

Stellenbosch University Summer School 2023

PRESENT IMPERFECT: NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AND FILM

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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 metaphors 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. This will be followed by a discussion of a small number of post-apartheid poems, in order to introduce some key post-1994 political and literary preoccupations.

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.

The course concludes with an examination of an important work of “literary” non-fiction, Jonny Steinberg’s *The Number*. The book chronicles the life of Magadien Wentzel, and focuses on his experience of prison and on the history of South Africa’s notorious Number gangs. We will consider the importance of the genre of non-fiction in the post-apartheid moment, and discuss the ways in which reportage begins to adopt the form and do the work of more conventionally “literary” modes like the novel or the short story.

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 Thursday 7 July, while the essay—for which the basic planning will be done in class on the 2nd Jul—will be due on Friday 15 July.

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

PRESCRIBED READINGS

Steinberg, Jonny. *The Number: One Man’s Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2004.

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 11 July (Presenter: Daniel Roux)

9.00-9.30: Introduction: literature/space/history

9.30-10.30 Discussion of poetry

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

10.30-11.00 Break

11.00-12.00 Discussion of poetry

12.00-13.00 Short stories

“The Bridegroom” – Nadine Gordimer
“The Toilet” – Gcina Mhlophe
“The Life of Worm” – Ken Barris

13.00-14.00 LUNCH

14.00-17.00 On reading film and Screening of *Mapantsula*

Wednesday 12 July (Presenter: Daniel Roux)

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 13 July (Presenter: Daniel Roux)

09:00-10:30 Revolution and Betrayal

For reference:

Country of my skull by Antjie Krog (2002)

Ways of Dying by Zakes Mda (1995)

David's Story by Zoe Wicomb (2000)

Secondary Reading: "SA's death penalty is not yet dead" by Achille Mbembe

10:30-11:00 Break

11:00-13:00 Screening: *Miners Shot Down*

13:00-14:00 LUNCH

14:00-16:00 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 14 July (Presenter: Daniel Roux)

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

Way back home by Niq Mhlongo, pages 9-11 and 203-208.

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.

Tuesday 18 July (Presenter: Daniel Roux)

9.00-9.30 Recent SA fiction and non-fiction; crime fiction; Jonny Steinberg

9.30-10.30 *The Number*

10.30-11.00 Break

11.00-13.00 *The Number*

<p>“Policing, state power, and the transition from apartheid to democracy: A new perspective” – Jonny Steinberg “Making a prison narrative personal: Jonny Steinberg, the gangster and the reader” – Gillian Rennie</p>

13.00-14.00 LUNCH

14.00-15.00 *The Number*

15.00-16.00 Essay planning