

SEMINAIRE MASTER2

REFUS DE LA LITTÉRATURE ET LITTÉRATURES DU REFUS (Denial of Literature and Literatures of Denial)

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Course Description

What is literature of denial or The denial of literature ? Why is it so important a part of literature strategies of transformation or change ? What does it tell us about the society? Of the role of race, class, region, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity in their lives? Of political movements, cultural traditions, and artistic trends? In this course, we will read diverse forms of literature—novels, plays, essays, poetry, and short stories—by African writers, African/ Black writers, African/British writers using them to investigate these issues

Course Objectives

1. To allow students to appreciate the diversity in literary works
2. To permit students to read and understand important works of literature, placing them within a specific historical and cultural context. In this manner, we will relate works to contemporaneous social and political concerns as well as literary movements.
3. To enable students to recognize the evolving format of the literary text and the literary devices, including plot and character development, language, dialogue, and symbolism, which affect the text as a work of art.
4. To help students improve their writing and interpretive skills through textual analysis.

I. The Notion of Literature

In Chapter 2 of their classic *Theory of Literature*>, René Wellek and Austin Warren discuss the concept of literature and conclude that it refers to "imaginative literature." From René Wellek & Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), pp. 20-28: What is literature? What is not literature? What is the nature of literature ? Simple as such questions sound, they are rarely answered clearly.

One way is to define 'literature' as everything in print. Another way of defining literature is to limit it to 'great books', books which, whatever their subject, are 'notable for literary form or expression'. Literature is a source of knowledge (which involves truth and meaning)

- Littérature désigne en son sens premier l' « ensemble des textes et, en un sens associé, les savoirs dont ils sont porteurs ¹ » (p. 433)

- le sens moderne renvoie à l'ensemble des textes ayant une visée esthétique ou, en d'autres termes, à l'art verbal.(Idem)

..En latin «*litteratura* », c'est l'écriture, les textes écrits et conservés grâce à l'écrit.

- Au 18^e siècle, elle désigne l'ensemble des œuvres littéraires (poésie, écrits philosophique, fiction)

- Puis le terme désigne le travail même de l'écriture

- A la fin du 19^e Siècle apparaît un sens péjoratif. « littérature » désigne ce qui est artificiel, sophistiqué par opposition soit à la réalité vraie, soit aux élans sincères du cœur, soit l'inspiration authentique.

cf **La notion de littérature** (1987)by Tzvetan Todorov: “ la littérature est imitation par la langue... (le réel, des êtres et des actions qui n'ont pas existé)... la littérature est une fiction: viola sa première définition structurale” (p 12), “la littérature est donc un système qui attire par là l'attention sur lui-même, qui devient autotélique : voici sa deuxième définition structurale » (p.16)

In ***Myth, Literature, and the African World***, Soyinka defined such a “literature of a social vision”:

“A creative concern which conceptualizes or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable, a concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions, these are qualities possessed by literature of a social vision”. (Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 66).

.- Literature is “connotative”, “multifunctional”, and “autotelic” .

- Literature addressing the critical issue of change. Change and literary tradition are inextricably bound.

¹ Paul Aron et al, **Le dictionnaire du littéraire**, Paris, PUF,2014, p.433.

La littérature vise d'autres buts que la (re)présentation de la réalité. Qu'est-ce re-présenter, sinon présenter à nouveau (dans la modalité du temps) ou à la place de ... (dans celle de l'espace) ?

2. literature and the problematics of denial

African narrative and poetry, in the era immediately preceding and following formal declarations of independence, were born, for the most part, in protest against history and myths constructed in conjunction with the colonial enterprise. Writers struggled to correct false images, to rewrite fictionally and poetically the history of precolonial and colonial Africa, and to affirm African worldview.

African intellectuals and writers felt keenly that "the truth," as Birago Diop had put it, "depends also on who speaks." Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels (*Weep Not, Child*, 1964; *The River Between*, 1965; and *A Grain of Wheat*, 1967) explore the many facets of individual Kenyan lives within the context of colonialism: their experiences of education, excision, religious conflict, collective struggle, and the cost of resistance. *A Grain of Wheat* suggests, moreover, the coalescing of lives and forces in the making of historical events.

Des refus partiels sont presque toujours la règle chez certains auteurs : la plupart des grands créateurs ne s'imposent qu'en s'opposant. Lorsque les formes artistiques se figent, se sclérosent, lorsque l'imitation paresseuse prévaut sur l'invention, on voit soudain des formes plus jeunes se rebeller, prendre le pouvoir. La littérature vit de violences délicieuses qui lui infusent à chaque génération un sang tout frais. Les « nouveautés » qui sont exploitées, cessent peu à peu d'être des nouveautés.

- les rebelles de la littérature piétinent volontiers les dogmes littéraires

- Writing as *pharmakon*: Derrida's play on the word **pharmakon**, used to describe writing in Phaedrus, as both poison and curse, sums up the writer's situation.

- Barthes: *S/Z* (1970)- The Readerly text opposes the concept of discontinuity- the Writerly text annuls traditional, conventional models: violate, parody, persistent shock, baffle and frustrate standard expectations. - The text exists in the world. Edwards Said, it is "worldly": masquerades, songs and dances)

Barthes dans *Le Degré Zéro de l'écriture* (1953), il met en perspective les notions de langue, de style et d'écriture

Langue	style	écriture
Un objet social, un matériau dont dispose l'écrivain pour s'exprimer	Données imposées à l'écrivain	Données imposées à l'écrivain
	Une dimension essentiellement individuelle	Traduit l'espace de liberté dans lequel peut se mouvoir l'écrivain. « la morale de la forme, le choix de l'aire sociale au sein de laquelle l'écrivain décide de situer la nature de son langage » (1953 :15)

Valéry pense que le « **travail sévère, en littérature [c'est-à-dire, pour lui, la seule et vraie littéraire], se manifeste et s'opère par le refus. C'est le nombre et la rigueur des refus, de tout ce que l'on s'interdit, qui définissent l'œuvre authentique** » (Curtis,1973,80).. Le problème de l'innovation ne peut être considéré comme dépassé

- l'écriture de révolte : hybridation discursive ou le discours du blablabla

- l'écriture de folie : le dérèglement de la forme, l'immoralité de la forme à l'intérieur de laquelle le personnage de fou joue un rôle important : celui de la catharsis ; c'est également une écriture de

désordre, de malaise, de chaos qu'est la vie elle-même, le dire tordu, le mélange des genres et de typographies textuelles, le composite événementiel, le discours indirect, etc.

- l'écriture décentrée : brisures narratives-les pratiques de l'hypertextualité . indices linguistiques de la décentration .

3. LITERATURES OF DENIAL

a) **Aesthetic of denial**- (juxtaposes logic and illogic- echoes extravagance, exaggeration- Conflicting forces within the text itself (binary opposition), diversity of opinions stands for the complexity of the literary work, and its diversity of interpretative modalities.

- Ngaboh-Smart called "the post-Afrocentric zone", "a zone of the most complex, challenging, and dynamic conceptions of difference", that seeks to undo the "excessive Manichaeism" of Afrocentric discourse.(Francis Ngaboh-Smart, "**Re-narrating the nation: Soyinka's *The Interpreters***." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46.1 (2010): 42-52)

- "the ideal of social solidarity"(Mazisi Kunene, ***The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain***. London: Heinemann, 1982, xvi.). This is the core of Soyinka's philosophy in ***The Interpreters*** and ***Season of Anomy***, as in the works of Ngugi and Achebe, to name two of the most important African writers of the postcolonial period.

- African writers have modified the conventions of the European novel of development, to offer their own counter-narratives to **progressive development** and **coherent identities**. They pivot the center that is to center in another experience: avoiding the dualistic opposition of center and margin to explore reality in concentric narratives

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The unreliable narrator :there is no differentiation between the external and internal function of the author image. Speech reveals itself as part of the Symbolic Order and constructs meaning only on a symbolic level . The language is capable of dysfunction and re-interpretability . The role the supernatural plays in the life of the characters, reproducing "the whole psychic atmosphere... filled with belief in... mystical power".(Mbiti, John. ***African Religions and Philosophy***. Oxford: Heinemann, 1969, 197, qtd. in Tanure Ojaide, op. cit., p. 47.)

- **The sacred bond between the African and his land**. The land is the place gods look upon, of birth and death that define the living, in other words, the ownership of a piece of land means

respect, honor, human dignity. This is the reason why the departure from the land for the adventure of the city brings alienation, loss of meaning and moral decay.

b) ***Hybrid strategies of transformation***

- **Collective self-representation.** Approach a literary work in terms of double-voicedness: the way in which it is signifying upon cross-cultural traditions.

- **Generic flexibility:** incorporate a cross-section of genres such as fairy-tale, romance, fable, and detective or suspense novel, quest narrative. The text resists compartmentation, embodies an expansive, dynamic cultural identity rather than a reductive, static one.

- **Transformatrix and R.A.W** "rhythm and Word »- celebrating words -body language (Patience AGBABI): CHANGE/ metamorphosis, creativity and Adaptation. The fragmentation of the discourse and the temporal lapses and fractures, constitute a symbol for the "disillusionments in postcolonial Africa, the discontinuities of the (post)colonial state, its arbitrary regimes of power and uneven modernity."

c) ***Change and the theory of paradigm***

- The change occurs around points of destabilization (the existence of struggle between the past and the present, the sense of loss, etc,)

-The text does not suddenly come into being. The movement of its advent can never be reduced to a precise time and place. This juxtaposition of techniques, coupled with abrupt changing of worlds reinforce the point.

- The text has no signature: the text can be read without its father's guarantee; the restitution of the intertext paradoxically abolishes the concept of filiations

- Metamorphoses of genre: the interpenetration or incorporativeness where the fluid characteristics of orality create a continuum of genres & a holistic vision)of prose poetry and drama where It can be perceived at the level of the device

- The defamiliarization (*ostranénie*) of the literary experience cf Victor Shklovsky

a) Devices such as images or figures of speech or constructions

b) Inherited conventions

c) d) Prevailing critical practice (deconstruction, intertextuality,ect,)

- *tissues of issues of homosexuality*

- Afrocentric view of homosexuality: Wole Soyinka gives us an African perspective of interracial homosexuality in *The Interpreters* (1965). Homosexuality thus is not seen as genetic but as something that one catches through associating with certain races.

-[...] we can also begin to see, and to question, those arrangements of foregrounding and backgrounding, of stressing and repressing, of placing at the centre and of restricting to the periphery, that give our own way of life its distinctive character. (Hawkes, "Preface". *The Empire Writes Back*, viii).

- Magical realism: THE RISE OF WEST African Magic Realism , beginning in the mid-1980s, with the outstanding figures Ben Okri (Nigeria): *The Famished Road* (1991); *Astonishing the God* (1995);; Kojo Laing (Ghana): *Woman of the Aeroplanes* (1988);

- Syl Cheney-Coker (Sierra Leone): *Search Sweet Country* (1986)/- fictions characterized by the powerful, restless reincarnations of myth into magic and history into universal. The writing capture the paradox of the unity of opposites. /

- Nomadic identity : identity as a production. Something which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. One can see the question of identity as an open question. In literature of denial we continue to explore the genre's traditional question about the relationship between origin, experience, subjectivity and social structures.

-- A "literature of a social vision": explore the complexities and contradictions of growing up in region where (post-)colonial and racial relationships exacerbate an already oppressive patriarchal situation.

QUESTION: A) IN LIGHT OF THE ESTHETICS OF DENIAL IN AFRICAN LITERATURE, DO you think there is the possibility of what Toni Morrison has called an **indisputably Black form**, or a **Black aesthetic** in Kwame Dawes terminology?

B) Do you think that Black identities are essentialists?

L'histoire de la littérature est ainsi jalonnée de révolutions :

- La littérature postcoloniale : littérature de décentrement, une littérature migratoire. Elle exprime la vision des colonisés dans la langue du colonisateur.

- littérature de la « migritude » des années 90 : un refus/rupture identitaire et thématique. Style fragmentaire et le langage grotesque. Une volonté d'universalisme qui se manifeste dans le gommage volontaire des origines. Pas de recherche délibérée de la couleur locale. Pas de recours aux notes ethnographiques en bas de page. Pas de traduction dans le texte. Emploi au besoin des mots grossiers et de forme argotiques.

Writing and fictional representation

- The following (stipulative) definition of a representation:

"R is a representation of some object O if and only if R is intended by a subject S to stand for O and an audience A (where A is not identical to S) can recognise that R stands for O"

So defined, there are three necessary conditions of something's being a representation. For a start, if something is a representation of some object, it must stand for the object. Second, if something is a representation, it must be intentionally used as a representation. This may be called the intentionality condition. Finally, there is the recognition condition: nothing is a representation of an object unless it can be recognised as standing for the object by someone other than the person (or persons) who intends that it be a representation of the object. A few comments on each of these conditions are required; particularly an account of what it is for something to stand for something else.

- All representation is representation of something. Representation so characterised is always relational and 'non-relational representation' is an oxymoron. E.g. picture (non-relational); the coloured (type of class): relational representation; semantic representations and illustrative representations (or illustrations).

Probably the most common and naive intuition about literature is that it is a "**representation of life.**" Unlike many of the terms in this collection, "**representation**" has always played a central role in the understanding of literature. The view that works of literature represent can, however, be traced at least as far back as the Poetics and Aristotle's views have been echoed repeatedly. Indeed, one might say that it has played the definitive role insofar as the founding fathers of literary theory, Plato and Aristotle, regarded literature as simply one form of representation. Aristotle defined all the arts—verbal, visual, and musical—as modes of representation, and went even further to make representation the definitively human activity.

Since antiquity, then, representation has been the foundational concept in aesthetics (the general theory of the arts) and semiotics (the general theory of signs).

Semiotic forms of representation

- Representation is an extremely elastic notion

- The representational sign never seems to occur in isolation from a whole network of other signs. The word "tree" represents a certain class of objects only in the context of a language, just as a note or a musical phrase has meaning only in relation to a larger piece and familiar systems of tonality. These "systems" (tonality, language, representational schemes in painting) may be called "codes," by which I simply mean a body of rules for combining and deciphering representational signs.

- **Aristotle** says that representations differ from one another in three ways: in object, manner, and means. The "object" is that which is represented; the "manner" is the way in which it is represented; the "means" is the material that is used. The "means" of literary representation is language, but there are many ways of employing that means (dramatic recitation, narration, description) to achieve all sorts of effects (pity, admiration, laughter, scorn) and represent all sorts of things.

- **Plato** accepted the common view that literature is a representation of life, but for that very reason he thought it should be banished from the ideal state. Representations, Plato reasoned, are mere substitutes for the things themselves; even worse, they may be false or illusory substitutes that stir up antisocial emotions (violence or weakness), and they may represent bad persons and actions, encouraging imitation of evil. Only certain kinds of representations, carefully controlled by the state, were to be permitted into Plato's republic of rational virtue.

-To **the formalist**, literature is about itself: novels are made out of other novels; all poems are about language. If representation sneaks back in, it is likely to be turned backward: life imitates art, reality (nature, society, the unconscious) is a text, and there is nothing outside the text.

-One crucial consideration that enters into any analysis of representation is the relationship between the representational material and that which it represents. **Semioticians** generally differentiate three types of representational relationships under the names of icon, symbol, and index: Mimesis" and "imitation" are thus iconic forms of representation

- It is as a **triangular relationship**: representation is always of something or someone, by something or someone, to someone. It seems that only the third angle of representation need be a person: we can represent stones with dabs of paint or letters or sounds, but we can represent things only to people. We might call these connecting lines the "axis of representation". Our lines of communication with others, presenting the possibility of misunderstanding, error, or downright falsehood.

- **Postmodern literary representation:** postmodern experiments in literary representation: concepts such as the identity of the text, the determinacy of meaning, the integrity of the author, and the validity of interpretation all play a role in the representational (or antirepresentational) character of literary texts. The highly self-conscious fictive “labyrinths” with their pastiches of scholarly and historical documentation, deadpan realism, and bizarre fantasy, are often cited as paradigms of postmodern literary representation.

- écriture est une production graphique qui véhicule un faire-voir : elle donne à voir les sons de la langue ; elle utilise un système de signes arbitraires ; elle résulte d'un processus d'empreinte mécanique

- la représentation ou le concept de représentation utilisé en sémiotique « les mots n'étant que des signes ; des représentations des choses du monde »
(Greimas et Courtès, Sémiotique : dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage