

## SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

**Spring 2013**

**Discipline: Literature**

**ENMC 3559-501: Women Writers Around the Globe, Section 1**

**Division: Upper**

**Professor: Susan Fraiman**

**Prerequisites: none**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Following the path of our voyage, this course treats contemporary texts—short fiction and autobiographical non-fiction—by women from Mexico to Morocco. A guiding question will be: To what extent can we generalize about women and their concerns across national boundaries? Do women around the world seem drawn to many of the same topics, face common problems, and take similar approaches to writing about these things? Or do women's lives, issues, and literary strategies vary widely from place to place? How do our writers think about their national identity, their place in the global economy of the twenty-first century? How would they define and what do they think of feminism? How do their works comment on such matters as growing up, family, war, history, ethnic identity, sexuality, the United States? Do their writings seem to confirm or challenge your ideas about women in other parts of the world? In addition to exploring *what* our texts have to say, we will also be analyzing *how* they say it. Using the literary critical method of close reading, we will pay microscopic attention to the formal characteristics of our works. How is a particular story narrated and from whose perspective? Where does it begin and how is it structured overall? What kinds of images and vocabularies are deployed, and to what effect?

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- To engage with the literature and culture of the places we visit
- To think about issues of gender in a global context
- To develop the skill of close reading and other techniques of literary analysis
- To develop the written expression of ideas and arguments

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

- Kate Figes, ed., *International Women's Stories* (Penguin, 1997)
- Maxine Hong Kingston, *Hawai'i One Summer* (U of Hawaii P, 1998)
- Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (Perseus, 1995)
- Electronic course packet

**READINGS/ITINERARY**

1. Introduction

**Mexico**

2. Sandra Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek"\*

**Pacific Islands**

3. Maxine Hong Kingston, *Hawai'i One Summer* (United States), pp. 3-7, 15-33

4. Kingston, pp. 35-39, 47-57, 67-72  
PAPER #1 DUE JANUARY 20 (3-4 pp.)

**Japan**

5. Nobuko Takagi, "The Shadow of the Orchid"\*\*\*

6. Banana Yoshimoto, "Newlywed"\*

**China**

7. Zhang Jie, "An Unfinished Record"\*

8. Bi Shumin, "Broken Transformers"\*

**Southeast Asia**

9. Duong Thu Huong, "Reflections of Spring" (Vietnam)\*\*

10. Suchen Christine Lim, "Christmas Memories of a Chinese Stepfather"  
and "Christmas at Singapore Casket" (Singapore)\*\*

11. Aung San Suu Kyi, *Letters from Burma* (Burma),  
pp. vii-xii; chaps. 7, 11-14, 21, 22, 26, 30, 40, 51\*\*

**India**

12. Jhumpa Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies"\*\*\*

13. Lahiri, "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"\*\*\*

14. Bharati Mukherjee, "A Wife's Story"\*  
PAPER #2 DUE MARCH 14, based on field lab (3-4pp.)

15. Mahasweti Devi, "Dhowli"\*\*\*

### Southern Africa

16. Nadine Gordimer, "Africa Emergent"\*\*\* (South Africa)
17. Gordimer, "Comrades"\*
18. Bessie Head, "Jacob: The Story of a Faith-healing Priest" (Botswana)\*

### West Africa

19. Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, "Jumping Monkey Hill" (Nigeria)\*\*
20. Ama Ata Aidoo, "A Gift from Somewhere" (Ghana)\*  
PAPER #3 DUE APRIL 5 (3-4pp.)

### Morocco

21. Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, pp. 57-64, 66-72, 175-87
22. Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass*, pp. 125-34, 137-43  
Mernissi, "Size 6: The Western Women's Harem" \*\*
23. Final Exam

\* In *International Women's Stories*

\*\* In electronic course packet

### FIELD LAB ASSIGNMENT

**This course's field lab will occur on March 06 in India. Attendance is mandatory.**

Our visit to Chendamangalam, in the state of Kerala, will give us a taste of village life, with a particular focus on the social and economic roles of rural women. After a traditional welcome, we will be invited into a family house and treated to a home-cooked meal. Following this demonstration of women's culinary skills, we will visit a factory where a different kind of work takes place: there women earn a living weaving cloth on handlooms. They have been enabled to do so by Kudumbasree, a government program launched in 1998 aimed at eradicating poverty among women. By interacting with those who administer and benefit from Kudumbasree, we will learn something about the achievements and challenges of such a project. In conversation with local residents, we will also have a chance to ask some general questions about women's issues in Kerala and perhaps to share some stories about the gender dynamics of our own culture. We will, of course, be interested in how our field experience echoes and/or revises the impressions we've received from fictional works by Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee.

To complete your field assignment, you will need to take notes throughout the day and use these journal entries as the basis for a formal paper (3-4 pp.). What does the field experience suggest about the status of women in rural Kerala? In what ways are women at a disadvantage? In what ways do they have agency? How would you compare/contrast the concerns of women in this culture with those of women in the United States and elsewhere? If possible, papers should bring your field experience into dialogue with class materials/discussions. At the very least, your paper should have, as an epigraph, a sentence or two selected from one of our texts. As you develop your ideas, try to avoid stating the obvious—instead, elaborate on a specific observation that startled you, forced you to revise your preconceptions, and gave you a more complex, nuanced understanding of local/global gender relations. The field assignment component of the course (based on your completed paper, not journal entries) will count for 20% of your final grade.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

- Two papers (3-4 pp. each) based on readings (40%): due January 20 & April 5
- One paper (3-4 pp.) based on Field Lab (20%): due March 14
- Class participation: attendance, quizzes, contribution to discussion (20%)
- Final exam (20%)

## **POLICIES**

Papers must be typed, double-spaced with 1" margins, and follow MLA citation guidelines. Late papers will be accepted one class after the due date, in which case they will be penalized by one third of a grade. You are allowed one unexcused absence; after that, each absence will result in a lowering of your class participation grade.

## **HONOR CODE**

Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University's honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager's Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: "On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment." The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed "[signed]."