Stellenbosch University Summer School 2018

PRESENT IMPERFECT: NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES
IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AND FILM

Presenters:
Dr. Annel Pieterse, annelp@sun.ac.za

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on the way in which literature and film in South Africa have registered and reflected the social and political conflicts and tensions of the Apartheid years, and how, since the first democratic elections in 1994, these fields of cultural production have served—and continue to serve—as a means of questioning and negotiating identity, not only nationally, but also at the level of the community and the individual.

The primary aim of this course is therefore to identify currently prevalent thematic trends – for example, the ongoing interest in and engagement with the fact or metaphorics of crime – while also thinking about South Africa’s cultural landscape as constituted in the interplay between, on the one hand, the country’s history and socio-economic realities, and, on the other hand, a range of global trends and developments.

A secondary aim of the course is to establish the shifts or continuities in the particular formal codes used in South African literature and film to represent these thematic trends, with some attention also being given to non-fictional forms. Over the course of the week, we will engage with both classic and current South African poems, short stories, a contemporary novel, as well as three films: two fiction films, from the apartheid and post-democratic eras respectively, as well as a documentary.

At the end of the course, students should be equipped with a basic understanding of the manner in which particular stylistic features are deployed in the representation of questions of identity in South Africa, and to have gained some insight into the ways in which the South African present continues to show up as an uncompleted civil project of reconciliation, development and justice, as a moment that is stubbornly imperfect and unresolved.

We will start our inquiry with a basic overview of the South African literary landscape, and concretise this by means of a few samples of poetry from the colonial and apartheid eras. These will serve to establish some of the key issues, topographies, and metaphorical tendencies that have subtended much of South African literature and cultural discourse. We will then take a brief introductory look at one nexus of contemporary South African poetic praxis, the InZync Poetry Sessions, before going on to consider a small sample of (near-contemporary and Apartheid-era) short stories. This material will also help to prepare the ground for our later discussion of the novel.

We will then shift our attention to film, going back in time to consider the apartheid state in crisis in the 1980s, as represented the film, Mapantsula (1988), a key text in the history of South African film, which loosely adopts the genre of the gangster film for the purpose of socio-political engagement. This also involves bringing into focus the city of Johannesburg and its environs, Hillbrow in particular, which is also the primary setting for Jerusalema (2008), a gangster film which at the time of its release registered both the opportunities and the disappointments that crystallised in the years after the first democratic elections.

Next, we will consider a selection (in extracts) of recent South African writing that is characterised by a preoccupation with the question of betrayal, particularly within the
structures of the liberation movement during the late struggle period. Our departure point for this discussion will be Riad Desai’s 2014 documentary film, *Miners Shot Down*, which articulates the sense of betrayal of the working class by the ruling party. These betrayal narratives bring the figures of the collaborator and the mutineer out of the shadows, and challenge the prevailing binarist narrative officially adopted by the ANC when it came into power.

Unsettled affiliations and the problematised binaries are evident also in Michiel Heyns’s prize-winning *Lost Ground* (2011). We conclude the course with a consideration of this novel, which is set in a small town in the Western Cape and which diagnoses some of the ways in which the past informs, and persists in, the present.

**PRESENTATION**

The course combines brief formal introductory lectures on the works described above with more informal group discussions of textual details and their implications.

**ASSESSMENT**

Final evaluation for this course will be based on class attendance and participation (5%), a test (45%) and an essay (50%). Both assignments are intended to consolidate ground covered in the course. The test will be written *in class* on Friday 13 July, while the essay—for which the basic planning will be done in class on the 17th—will be due on Thursday 19 July.

Secondary readings—part of the preparation for the written assignments—will be made available during the course.

**PRESCRIBED READINGS**


Additional primary and secondary reading material will be supplied in class or made available on SUNLearn, along with hand-outs that will form the basis of the discussions and the assessments.

*Viewings of the films will be arranged during the course.*
PROGRAMME

Please note that the lectures/discussions will proceed on the assumption that you have read the novel and short stories before class.

Tuesday 10 July (Presenter: Dawid de Villiers)

9.00-9.30: Introduction: literature/space/history

9.30-10.30 Discussion of poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Lusiads (Adamastor section)</td>
<td>Luís Vaz de Camoens</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Afar in the Desert”</td>
<td>Thomas Pringle</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The Cape of Storms”</td>
<td>Thomas Pringle</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Nature’s Logic”</td>
<td>Frederick Brooks</td>
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<td>“Kaatje Kekkelbek”</td>
<td>Andrew Geddes Bain</td>
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<td>“Voortrekkers”</td>
<td>Charles Ould</td>
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<td>“I killed a man at Graspan”</td>
<td>M. Grover</td>
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<td>“Africa: My Native Land”</td>
<td>Mrs. A. Dube</td>
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<td>“The Serf”</td>
<td>Roy Campbell</td>
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<td>“Johannesburg”</td>
<td>William Plomer</td>
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<td>“The Underdogs”</td>
<td>Guy Butler</td>
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<td>“Renunciation”</td>
<td>H. I. E. Dhlomo</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Taken for a Ride”</td>
<td>Stanley Motjuwadi</td>
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<tr>
<td>“City Johannesburg”</td>
<td>Mongane Wally Serote</td>
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<tr>
<td>“To Whom It May Concern”</td>
<td>Sipho Sepamla</td>
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<tr>
<td>“History-books, Amen!”</td>
<td>Sipho Sepamla</td>
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<td>“When the first slave arrived at the cape”</td>
<td>Shabbir Banoobhai</td>
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<tr>
<td>“In Defence of Poetry”</td>
<td>Mafika Gwala</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Slave Song”</td>
<td>Achmat Dangor</td>
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10.30-11.00 Break

11.00-12.00 Discussion of poetry

12.00-13.00 Contemporary poetic praxis: InZync

12.30-14.00 LUNCH

14.00-15.30 Short stories

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Bridegroom”</td>
<td>Nadine Gordimer</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The Toilet”</td>
<td>Gcina Mhlophe</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The Life of Worm”</td>
<td>Ken Barris</td>
</tr>
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15.30-16.00 On reading film

17.30-19.30 Screening of Mapantsula

Wednesday 11 July (Presenter: Dawid de Villiers)

9.00-10.30 SA film; discussion of Mapantsula
From South African National Cinema – Jacqueline Maingard
"Underworld RSA" – Leslie Marx

10.30-11.00 Break
11.00-13.00 Screening of Jerusalema
13.00-14.00 LUNCH
14.00-16.00 Discussion of Jerusalema (with reference to Mapantsula)

"After the Revolution: Jerusalema and the Entrepreneurial Present” – DW de Villiers

Thursday 12 July (Presenter: Annel Pieterse)

09:00-11:00 Revolution and Betrayal

For reference:
David’s Story by Zoe Wicomb (2000)

Secondary Readings:
"Introduction" to Omens of Adversity by David Scott.
“SA’s death penalty is not yet dead” by Achille Mbembe.

11:00-11:30 Break
11:30-13:30 Screening of Miners Shot Down
13:30-14:40 LUNCH
14:30-16:00 Discussing Miners Shot Down

Secondary Readings:
“Marikana: The Day President Zuma added insult to injury” by Greg Nicolson
“The Oscar Pistorius case: History written on a woman’s body” by Hedley Twidle
“‘Miners Shot Down’ an unequal representation of the bigger picture” by Gillian Schutte

Friday 13 July (Presenter: Annel Pieterse)

09:00-10:30 Betrayal after Marikana.

“The Past, the present, the future,” extract from Askari by Jacob Dlamini
The Texture of Shadows by Mandla Langa, pages 331-370
10:30-11:00  Break
11:00-11:45  Assessment question and group discussion.
11:45-13:00  Written assessment to be completed in class.

**Monday 16 July (Reading day)**

**Tuesday 17 July (Presenter: Dawid de Villiers)**

9.00-9.30  Recent SA fiction and non-fiction; crime fiction; Michiel Heyns
9.30-10.30  *Lost Ground*
10.30-11.00  Break
11.00-13.00  *Lost Ground*

"The novel that Heyns was always going to write" (review) – Finuala Dowling
"In search of lost ground" (review) – Jane Rosenthal
"Crime Fiction, South Africa: A Critical Introduction" – Sam Naidu

13.00-14.00  LUNCH
14.00-15.00  *Lost Ground*
15.00-16.00  Essay planning