

Michaela Bronstein
English 179D; seminar
Empire and Revolution: Joseph Conrad and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o
Winter 2017; Monday Wednesday 10.30 AM – 12.20 PM
LATHROP292

What are the political uses of literature? Is the audience of a novel local or global, in its own time or beyond? These are just a few of the big questions raised by the works of two landmark innovators in fiction: Joseph Conrad, one of the first major modernist writers of the early 20th century; and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the first East African novelist published in English and still a perennial Nobel shortlister. Conrad is most famous as a novelist of colonial imperialism and the British empire, while Ngũgĩ—born under British occupation in colonial Kenya—has spent his career advocating political, cultural, and economic independence for colonized peoples. Yet, surprisingly, Ngũgĩ's affection for Conrad's work has never dimmed. What did Conrad's novels offer Ngũgĩ—and what does that say about what the literary works of the past can offer us today? Ngũgĩ's work has also attained the status of world classic; yet he remains a forceful advocate for the importance of speaking to local, immediate audiences in order to bring about political change. What makes politics in his novels both so urgent in Kenya and still compelling around Africa—and the globe?

Book list:

Ngũgĩ:

A Grain of Wheat, ISBN: 0143106767

Petals of Blood, ISBN: 0143039172

Devil on the Cross, 0435908448

Conrad:

Under Western Eyes, ISBN: 978019955237X

Nostromo, ISBN: 0199555915

The Secret Agent, ISBN: 978019953635X

(Other readings will be posted on Canvas.)

Part 1: Reading Conrad through Ngũgĩ

Week 1:

Monday 9 Jan: Introduction; Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa."

Wednesday 11 Jan: Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat* Ch 1-6

Week 2:

Monday 16 Jan: MLK Day Holiday

Wednesday 18 Jan: *A Grain of Wheat*, complete; *Under Western Eyes*, Part 1; excerpts, reviews of *A Grain of Wheat*

Week 3:

Monday 23 Jan: Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, parts 2-3; excerpts, *Notes on Life and Letters*

Wednesday 25 Jan: Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, complete; excerpts of Ngũgĩ interviews

Friday: Essay 1 due: Reading across time

What can we learn about Conrad by examining how Ngũgĩ read him? How was Ngũgĩ affected as a reader by Conrad, and how, in turn, did he make use of Conrad's literary techniques?

Part 2: Reading Ngũgĩ through Conrad

Week 4:

Monday 30 Jan: Conrad, *Nostramo*, "The Silver of the Mine"

Wednesday 1 Feb: *Nostramo*, "The Isabels"

Week 5:

Monday 6 Feb: *Nostramo*, "The Lighthouse" Chapters 1-9

Wednesday 8 Feb: *Nostramo*, complete; excerpt, Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Week 6:

Monday 13 Feb: *Petals of Blood*, Part One

Wednesday 15 Feb: *Petals of Blood*, Part Two

Week 7:

Monday 20 Feb: Presidents' Day Holiday

Wednesday 22 Feb: *Petals of Blood*, Parts 3-4.

Friday: Essay 2 due: Reading around the world

How are novels used differently in 1900s England and 1970s Kenya? How do both the historical situations and the novels themselves reflect aspects of global modernity?

Week 8:

Monday 27 Feb: Conrad, *The Secret Agent* Ch 1-3; excerpts, *Notes on Life and Letters*

Wednesday 1 March: *The Secret Agent* Ch 4-10

Week 9:

Monday 6 March: *The Secret Agent*, complete; excerpts, *Decolonising the Mind*

Wednesday 8 March: *Devil on the Cross*, Ch. 1-3

Week 10:

Monday 13 March: *Devil on the Cross*, complete

Wednesday 15 March: Conclusion; discussion of paper topics.

Final paper: The stakes of literature

What role can literature play in reflecting society as it exists? In changing society?

Class Goals:

As a Way-All class, you will learn the following:

- acquire and assess techniques of interpretation (including close reading techniques), criticism, and analysis of cultural texts, artifacts, and practices.
- learn fundamental critical thinking skills to analyze different theories and interpretations of literary works.
- analyze the different assumptions underpinning our frameworks for understanding how novels work in individual readers and in societies.
- examine how texts manipulate their readers—and, in turn, how readers make use of texts. (Essay 1)
- examine two diverse yet connected literary traditions personified by these two writers, and look at how the novel as a form changes across time and space. (Essay 2)
- understand how expressive works both speak to audiences beyond their own moment, and address historically specific circumstances. (Essay 3)

POLICIES.

Prompt, prepared, and participatory attendance is required; class discussions are the primary medium by which we will develop close reading skills and sharpen critical thinking. Absences or regular silence in class will affect your participation grade. Up to one absence in the quarter, with advance notice, can be made up through writing a very short response to the readings. 3 or more absences will result in a lowering of the overall grade for the course.

No computers in class. Tablets without a keyboard are OK.

All essays are due by e-mail to bronstein@stanford.edu at 6 PM on the listed due dates. I will accept the following formats: .pages, .doc, .docx (no pdfs or google docs). Late papers will drop a third of a letter grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each day late.

You are each entitled to ONE essay extension (no questions asked), provided you make your request more than 48 hours in advance of the relevant deadline. The extension will be for no more than three days (e.g., Friday to Monday, Monday to Thursday). I do not grant extensions, barring documented emergencies, if you ask less than 48 hours before a deadline.

Feel free to drop by my office hours without an appointment (Mondays 3-4.45, Margaret Jacks Hall room 321). If you can't make those times, let me know and I'd be glad to work out another time. Office hours have diverse purposes: you don't need to come in only if you're struggling. You can come to discuss an upcoming assignment, to talk about something that interested you in the reading that we didn't get to in class, to talk about something said in class that you didn't like, or to talk about any topics in the course that you've become interested in beyond the reading material.

GRADING.

Essay 1: 25%

Essay 2: 25%

Essay 3: 30%

Participation: 20%

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae>).

Honor Code

The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:

The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading.
2. that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

Course Material Support

Stanford University and its faculty are committed to ensuring that all courses are financially accessible to all students. If you are an undergraduate who needs assistance with the cost of course textbooks, supplies, materials and/or fees, you are welcome to ask the Diversity & First-Gen Office for assistance by completing their questionnaire on course textbooks & supplies: <http://tinyurl.com/jpqbarn> or by contacting Joseph Brown, the Associate Director of the Diversity and First-Gen Office (jlbrown@stanford.edu; Old Union Room 207). Dr. Brown is available to connect you with resources and support