

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Spring 2013

Discipline: Literature

ENMC 3559-502: Women Writers Around the Globe, Section 2

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

Japan

5. Nobuko Takagi, "The Shadow of the Orchid"**
6. Banana Yoshimoto, "Newlywed"*
PAPER #1 DUE JANUARY 26 (3-4 pp.)

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"*

15. Mahasweti Devi, "Dhowli"**
PAPER #2 DUE MARCH 17 (3-4 pp.)

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)*

Morocco

21. Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, pp. 57-64, 66-72, 175-87
PAPER #3 DUE APRIL 12, based on field lab (3-4 pp.)
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 ASSIGNMENT

This course's field lab will take place on April 6 in Ghana. Attendance is mandatory.

This field lab takes us to a hospital in Accra where we will tour a maternity ward and speak with physicians and midwives about childbirth practices in Ghana. Topics for discussion might include: the availability of pre- and post-natal healthcare for women; beliefs and practices around family planning; infant and maternal mortality rates; the role of midwives in Ghana today; the interaction of "modern" and "traditional" beliefs/knowledge around pregnancy and childbirth; the use of anesthesia during childbirth; the availability of general gynecological care for women; the role of fathers in pregnancy and childbirth. During our tour, we will want to minimize our intrusiveness as far as possible and be respectful of patient privacy; even so, this trip will require us to be thoughtful about and sensitive to the proper limits of tourism. It also

promises to be a moving experience that speaks—in a vivid and immediate way—to some of the ideas about maternity, women’s bodies, and female sexuality raised by our literary texts.

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 Ghana? 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? To what extent is a biological process such as childbearing “universal”? To what extent is it shaped by cultural context? 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%): January 26 & March 17
- One paper (3-4 pp.) based on Field Lab (20%): April 12
- 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].”