one specific historical/political or social issue at the time of writing. The goal is not to write a comprehensive explanation of the texts, but to focus closely on a set of passages, verbal patterns, or recurring images that can help readers understand one specific aspect of the texts' relationship to its historical/political/social context. You have some autonomy in choosing a second text for comparison, but at least one of the texts for this essay must be *Oil on Water* or *Crossbones*. Possible topics might be: the representation of and message about piracy in *Oil on Water* and *Crossbones*; the depiction of postcolonial governments in *Oil on Water* and *Mother of 1084* or *The Lowland*; the connection between colonialism and neocolonialism in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and either *Oil on Water* or *Crossbones*, etc.

Your **introduction** should briefly introduce the context you're focusing on (Piracy, Neocolonialism, State violence, etc.) and state your **thesis**: your central argument about how you think the authors represent or implicitly respond to a specific cultural/historical/political issue. For example, do the texts you're analyzing suggest that contemporary literature affirms or subverts dominant depictions of today's pirates? Do your passages indicate a challenge in the text to a common understanding or stereotype? What are the authors trying to get us to understand about the context you are analyzing?

**Research:** Unlike your first paper, this assignment requires you to gather evidence from outside of your main literary text. You are required to incorporate **at least 3 credible scholarly sources**: one source that provides background information on your historical topic, one critical essay that makes an argument related to your historical topic, and a third source (could be either informational or critical). Cite all of your sources within the paper using parenthetical citations (Author #), and include a Works Cited page citing in MLA style.

To locate sources in the SJSU library system, visit the MLK Library's English and Comparative Literature research guide: <https://libguides.sjsu.edu/english>. The research guide includes contact information for the English and Comparative Literature librarian, who can help with research questions. For more guidance, please visit my office hours, the Writing Center, or the MLK Library's Research help desk

## ✓ Grading Information

---

There will be a series of short writing assignments and longer essays that make up the majority of the grade for this class. **Should you choose to revise essay 1, the deadline for revisions is one week from the date you receive your paper back with comments.** There will also be weekly blog posts, assignments and reading/lecture quizzes:

Essay 1	25%	CLO 1, 2, 3
Essay 2	25%	CLO 1-4
Weekly Blog Posts	15%	CLO 1-4
Short writing assignments	15%	CLO 1, 2, 3
Quizzes	15%	
Participation	5%	CLO 1, 4

## University Policies

---

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance,

counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.