Introduction
Postcolonialism & Postcolonial Literature

ENG 5850
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Stanley Fish in “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics” (1970)

“[T]he value of such a procedure is predicated on the idea of meaning as an event, something that is happening between the words and in the reader's mind, something not visible to the naked eyes, but which can be made visible (or at least palpable) by the regular introduction of a "searching" question (what does this do?). It is more usual to assume that meaning is a function of the utterance, and to equate it with the information given (the message) or the attitude expressed. That is, the components of an utterance are considered either in relation to each other or to a state of affairs in the outside world, or to the state of mind of the speaker-author. In any and all of these variations, meaning is located (presumed to be embedded) in the utterance, and the apprehension of meaning is an act of extraction. In short, there is little sense of process and even less of the reader's actualizing participation in that process.”
Lecture Outline

• What is the course about?
• What do Colonialism and Postcolonialism mean?
• What is the significance of studying Postcolonial Literature?
Colonialism, Imperialism, and Postcolonialism

Discussion:
What are “colonialism,” “imperialism,” and “postcolonialism”? Pick 2 terms and try to come up with a brief definition for each of them.
Colonialism

• Oxford English Dictionary (OED)
  • “colonia” = “farm” or “settlement”
  • “a settlement in a new country […] a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection with the parent state is kept up.”

• Problem?
  • The colonised?
  • How “new” is the country?
  • Conquest and Domination?
Colonialism

• The 2\textsuperscript{nd} century AD: the Roman Empire stretched from Armenia to the Atlantic

• The 13\textsuperscript{th} century: the Mongols conquered the Middle East as well as China
Colonialism

• The 14th-16th centuries: An ethnic groups in the valley of Mexico subjugated the others and established the Aztec Empire

• The 15th century: the Vijaynagar Empire in India and the Ottoman Empire in most of Asia Minor and the Balkans
Colonialism

• The 16th century: “the Age of Discovery,” Portuguese Empire and Spanish Empire

• 17th century: French colonial empire, Dutch Empire, British Empire
Colonialism

PARTITION OF AFRICA
1885 - 1914

• Late 19th century: the Scramble for Africa: Belgian, British French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish
Colonialism

Why the current study of colonialism and postcolonialism is mainly about the European expansion in the recent 4 centuries?

- Political, social, and cultural legacy
  - Examples:
    - Hong Kong (1997)
    - Macau (1999)
    - Nigeria (the 19th century to the mid-20th century)
    - India (the late 18th century to the mid-20th century)
Colonialism

However, what is the significance of such the legacy of colonialism? What are the impacts?

• Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*
  • “Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered – it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries.”
Colonialism

The Scramble for Africa 1880-1914
Colonialism

• Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*

• “By the end of the nineteenth century, colonialism had developed into a system of ahistorical categorization in which certain societies and cultures were perceived as intrinsically inferior […] The colonialist system permitted a notional idea of improvement for the colonized, via such metaphors as parent/child, tree/branch, etc., which in theory allowed that at some future time the inferior colonials might be raised to the status of the colonizer. But in practice this future was always endlessly deferred.”

• Example: Apartheid in South Africa
Imperialism

• Pre-capitalist colonialism = Imperialism?
  • Problem: Colonialism could be dated back to a pre-capitalist past
  • Examples: Imperial Russia (1721 – 1917) and Imperial Spain (1469 – 1716)
Imperialism

• Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*
  • “the practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory.”
Imperialism

• Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths in Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies
  • Imperialism could be dated back to Roman times
    • “imperium”: sovereignty over the Mediterranean world
    • “Imperium populi Romani”: sovereignty and power to whom all the people must be loyal to
Imperialism

• Ashcroft, Tiffin, and Griffiths:
  • Before 1880:
    • “empire” = “(particularly the British variety) conjured up an apparently benevolent process of European expansion whereby colonies accrued rather than were acquired”
  • the mid-19th century:
    • “imperialism” = “describe the government and policies of Napoleon III, self-styled ‘emperor’”
  • from the 1880s
    • “imperialism became a dominant and more transparently aggressive policy amongst European states for a variety of political, cultural and economic reasons”
Imperialism VS Colonialism

- Understanding imperialism as an ideology
- Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*
  - “‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory.”
  - “ideological discrimination between ‘us’ and ‘them’”
Postcolonialism/Post-colonialism

• Ania Loomba in Colonialism/Postcolonialism
  • Postcolonialism
    • Writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives
  • Post-colonialism
    • Implies a chronological order – that is, a change from a colonial to a post-colonial state
Postcolonialism/Post-colonialism

- cultural, historical, political, sociological and economic analyses under the impact of European imperialism upon societies
- Begun in the late 1970s
  - Edward Said’s *Orientalism*
  - Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak
  - Homi Bhabha
Postcolonialism/Post-colonialism

• Debate over the term
  • “post” simply means “after”?  
    • i.e. referring to politically defined historical periods, of pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence cultures
  • Is there any limit?
  • Aijaz Ahmad in “The politics of literary postcoloniality”
    • “a transhistorical thing, always present and always in process of dissolution in one part of the world or another”
Postcolonialism/Post-colonialism

Discussion:

• Why postcolonialism is such an important field of studies in today’s world? What is the significance of studying it?

  • the processes and effects of, and reactions to, European colonialism since the 16th century (even includes neo-colonialism)
  • cultural exchanges
  • traumatic experiences
  • Examine the irreversible changes that have transformed societies
Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial Literature = postcolonial + literature

Discussion:

What is literature?

• Not a questioned meant to be answered but discussed
Literature

• Letter
  • Latin “littera” = letter
  • loosely defined as anything that is written
  • Telephone directory, cookbook, road atlas, *Pride and Prejudice*
  • Problem:
    • How about oral traditions of literature?
      • *Iliad, Odyssey, Beowulf*, native American legends, African oral literature

• An Art Form
  • written or oral
  • Imagined creative writing
  • “wortkunst”: German word of literature
    • imaginative and creative aspects of literature are the essential components literature
  • Poetry, drama, fiction etc.
  • Problem:
    • How about biography? Autobiography? Semi-autobiography?

Svetlana Alexievich
Winner of 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature
Literature

• **Test of Time**
  • Withstand the passage of time
  • Still being read centuries after its first publication

• **Problem**
  • Literary Canon only? Famous texts only?

• **Aesthetic Quality**
  • Element of beauty
  • Aesthetics: the branch of philosophy that deals with the concept of the beautiful, strives to determine the criteria for beauty in a work of art

• **Problem:**
  • How about literary works that include bad languages? Or violence? Do those works have aesthetic qualities?
Literature

• Hyperprotected cooperative principle
  • Who declares whether a piece of work literature?
  • Publishers?
  • Nobel Prize? Man Booker Prize? Pulitzer Prize?
Literature

• Charles Bressler in *Literary Criticism*
  • “literature’s primary aim is to tell a story. The subject of this story is particularly human, describing and detailing a variety of human experiences, not stating facts or bits and pieces of information […] By doing so, literature concretizes an array of human values, emotions, actions, and ideas in story form. It is the concretization that allows us to experience vicariously the stories of a host of characters. Through these characters, we observes people in action, making decision, struggling to maintain their humanity in often in humane circumstances, and embodying for us a variety of values and human characteristics that we may embrace, discard enjoy, or detest.”
Postcolonial Literature

Discussion:

• However, if literary texts are only fictive stories, what is the point of studying literature? More importantly, what is the point of studying postcolonial literature? What don’t we simply read history?
Postcolonial Literature

• Fictive ≠ unreal
  • Reflection of dominant ideologies
  • Challenging ideologies
  • A reading of identity, relationship, and culture
  • Read “outside”
    • Said in “Secular Interpretation: The Geographical Element, and the Methodology of Imperialism”
      • “to read Austen without also reading Fanon and Cabral [...] is to disaffiliate modern culture from its engagements and attachments”
Postcolonial Literature

• The 1950s
  • India’s independence
  • the ending of France’s long involvement in Indochina
  • Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)
  • Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

• Subject Matters
  • Universality, difference, nationalism, postmodernism, representation and resistance, ethnicity, feminism, language, education, history, place, and production
Postcolonial Literature

Rudyard Kipling (1856-1936)
• Born in British India
• an English journalist, short-story writer, poet, and novelist
• “The White Man’s Burden” (1899)

Discussion:
What is the poem about? What does it say about postcolonial literature?
“The White Man’s Burden” (1899)

• Imperialism
• Gender bias
• A warning?
• Counter discourse
  • “The Brown Man’s Burden” (1899) by Henry Labouchère
  • “The Black Man’s Burden: A Response to Kipling” (1899) by H. T. Johnson
Conclusion

• The history and significance of colonialism
• What imperialism means and how it is different from colonialism
• The historical and political context and importance of postcolonial studies
• What is postcolonial literature and what can one get by reading postcolonial literature

• Next week...
  • Changes in language brought by colonialism


