Colonial Fictions: Novels of Adventures, Exoticisms, and East and West

The Age of Empire has bequeathed us a wealth of literary texts, among them tales of adventure and conquest as well as more serious novels about colonial encounters and life in the colonies, such as E.M. Forster’s famous novel *A Passage to India* (1924). At the same time, colonialism introduced the novel as a new literary genre to many literatures in Asia. This course will examine what Empire was in the case of British India and the Dutch East Indies (today’s Indonesia) by reading English and Dutch novels together with the work of Asian writers. This will help us develop an idea of how literature was both collusive with and critical of colonialism, how different cultures wrote about their contact with each other, and how the writing of that era has shaped our modern world. Readings will include the following novels: E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, B. R. Rajam Aiyar’s *The Fatal Rumour* (1896, translated from Tamil), Louis Couperus, *The Hidden Force* (1900, tr. from Dutch), and Abdoel Moeis, *Never the Twain* (1928, tr. from Indonesian).

**Required Books** (Available for purchase in the Seminary Coop Bookstore)

To ensure that during our class discussions we will all be on the same page, literally, please make sure you have **precisely these and not other editions:**

E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*.
ISBN: 9780141441160
Publisher: Penguin Books
Publication Date: 2005

Louis Couperus, *The Hidden Force*.
Translated by Alexander Teixeira De Mattos, Edited by E. M. Beekman.
ISBN: 9780870237157
Publisher: Univ of Massachusetts Pr
Publication Date: 1990

Abdoel Moeis, *Never the twain*.
Translated by Robin Susanto.
ISBN: 9789798083549
None of the novels is very long, but depending on how quickly you read, you should get started on reading them as soon as possible. For Couperus’ *Hidden Force*, starting directly with the novel without reading Beekman’s introduction first will make for a more rewarding reading experience (i.e. I recommend reading the introduction only after you have read the novel). All other Required Readings will be made available for download on the course’s CHALK website (http://chalk.uchicago.edu).

**Course Calendar**

**Week 1**

March 31 Tue Introduction

March 29 Thu Readings:

- Boehmer (Introduction and Chapter 1 from *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*),
- Said (Introduction from *Orientalism*),
- Loomba (Chapter 1 “Situating Colonial and Postcolonial Studies” from *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*)

[all on CHALK]

**Week 2**

April 3 Tue Forster, *A Passage to India*.

April 5 Thu Forster, *A Passage to India*.

**Week 3**

April 10 Tue Forster, *A Passage to India*.

**April 12** Thu Forster, *A Passage to India*.

**Paper #1 assigned.**

**Week 4**

April 17 Tue Rajam Aiyar, *The Fatal Rumour*. (The entire text of the novel in translation can be found on the course CHALK page)
Additional Reading: Ebeling (Introduction from *Colonizing the Realm of Words*).

April 19 
Thu 
Rajam Aiyar, *The Fatal Rumour*.

**Week 5**

April 24 
Tue 
Rajam Aiyar, *The Fatal Rumour*.

April 26 
Wed 
Rajam Aiyar, *The Fatal Rumour*.

**Week 6**

May 1 
Tue 
Couperus, *The Hidden Force*.

**May 3** 
Thu 
Couperus, *The Hidden Force*.

**Paper #1 due.**

**Week 7**

May 8 
Tue 
Couperus, *The Hidden Force*.

**May 10** 
Thu 
Couperus, *The Hidden Force*.

**Paper #2 assigned.**

**Week 8**

May 15 
Tue 
Moeis, *Never the Twain*.

May 17 
Thu 
Moeis, *Never the Twain*.

**Week 9**

May 22 
Tue 
Moeis, *Never the Twain*.

**May 24** 
Thu 
Moeis, *Never the Twain*.

**Paper #2 due.**
Attendance, Course Requirements and Expectations

Regular attendance is of course a basic requirement of this course. Failure to show up in class will impact on your grade. There may be a maximum of two absences for which you do not need to excuse yourself. You should save these two sessions for situations of major life disruption, since any further absences will impact on your grade regardless of the circumstances.

For the duration of the class sessions, cell phones and other noise-generating devices will have to be completely switched off. Laptop computers or iPads may not be used in class.

In the case of the four novels we will read, it will be essential that you have read each novel in its entirety by the time it is first discussed in class, i.e. Forster by week 2, Rajam Aiyar by week 4, Couperus by week 6 and Moeis by week 8. Furthermore, you are expected to also have read the additional readings listed under each class date for that session.

Attendance at every class, careful preparation of the readings, and active participation in class discussions and in the writing seminar that accompanies this course are expected of all students and will count for 50% of the grade. Note that your participation in class discussions and in the writing seminar as well as your written assignments will form the basis of your final grade.

Assignments

There will be 2 written assignments (papers) throughout the quarter the deadlines of which are listed above. Each essay will count 25% towards the final course grade. Extensions to the above deadlines are not possible under any circumstances. Please note that late papers will have to be penalized by one grade for each calendar day past the deadline (i.e. from A- to B+, etc.).

Additionally, depending on the size of the class, every student will give at least one oral class presentation. The topics for these will be assigned during one of our first meetings.