

English 350: The Idea of a World Literature
(Spring 2009 : MWF 10:30-11:20 Ent 176)
Professor Alok Yadav / Office: Robinson A471
Office Hours: M 11:40-12:30 and by appointment
Email: ayadav@gmu.edu / [Homepage](#)
Phone: 703-993-2773

[Texts](#) || [Course Description](#) || [Requirements](#) || [Syllabus](#)

I. Required Texts

(Please get these editions of the novels, available at the Campus Store)

- Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. New York: Free P, 2008.
- Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*. Seattle: Seal P, 1989.

Other readings will be available online.

Recommended Texts

MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing. 3rd ed. New York: MLA, 2008.

This book documents the latest revision to MLA style, which has been significantly revised from the previous standard in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. (New York: MLA, 2003). I will ask you to use MLA style in the newly revised format for all your formal writing for this class. If you want the authoritative guide to this format, you should get hold of this book. Otherwise, there are also various guides to MLA documentation style available online, including one I have prepared myself (available here: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~ayadav/MLA Style Guide.htm>)—but make sure the guide you consult employs the new (2008) conventions.

A good dictionary is also essential. Many of you will already have a favorite desk dictionary and you should use it whenever the need arises. For this course, you should also make extensive use of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, available online to GMU members from the databases page of the GMU Libraries (click here, <http://furbo.gmu.edu/dbwiz/SPT--BrowseResources.php>, and type "oed" into the search box).

Other Preliminary Matters

Some additional material for the course will be available online, posted on the course webpage (Blackboard). Go to <http://courses.gmu.edu> and login using your GMU email ID and password.

You will also need to consult proprietary databases (such as JSTOR, Literature Online, Project Muse, MLA International Bibliography, or WorldCat). These

databases can be accessed through the GMU Libraries databases page (<http://furbo.gmu.edu/dbwiz/SPT--BrowseResources.php>). If you need assistance with the databases you should consult a librarian at the Fenwick Reference Desk or by using the online "Ask-a-Librarian" feature (available during regular working hours only: <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>).

You should access and print out any required readings **before** they are needed for class, so that you can get assistance if you run into any trouble along the way. (Inability to access the material in time will not be considered an acceptable excuse for failure to do the assigned reading.)

Note that all class-related email communications will be sent to your GMU email accounts. (You should check your email on a regular basis, if you don't do so already.)

([Back to top](#))

II. Course Description and Objectives

Typically when we speak of literature, we speak of national literatures like British, American, or French literature, or of broader regional entities like "Western" literature or "Latin American" literature. But at least since Goethe articulated the notion of a "world literature" in the 1820s, there have also been attempts to think of literature in a global setting, and the issue has become only more urgent with the increasing globalization of culture in the era since then. This course examines the history and current status of these attempts to rethink literature in a global rather than a national or regional setting. We will consider such topics as non-European influences on Western literature, the internationalization of English literature and the rise of postcolonial literatures, the place of translation, the role of literary institutions like the Nobel Prize for Literature, and that of commercial publishers. The course is not a world literature survey, though we do read and discuss some exemplary literary texts. Our main concern is to examine the effort to think about the literary terrain in a globalized frame: Why might it be important to do so? How might one seek to do so? And how does our understanding of literature change if we do so?

This course fulfills the University's Global Understanding requirement.

The course objectives are that students completing the course will be able:

- To characterize different understandings of the concept of "world literature" and some of the intellectual genealogy of these different concepts
- To recount some of the ways in which "world literature" has been institutionalized as a field of study in the United States, in courses and anthologies

- To discuss some of the factors that shape the international availability and reception of literary works, including the gate-keeping roles of translation, publishing, literary awards, and metropolitan advocacy
- To discuss insightfully some of the challenges involved in reading and understanding literary works from different cultures
- To conduct research in the field of world literature and to construct their own interpretive arguments in relation to existing scholarship in this field
- To discuss some of the critical debates and contributions that have shaped scholarship in this field

[\(Back to top\)](#)

III. Course Requirements and Grading

The class meets on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, from 10:30 to 11:20 am, in Enterprise Hall room 176.

The course requirements are as follows:

Active Preparation, Class Participation, and Quizzes (10%)

You should come to class with assigned reading completed. Since this is a discussion class, your active participation in and productive contribution to class discussions is expected and will form the major basis of your participation grade. In addition, I will give unannounced in-class quizzes at my discretion. **NB: in-class quizzes cannot be made up**; you will receive a zero for any such work that you miss (unless you can demonstrate that you have a valid excuse for being absent).

Reading Journal (20%)

Each week, I will ask you to write a one-page reflection on one of the readings assigned during that week. Over the course of the semester, this will add up to about 15 pages of writing. These will be kept online in Blackboard but will only be accessible to you (and me). I will glance over them periodically, but will not grade them until the end of the semester. It will be your responsibility to keep up with this assignment during the course of the semester: you will be allowed to skip any one week during the semester—but only one week. (In addition, no journal posting is required for the final week of classes.) The commentary and reflections you work out for this assignment will also serve as review notes for you for the midterm and the final exam.

In your weekly reflection, be specific in your references to the readings, quoting passages as appropriate and providing page references. Each post should be about 300 words in length. Please date each entry clearly in terms of the "week" on the syllabus to which it pertains.

Midterm and Final Exams (20% each)

There will be a midterm and a final exam during the semester, each addressing all of the material covered up to that point in the semester.

Term Paper (30%)

The most substantial work of the semester will consist a research paper (10-12 pages in length) to be submitted at the end of the semester. The paper can either focus on one particular literary work in relation to the issues we will be discussing this semester, or it can take up an "institutional" issue related to the subject matter of the course (e.g. the teaching of world literature in schools or colleges; the translation and publication of literature from particular regions of the globe; the role of literary prizes; issues of translation; the role of commercial publishers and of cultural bureaus; etc. If you choose to focus on a particular literary work, you will need to focus on how this work figures in relation to world literature—either in its composition or in its circulation. In either case, you'll develop your paper topic in consultation with me.

Since this is a research paper, I expect you to make use not only of the assigned readings from the course (as appropriate), but also other scholarship more specifically addressed to the topic you have chosen. You are free to make use of scholarly internet resources, but you should not rely exclusively on such material. At least half your secondary material should come from the library. The question of how many secondary sources you should make use of in your paper will depend a little on your chosen topic—since for some topics there may be very little secondary scholarship available—but, in general, you should contemplate having five or six scholarly sources for your paper (or more if you wish!).

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Submission of Assignments

All writing assignments done outside of class should be typed and double-spaced, with one inch margins. Be sure to use a standard pitch (not larger than 12 point). Please number your pages and staple multiple pages together (rather than using a binder or folder). In all your written work, format and citations **must conform to MLA style**. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Do not leave assignments in my mailbox or at my office; they will be considered late. I will not accept assignments by electronic mail. Late assignments will be penalized half a grade for each day (or part of a day) that they are late. Blackboard contributions will be credited to you only if they have been posted in a timely fashion as specified above. **NB: in-class work (including quizzes) cannot be made up; you will receive a zero for any such work that you miss.**

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Plagiarism (and other violations of the GMU Honor Code) will be taken very seriously. Plagiarism means using words, ideas, opinions, or factual information from another person or source without giving appropriate acknowledgment. You should credit your sources through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books and articles

consulted is not sufficient. Nor does rearrangement or alteration of another person's words by paraphrasing them release you from the obligation to document your sources. Plagiarism is a form of fraudulently presenting someone else's work as your own, and as such is the equivalent of cheating on an exam. A serious academic offense, plagiarism is grounds for failing at least the assignment, if not the course, and for possible further sanctions. (It goes without saying that work that includes plagiarism cannot be made up.) If you are unclear about what you should document, consult with me. When in doubt, document. (Adapted from the English Department Statement on Plagiarism)

Writing Center

You can get assistance to improve your writing skills from the university Writing Center. The Center is located in Robinson A114. Both face-to-face and online tutoring are available. You can call them at 703-993-1200 or visit their website (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>) for more information. The Center is a busy place: be sure to contact people there in plenty of time to have them help you with your work for a particular assignment.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me at the start of the semester and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

([back to top](#))

IV. Tentative Syllabus

Changes will be made to this syllabus as necessary; I will announce changes in class and update the online version of the syllabus. You are responsible for keeping abreast of any changes.

Week 1: Goethe and *Weltliteratur*

Wednesday, Jan. 21

- Introduction: cosmopolitan culture: world music; world cinema; world literature

Friday, Jan. 23

- Goethe and the idea of *Weltliteratur*

Week 2: *Weltliteratur*, Goethe and since

Monday, Jan. 26

- John Pizer. "Goethe's 'World Literature' Paradigm and Contemporary Globalization" *Comparative Literature* 52.3 (2000): 213-27. [JSTOR]

Wednesday, Jan. 28

- David Damrosch. "Introduction: Goethe Coins a Phrase." *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 1-36. [PDF]

Friday, Jan. 30

- *Weltliteratur*, Marx & Engels, Matthew Arnold [PDF]

Week 3: world literature at the end of the 19th century

Monday, Feb. 2

- Sarah Lawall. "Richard Moulton and the Idea of World Literature" (*No Small World: Visions and Revisions of World Literature*. Ed. Michael Thomas Carroll. Urbana: NCTE, 1996), 3-19. [PDF]
- Richard Moulton. *World Literature and Its Place in General Culture*. New York: Macmillan, 1911. [Google Books] Read the introductory section titled "The Unity of Literature and the Conception of World Literature" (pp. 1-9): <http://books.google.com/books?id=li8qAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=moulton+world+literature#PPA1,M1>

Wednesday, Feb. 4

- Thomas Wentworth Higginson. "A Cosmopolitan Standard." *The New World and the New Book . . . With Kindred Essays* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1892), 43-50. [Google Books]

[Last day to add classes; last day to drop classes with no tuition penalty]

Friday, Feb. 6

- Georg Brandes. "Weltliteratur." *Das literarische Echo* (1899); English trans. as "World Literature" (in Mads Rosendahl Thomsen. *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literature* [New York: Continuum, 2008], 143-47) [PDF]

Week 4: comparative poetics

Monday, Feb. 9

- Miner, Earl. "Some Theoretical and Methodological Topics for Comparative Literature." *Poetics Today* 8.1 (1987): 123-40. [JSTOR]

Wednesday, Feb. 11

- Jahan Ramazani. "A Transnational Poetics." *American Literary History* 18.2 (2006): 332-59. [Oxford Journals]

Friday, Feb. 13

- David Damrosch. "World Literature, National Contexts." *Modern Philology* 100.4 (2003): 512-31. [JSTOR]

Week 5: non-western genres: ghazal

Monday, Feb. 16

- Ralph Russell. "The Pursuit of the Urdu Ghazal." *Journal of Asian Studies* 29.1 (1969): 107-24. [JSTOR]

Wednesday, Feb. 18

- Agha Shahid Ali. "Introduction." *Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English*. Ed. Agha Shahid Ali. Hanover: Wesleyan UP/UP of New England, 2000. 1-14; plus selected English ghazals. [PDF]

Friday, Feb. 20

- continue to discuss ghazals; ideas for final papers
[Last day to drop classes (followed by selective withdrawal period, Feb. 23-March 27)]

Week 6: non-western genres: haiku

Monday, Feb. 23

- Makoto Ueda. "Basho and the Poetics of Haiku." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21 (1963): 423-31. [JSTOR]
- Leon Zolbrod. "Buson's Poetics Ideals: The Theory and Practice of Haikai in the Age of Revival, 1771-1784." *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 9.1 (1974): 1-20. [JSTOR]

Wednesday, Feb. 25

- continue to discuss haiku

Friday, Feb. 27

- Akira Kawano. "Haiku and American Poetry: The Influence of Haiku upon American Poetry." *Neohelicon* 10.1 (1983): 115-22. [Springer Online Archive]
- Yoshinobu Hakutani. "Richard Wright's Haiku, Zen, and the African 'Primal Outlook upon Life.'" *Modern Philology* 104.4 (May 2007): 510-28. [Academic Search Complete]

Week 7: literary prizes

Monday, March 2

- James E. English. "Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art." *New Literary History* 33.1 (Winter 2002): 109-35. [JSTOR]; also take a look at the Nobel Prize in Literature website, and browse esp. at the following (if possible):
- The Nobel Prize in Literature and non-European literatures: consult list of winners of Nobel Prize for Literature since 1901
[<http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/>]
- Presentation Speech for 1913 Nobel Prize to Rabindranath Tagore
[<http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1913/press.html>]
- Bo Svensén. "The Nobel Prize in Literature: Nominations and Reports 1901-1950." [<http://nobelprize.org/literature/articles/svensen/index.html>]

- Kjell Espmark. "The Nobel Prize in Literature."
[<http://nobelprize.org/literature/articles/espmark/index.html>]

Wednesday, March 4

- Graham Huggan. "Prizing Otherness: A Short History of the Booker." *Studies in the Novel* 29.3 (1997): 412-33. [Academic Search Complete]

Friday, March 6

Midterm exam given out: due Monday, March 16th at start of class

Week 8: Spring Break

Monday, March 9-Friday, March 13: **no classes**

Week 9: Aravind Adiga (India)

Monday, March 16

- Aravind Adiga. *The White Tiger* (2008), pp. 1-166

Wednesday, March 18

- Aravind Adiga. *The White Tiger* (2008), to p. 276 (end of novel)

Friday, March 20

- Aravind Adiga. *The White Tiger* (2008)

Week 10: anthologies and translations

Monday, March 23

- David Damrosch, "World Literature Today: From the Old World to the Whole World." *Symptome* 8.1-2 (2000): 7-19. [Project Muse]

Wednesday, March 25

- UNESCO and world literature
- Series of Representative Works (online):
<http://www.unesco.org/culture/lit/rep/index.php>
- Litprom (online): <http://www.litprom.de/literature-translation.html>

Friday, March 27

- Words Without Borders (<http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/>)
- Lawrence Venuti. "How to Read a Translation" (online):
<http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article.php?lab=HowTo>

Week 11: reading African literature

Monday, March 30

- Graham Huggan. "African Literature and the Anthropological Exotic." *The Postcolonial Exotic*. London: Routledge, 2001. 34-57. [NetLibrary]

Wednesday, April 1

- Simon Gikandi. "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture." *Research in African Literatures* 32.3 (2001): 3-8. [Project Muse]

Friday, April 3

- Wole Soyinka. Nobel Prize Lecture. 1986. (online): http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1986/soyinka-lecture.html
- Lars Gyllensten. Presentation Speech. 1986. (online): http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1986/presentation-speech.html

Week 12: the Heinemann African Writers Series

Monday, April 6

- Clive Barnett. "Disseminating Africa: Burdens of Representation and the African Writers Series." *New Formations* 57 (Winter 2005-06): 74-94. [PDF]

Wednesday, April 8

- James Currey. "Chinua Achebe, the African Writers Series and the Establishment of African Literature." *African Affairs* 102.409 (1 Oct. 2003): 575-85. [ProQuest Research Library]

Friday, April 10

- Becky Clarke. "The African Writers Series: Celebrating Forty Years of Publishing Distinction." *Research in African Literatures* 34.2 (2003): 163-74. [Project Muse]
- Phaswane Mpe. "The Role of the Heinemann African Writers Series in the Development and Promotion of African Literature." *African Studies* 58.1 (1999): 105-21. [Academic Search Complete]

Week 13: publishing African literature

Monday, April 13

- Caroline Davis. "The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing: Oxford University Press's Three Crowns Series 1962-1976." *Book History* 8 (2005) 227-44. [Project Muse]
- Keith Smith. "Who Controls Book Publishing in Anglophone Middle Africa?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 421 (1975): 140-50. [JSTOR]

Wednesday, April 15

- Isidore Diala. "Migrating Bards: Writers' Burdens and a Writers' Body in Nigeria at the Turn of the Century." *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 45.2 (Spring 2008): 133-48. [PDF]
- Helon Habila. "The African Writer: Facing the New." (2005) (online): <http://www.sabdet.com/aegis2005habila.htm>

Friday, April 17

- Francis B. Nyamnjoh. "From Publish or Perish to Publish and Perish: What 'Africa's 100 Best Books' Tell Us About Publishing Africa." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 39 (Oct. 2004): 331-55. [Sage Journals Online]

Week 14: Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe)

Monday, April 20

- Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (pp. 1-57)

Wednesday, April 22

- Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
- Gallagher, Susan V. "Contingencies and Intersections: The Formation of Pedagogical Canons." *Pedagogy* 1.1 (2001): 53-67. [Project Muse]

Friday, April 24

- Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (to p. 119)

Week 15: Dangarembga (continued)

Monday, April 27

- Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (to p. 204 [the end])

Wednesday, April 29

- Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
- **Tsitsi Dangarembga's reading/talk 6:00-7:00 pm Center for Performing Arts, Lobby**

Friday, May 1

- Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

Week 16

Monday, May 4

- African literature and African languages
- **term papers & reading journals due (note that no reading journal posting is expected for either Week 15 or Week 16)**
- **take-home FINAL EXAM handed out**

Exam Week

- **Final exam due: Monday, May 11** (in hardcopy, in my mailbox by 11:20 am)