

What Is “*She*” Like? Reflections on Indigenous Experiences of Gender and Feminism in the Study of Literature in Kenya and Canada

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Abstract

In universities around the world, an effort has been made to include works by female writers on the primary reading lists of literature units at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In this article, I will examine the primary reading lists of undergraduate and graduate literature units at Kenyatta University, Kenya, and Carleton University, Canada, eventually focussing on research articles that deal with creative work produced by female authors: Kenyan female authors and aboriginal Canadian female authors. It is effectively an examination of how research articles deal with the female characters in creative works such as Yvonne Owuor’s *Dust*; Rebeka Njau’s *The Scar*; Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*; and Beatrice Culleton’s *April Raintree*. This research on gender aspects of university literature curricula will be guided by the critical lens of intersectional feminism; and argues that in carrying out research on creative work by female writers, and focussing on the female characters in those works, critics contribute to intersectional feminism and push the feminist agenda forward; thereby encouraging female writers to keep writing and fostering a positive attitude towards the female gender: thus contributing to reversing discrimination and misogyny.

Keywords: Female Writers, Female Characters, Intersectional Feminism, Kenya, Africa, Aboriginal Canadians.

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Introduction

There is no doubt that any mention of Kenyan literature mostly brings to mind Ngugi wa Thiong'o's name, a renowned and prolific Kenyan author whose first novel in English was published in 1964. However, the earliest Kenyan novel was published by a female Kenyan writer, Grace Ogot, in 1963. From those early beginnings, both men and women seem to have been equally represented in the Kenyan literary scene into the 21st century. It is probably for this reason that Anna Adima, writing in 2020, notes that "the vibrancy of the East African Literary Scene today would not have been possible without the women [...]" (2020: 4). This reality, however, does not come clearly through from the course outlines of University literature units that are studied in this article.

There may be some history behind this. The very first major international gathering of writers and critics of African literature to be held on the African continent was held at the Makerere University, Uganda, in June 1962. At that conference, there were only two female writers from the entire East African region: Grace Ogot and Rebeka Njau. Given that the East African region was represented at the Makerere conference only by a few student writers who had just started publishing (see Gikandi 2007: 7), this may still show that women writers were present from the beginning. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the literary canon both at high school and university level in the East African region included only the names of male pioneer writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek, Taban lo Liyong, Jonathan Kariara, Robert Serumanga, and John Nagenda. As the curriculum became more open, the female writers whose names appeared were Grace Ogot, and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. Conspicuously missing is Rebeka Njau's name. This is what leads Adima to ask the question: "[W]here were the women?" in relation to the inaugural June 1962 Makerere "Conference of African Writers of English Expression," organised by the Department of Extra-Mural Studies, as well as to the primary reading lists on the course outlines of literature units at the university. In the 21st century, the name Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor has been increasingly included on the primary reading lists of literature units at the university level. In the 2020 article, however, Adima draws a long list of pioneer female writers of East Africa, who started writing before Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor was born, whose names have been slow to appear in the literary canon: Rebeka Njau, Charity Waciuma, Muthoni Likimani, Asenath Bole Odaga, Pamela Kola, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, and Rose Mbowa.

These women were writing stories; they did not necessarily join institutions of higher learning to teach or further their education. They were, therefore, treated in the same way as writers in African languages, for whom Gikandi (2007: 9) notes that "what this meant, among other things, was that they did not have a

voice in the debate on literature and culture.” Furthermore, there was only one university in Kenya up to 1984, which was the University of Nairobi. There seems to be a gap between the presence of women writers in Kenyan literature and their absence, or delayed representation in literary studies at university level. The memorandum, “On the Abolition of the English Department,” published by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Henry Owuor-Anyumba and Taban lo Liyong in 1968 (Thiong’o et al 2013: 156-161) supports this observation. This seminal memorandum laid the foundation for the decolonisation of the humanities at the University of Nairobi. The points which were raised – a commitment to oral literature, to Swahili literature, to the literature of the African diaspora, and to African literature in French and Portuguese, and an emphasis on an Africa-centred approach to European and world literatures – have all been taken up in subsequent years. However, the memorandum says nothing about gender or the inclusion of women in research and teaching as a goal of cultural decolonisation. It was probably Micere Mugo, when she joined the department in 1973, who gave impetus to feminist literary studies, as a lecturer, writer, cultural activist, and the first female dean of a Kenyan university, as noted by Wachanga “Aware that the post colony was erasing the contributions of women, Micere traversed the country with some of her students, [...], interviewing former *Mau Mau* women fighters.” (Wachanga 2023: n.p). The zeal of Micere Mugo came to an abrupt end in 1982 when she was forced to flee the country.

For purposes of comparison, this article also looks at research articles focussing on the creative works of female aboriginal Canadian writers; precisely because like their Kenyan counterparts, the aboriginal Canadians have also been through the colonial experience under Britain. The colonial experience in Kenya, as in Canada, was one of settler colonialism. In the first half of the 20th century, a small minority of white European immigrants took control of much of the Central Highlands in Kenya. Indigenous people were only granted limited sovereignty in so-called 'tribal lands' or 'native reserves'. Outside their assigned 'tribal boundaries', people's mobility within Kenya was severely restricted and controlled, and they were discriminated against based on race within Kenya. This created a segregated society, especially in the cities, where Africans were at the bottom of the hierarchy after Europeans and Asians. They were discriminated against in the education system, the labour market and as entrepreneurs; they were considered second-class citizens, and did not enjoy the same civil rights. Indigenous Canadians share this experience. While the indigenous people of Kenya have successfully freed themselves from foreign rule, and Kenya has been governed by Africans since its political independence in 1963, the situation in Canada is different. Canada's so-called First Nations have continued to live as

colonized people in their lands into the 21st century, have often faced massive racism in Canadian immigration society, and continue to struggle for recognition of their civil and land rights. Those groups that survived the systematic destruction and alienation of their communities are only now beginning to recover from the consequences of collective traumas such as the atrocities committed against children in the residential school system. In 2017, Canada celebrated a hundred and fifty years since its confederation as a country in 1867. Canadian book blogger O'Brien's (2017: n.p.) commentary on the celebrations clearly point at the inherent paradox: "We are marking an anniversary of colonization and the oppression of Aboriginal people."

From the 20th century onwards, written literature in English has become an important medium of expression for Canada's Indigenous people. As I noted earlier, "aboriginal Canadians not only include in their writing themes universal to all works of art, but also themes similar to those in early African literature and peculiar to colonial situations." (Mbithi 2010: 4) Where are the women in this literature? A quick online search in 2023 for aboriginal Canadian writers reveals a list of the top ten "Influential Indigenous Authors in Canada" of which only four names are of female writers. The name of Jeannette Armstrong, born in 1948 and the author of *Slash* (1985) – considered to be the first novel by an aboriginal woman in Canada – is not on the list. Neither is the name of Beatrice Culleton, a Métis born in 1949 and author of *April Raintree* (first published in 1983; with an expurgated version issued in 1984).

Theoretical Underpinnings

These omissions are glaring gaps that call for investigation. If feminism is advocating for women's rights and equality between the sexes, intersectional feminism is the understanding of how women's overlapping identities – including race, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation – impact the way they experience oppression and discrimination.

Using an intersectional lens also means recognising the historical contexts surrounding an issue. Long histories of violence and systematic discrimination have created deep inequalities that disadvantage groups of people in the society from the outset. These inequalities intersect with each other, for example, poverty, caste systems, racism, and sexism; denying people their rights, and equal opportunities. The impacts extend across generations. As early as 1981, in her book *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, bell hooks drew attention to how women of colour in the US were subjected to the triple hammer of racism, sexism and classism. Similarly, Audre Lorde (1984) broadened the

ground for intersectional feminism with her famous statement that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" - implying that until racism and homophobia were acknowledged, it would be impossible to dismantle harmful gender dynamics.

As far as female characters in fictional works by female writers are concerned, there are four distinct levels of discrimination. The first level relates to the recognition and acceptance of female writers; closely followed by the inclusion, on the primary reading lists, of fictional work by female writers. On the third level, if such work is not included on the reading lists of university courses, then there would be less academic research discussing the work. It is also possible that at times, when research is carried out on fictional work by female authors, the researcher may not pay much attention to the female characters. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie points out,

"If we do something over and over again. If we see the same thing over and over again, it becomes normal. If only boys are made class monitor, then at some point we will all think, even if unconsciously, that the class monitor has to be a boy. If we keep seeing only men as heads of corporations, it starts to seem 'natural' that only men should be heads of corporations" (2015: 13).

Intersectional feminism focuses on the voices of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in any given context. It illuminates the connections between all fights for justice and liberation. It shows us that fighting for equality means not only turning the tables on gender injustices, but consciously working to solve overlapping forms of discrimination, simultaneously. Olivia Fialho (2019: n.p.) considers reading to be transformative, "literary reading always implies both a text and a reader in a reciprocal experience at a particular time and place. In such a fluid exchange, both text and reader are mutually modified." As we read, however, it is important to keep in mind the words of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor:

"There is a demeaning and even violent assumption that everyone needs to think in one particular way, and if they don't they are wrong, savage, barbaric - all those words that were used to justify the alienation and extermination of people. Listen: the contents, discontents, and complexities of woman-being in our many worlds, the ways of 'feminisms,' are numerous. The world is pluriversal. It is multipolar. And isn't that also its

beauty? This prismic quality that sometimes befuddles us. It's not a single strike of light, and neither is feminism. Feminism is a colorful terrain." (Owuor in Koss 2020: n.p.)

Sample Course Outlines

There are fifty-four units of literature at Kenyatta University. The reading lists provided as appendices sample those literature units at Kenyatta University by year: where the 3-digit code starts with the figure 1, it is a first-year unit; where the 3-digit code starts with the figure 2, it is a second-year unit; where the 3-digit code starts with the figure 3, it is a third-year unit; where the 3-digit code starts with the figure 4, it is a fourth-year unit; where the 3-digit code starts with the figure 8, it is a postgraduate Masters' unit. The undergraduate programme runs for four years. From each of the levels, at least one unit has been included. The postgraduate Masters' programme runs for two years with units being taught in the first year. Five units have been included.

The sampling was purposive: one unit from each year and one from each level; the unit descriptions which included the largest number of texts by female writers for study. The other units at that time (not discussed) have a smaller selection of primary texts by female writers, or none at all. The span 2014 to 2018 covers a curriculum review cycle. This particular review cycle ties in with Adima's article published in 2020, which is one of the key reference points for this article.

The first-year sample course description, ALT 102, is a practical oral literature unit. The reading list of reference materials, on the sample taken from August 2014, includes nineteen items and a total of nineteen names. Some of the writers have written more than one of the reference materials. Furthermore, six of the reference materials are co-written by two authors. In total, however, there are eight names of female writers, and eleven names of male writers.

The second-year sample course description, ALT 208 of January 2018, includes one female writer and two male writers on the primary list. It then includes 'poems' and 'stories' without indicating which poems and which stories will be read and analysed. On the reference list of five items, two are jointly edited by men and women, two are by female writers and one is by a male writer.

The third-year sample course description, ALT 303 of 2015, includes eleven titles, seven on the primary list and four on the reference list. Of the seven on the primary reading list, one is by a female writer: the prolific Egyptian writer with more than forty titles to her name, Nawal El Saadawi. Likewise, on the reference list, only one of the four titles is by a female author.

The fourth-year sample course description, ALT 402 of July 2014, includes a list of four primary texts and twelve secondary texts. From the total of sixteen texts, only one is by a female writer, and that one is on the list of secondary reading materials. The reference materials on the secondary list tend to be optional. They are not fictional works of art. Instead, they are critical analyses intended to help students in understanding and analysing the works of art on the primary reading list.

On the reading list of the postgraduate unit ALT 802 of August 2016, there are seven items on the primary reading list, four of which are by female writers. The secondary reading list has four items, of which one is by a female author. On the reading list of ALT 805 of September 2018, there are seven books. The other two items are anthologies, one of short stories and one of poems. Of the seven books, four are by female writers. The primary reading list of ALT 806 has four novels, two of which are by female writers. The poetry section has two items, neither of which is by a female author. Likewise for the drama section. The secondary reading list has seventeen items, of which one is by a female author. ALT 808 is a practical writing class where participants are actively engaged in creative writing. The reference list has a total of twenty-eight reference items: two of them by the same male author; and one of the references is to a female cartoon character, rather than a writer. Of the twenty-seven books listed, only six are by female authors. ALT 819: *Women in Literature* is taken as a stand-alone unit. It is expected that faculty would draw the attention of post-graduate students to the fact that women do write. Interestingly the sample attached has included Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Devil on the Cross* on the primary reading list.

These sample course descriptions indicate that even though, as noted by Adima, female writers in East Africa have been writing as much and for as long as the male writers, fewer creative works by female writers get into the course descriptions for purposes of reading and studying in class. Indeed, Adima draws up a long list of women who were writing alongside pioneer writers of East Africa such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and then notes that these women seem to have been side-lined by the historiographies of Africa which, even in 2020, remain largely androcentric.

In comparison to this, the case of female aboriginal Canadians is more complicated. An overview of the undergraduate literature units offered by the Department of English Language and Literature at Carleton University indicates that aboriginal writers are still not included in the canon of literature. The creative works of aboriginal writers are studied separately in units titled “Indigenous and Canadian Literatures” (ENGL 2802); “Studies in Indigenous Literature” (ENGL 3960);

“Indigenous Literatures I” (ENGL 4960); and “Indigenous Literatures II” (ENGL 4961). There may be no explanation for this differentiation, other than the fact that the aboriginal Canadians have been through the process of colonisation more recently. It is in the vein of current efforts on national reconciliation that the Canadian Women’s Foundation published a list of publications by Indigenous women writers to celebrate the National Indigenous Month in Canada saying that “[t]heir voices come from across Canada, and their words compel us to listen, learn, and look at where we go from here.” (Canadian Women’s Foundation 2019). This list provides a valuable insight into the range and depth of contemporary Indigenous women’s writing in Canada. It includes the non-fiction book *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward* (2018) by the investigative journalist and bestselling author Tanya Talaga, indicated as an “absolutely necessary read on cultural genocide” (Canadian Women’s Foundation 2019). Talaga is also the author of another recommended book, *Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death and Truth in a Northern City* (2017). Further book publications on the list are Tanya Tagaq’s novel, *Split Tooth* (2017) on a 1970s girlhood in the Canadian arctic, the novel *Monkey Beach* (2000) about a female protagonist who knows how to communicate with the supernatural world and the coming-of-age novel, *Son of a Trickster* (2017), both by the Haisla and Heiltsuk First Nations author Eden Robinson, the intergenerational family saga, *The Break* (2016) by Métis writer Katherena Vermette, the memoirs *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* (2019) by the Tuscarora writer and editor, Alicia Elliott, and *Heart Berries* (2018) by Terese Marie Mailhot, the young adult, dystopian novel, *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) by Cherie Dimaline, and the children’s book, *Shi-Shi-Etko* (2005) by Nicola Campbell on a four-year-old girl on the verge of leaving for residential school. There are many more Indigenous Canadian female writers, including Lee Maracle, Maria Campbell, Ma-Nee Charaby, Susan Aglukark, Lynn Gehl, and Sheila Watt-Cloutier.

Biographies of the Studied Female Writers

The following four authors are part of the canon of anglophone literature in Kenya and Canada respectively, and their works have been studied and taught as representative of Kenyan and Canadian Aboriginal women's literature.

Rebeka Njau is considered Kenya’s earliest female playwright, and a pioneer in the representation of African women in literature. Born in Kanyariri in 1932 to an educated Christian evangelist mother, she pursued higher education, graduating from Alliance High School, and Makerere University. Her maternal grandfather was a medicine man and a specialized blacksmith. He became her greatest

source of inspiration (Njau 2019: 27). She worked as a teacher in Kenya and Tanzania; and is a prolific writer of poems, letters, plays, and novels, publishing a regular newsletter for the NCCCK (National Council of Christian Churches of Kenya) in the 1970s.

Born on the Penticton Indian Reserve in British Columbia in 1948, Jeannette Armstrong has been described as “a cultural archivist and a real knowledge keeper” (Srivastava 2010: n.p.). She received a traditional education from Okanagan elders and grew up on her native reserve surrounded by a strong family of knowledge keepers. She has a very strong sense of identity but is, nevertheless, aware of the prevailing stereotypes regarding Aboriginal peoples, and her writing is an attempt at countering the negative stereotypes. She has been writing since she was fifteen. Many of her short stories and poems have been published in journals, and anthologies. In 2016, Armstrong was named the first First Nations recipient of the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award, British Columbia’s most prestigious literary honour recognizing local authors.¹

Also, born in Saint Boniface, Manitoba, in 1949, Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, is a Canadian Métis author. She became a ward of the Children’s Aid Society because of her parents’ alcoholism, and grew up living in foster homes, separated from her brother and sisters. Both of her sisters committed suicide, and she started writing for emotional release. The story in her first novel, *In Search of April Raintree*, is based on her own life. The book was eventually included in the high school curriculum in Manitoba.

The Kenyan author, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor is a widely travelled and celebrated author of essays, short stories and novels, whose debut novel *Dust* (2014) received much acclaim in Kenya, and beyond. Born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1968, she spent her early years in central Kenya near Limuru and confesses to being “caught in the experience of the 2007/2008 elections” and seeing the “suffering, horror and devastation first hand” (O’Mally 2014: n.p.).² She has worked as a screenwriter and was director of the Zanzibar International Film Festival 2003-2005.

¹ See Armstrong’s profile at <https://news.ok.ubc.ca/2021/10/06/jeannette-armstrong-works-to-protect-indigenous-philosophies-and-oral-syilx-stories/>

² Escalation of violence after the 2007 presidential election in Kenya, which left more than 1.500 people killed and more than 600.000 displaced.

Synopses of the Studied Primary Texts

Rebeka Njau's *The Scar* is a prize-winning one-act play written in 1961 and produced for the first time at Makerere University College the same year. It was first published by Kibo Art Gallery in Tanzania in 1965, and then went out of print. It was reproduced by Books Horizon in 2019, as they published Njau's *Mirrors of My Life: A Memoir*. The main character in *The Scar* is Mariana. She is a single, thirty-year-old lady who left her home village at the age of sixteen, due to the shame of an early pregnancy, leaving the child to an elderly lady to raise. Mariana is the head of a girls' shelter in a different village. The shelter keeps and protects girls against circumcision.

Originally published in 1985, Armstrong's first novel, *Slash* deals with the coming-of-age of an Okanagan Indigenous boy. Growing up in the Okanagan Valley in the 1950s and 1960s, the main character, Tommy Kelasket, gets involved in the exciting adventures of the Indian Movement, becoming quite an activist, and thereby acquiring the nickname "Slash". In the novel, Armstrong traces the incredible pain, anger, confusion, and frustration that Slash suffers because of his inability to accept either of the only choices offered by the dominant discourse: "join the rats" or "cop out and be drunks and losers" (1985: 198). Armstrong is of the opinion that "*Slash*" is not really a novel. The narrative is told using devices that would be used in an oral narrative told in the first person" (Srivastava 2010: n. p.). In his search for truth and meaning, Slash tries out politics, alcohol, and drugs; eventually coming to the realization that he was "a precious member of a threatened group" (Fee 1990: 172). In the process of describing the development of the protagonist from childhood to fatherhood, the novel depicts the discourses employed by the education system, Christianity, and organisations such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) during the 1960s and 1970s.

Beatrice Culleton's *April Raintree* is about two Métis sisters trying to survive and succeed in a multi-cultural setup. The two sisters are taken from their parents and sent, for much of the time, to separate foster homes, although they remain emotionally close. The elder sister, April, succeeds in making it to the pinnacle of 'success,' married to a rich white man, living in the mansion of her dreams, while Cheryl, like Slash, starts out doing well at school, strongly identifies with Métis ways, but, after struggling with the problems of urban Indians for a long time, finally ends up 'vanishing.' The two sisters, isolated by white social welfare policies from their Métis cultural context and from their family, fantasize: "Cheryl, too young to remember her parents' drinking, romanticizes her past;

April, old enough to remember it, overreacts, basing her fantasies of the future on the ads in magazines” (Fee 1990: 171).

Written by a writer born after independence, Owuor’s *Dust* (2014) uses the story of the Oganda family as a microcosm of the history of Kenya spanning more than fifty years. According to Ndivo (2014: n.p.):

“Although the story appears to be anchored around the 2007/2008 bungled elections and the political flare up and violence thereafter, there is much more to the narrative than meets the eye. The story of Odidi’s death becomes the reference point for the tumbling down of Wouth Ogik and the suggested unearthing of individual secrets tied together with those of the nation at large. Wouth Ogik symbolises the nation and its cracks and possible disintegration is reminiscent of the mistrust and the fissures of a nation resulting from tribal animosity and decades of political injustices. DUST is a warning that secrets from a dark past can devastatingly destroy and vanquish a family/nation overnight.”

Moving between the lamentations of a single family and the corruption of national politics, the story is “written in a powerful prose that is close to poetry. There are, in fact, many instances where the weight of the sentiment being expressed condenses the prose into poetry” (Mbithi 2016). In a review, Juliane Okot Bitek (2015: n.p.) comments that “*Dust* is about how stories have come to define and defy contemporary national borders and how memory, history, narrative, erasure, and politics rub against each other, resisting and sometimes working together to distance us from how we should think and who we are.”

Findings in the Research Articles

A systematic review of all four texts would be beyond the scope of this article. This section, therefore, represents a random reading of different reviews on the primary texts including research articles, masters’ theses and dissertations, undergraduate theses and dissertations, unpublished papers that are available on research platforms such as researchgate; and gives a good impression of what students would find if they started researching on the primary texts.

Research articles discussing Rebeka Njau’s *The Scar* are few and far between. There is one article by John Mugubi published in 2015. Mugubi considers Mariana, the main character, to be strong and progressive, “committed to the emancipation of the younger generation of women from the suppressive forms of meaningless Gikuyu traditional practices” (2015: 20). The fact that the society

she lives in considers her a “cultural renegade” and a “disseminator of rotten seeds” (2015: 22) leads Mugubi to remark that “Njau scoffs at the double standards employed in our judgement of the two sexes” (2015: 23). Towards the end of his article, however, Mugubi makes a comparison between *The Scar* and *The Bride* by the Ugandan writer Austin Bukenya, without any explanation. It would seem as if he felt a need to anchor his conclusion on a play by a male writer when he writes that, “like Bukenya, Njau envisages a society where humanity has the right to shape both individual and collective destinies” (2015: 26). A list of reference works provided by Mugubi has fourteen items, by surname and initial only. A quick check reveals that the only female writer on that list of fourteen is Rebeka Njau. And her only listed work is the play under discussion, *The Scar*.

There are quite a number of readily available studies and research articles discussing *Slash*, and many of them are authored by female researchers. Most of them, however, concentrate on land, race, and political issues. This is not surprising since the main character is male, and these are the issues that he is engaged with. In her 2001 article, “A Decolonial (Rite of) Passage: Decolonization, Migration and Gender Construction in Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*,” Sarkowsky analyses “the importance of migration and gender for the political agenda,” which quickly eclipses the female gender out of the equation. For her part, in her doctoral thesis, Nancy Lynn Van Styvendale (2010) discusses the trauma of displacement in as far as Native North American literatures are concerned. Other articles by female researchers include Hodne and Hoy’s (1992) “Reading from the inside out: Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*,” published in *World Literatures Written in English*, which focusses on cultural practices, particularly the ‘silences’ in the area of the problematic relation of academics to ‘postcolonial’ literature. Their article is an interesting look into the dynamics of joint research in an area of research which seems to be full of grey areas, probably because in 1992, the novel was still relatively new. For their part, Pramod and Ramachandran concentrate on the “buoyancy and inertia of revolution” in which they describe the protagonist’s “physical journey through Canada and the USA” as well as “an inner journey influenced by the experiences and teachers he encounters” (2015: 549).

Surprisingly, even the research articles on Culleton’s novel, *In Search of April Raintree*, where the lives of two Métis sisters are subjected to several layers of discrimination, concentrate on race matters. Among them, a paper presented at a conference in 2019 by Abinaya Bharathi, is titled “The Mythical Constraint: Pressure of the Roots in Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree*” and is,

indeed, self-declaratory. Where the articles focus on the “Native North American” rather than specific work(s) such as Van Styvendale (2010) does in her thesis, the gender issues are not addressed; perhaps understandably since issues that face the Aboriginal people of the North American continent collectively are many and multi-faceted. One term paper, anonymous, focusses on the two major characters, April and Cheryl Raintree, and starts with a startling quotation from 1818 by William McGillivray, Nor’ West Company Head: “‘They one and all look upon themselves as an independent tribe of natives entitled to a property in the soil, a flag of their own and to protection from the British government’” (Anonymous 2011: n.p.) Evident in this statement are the contradictions of the legacy of colonialism, even before the paper delves into the experience of victimization and how each of the sisters deals with those experiences. The text provides a succinct summary of the plot, “the feelings of disappointment and shame lead Cheryl into a life of alcoholism and prostitution, which in turn results in the rape of April by three men who mistake her for Cheryl” (Anonymous 2011: n.p.). Heather Hillsburg, in dealing with “anger, compassion and longing” highlights the truth, that members of the dominant society “ultimately blame Aboriginal women for the violence they may confront” (2015: 300). Similar sentiments are expressed by Hanson in an article titled “Through the White Man’s Eyes” where, in attempting a decolonizing reading of *In Search of April Raintree*, she refers to the “naturalization of violence in the social space of Aboriginal womanhood and the converse naturalization of the violent colonial brutalization of Aboriginal women by white men” (2012: 15).

There is an article by Margery Fee, published in 1990 that focusses on both *Slash* and *April Raintree*. The article, focussing on members of the First Nations, concentrates on the ideology conveyed through Canadian social institutions and the language and practices of everyday life, referring to them as “fake ideas”, but explaining *ab initio* that they “are not always obviously fake to those subjected to them, even though they cause confusion and frustration in those for whom they do not seem ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’” (1990: 168). Fee notes that “Culleton focusses her account on the psychological” and “Armstrong [focusses] on the political aspects of the Native experience” (1990: 173). Nevertheless, Fee seems to be convinced that “despite their differences, these novels are trying to open up a space between the negative stereotype of the Indian and the romanticised popular view” (1990: 170). In the article, Margery Fee has concentrated on ideology and the dichotomy between ‘white’ and ‘Indian’ rather than gender. She does, however, seem to focus more on the male character of Tommy Kelas-ket, also known as Slash, than on the female character of his wife, about whom Fee says: “Slash settles down, marries Maeg and they have a child”; “Even

Slash's wife Maeg voices her feeling that to refuse to negotiate on land claims is simply too hard [...] and she gets actively involved in the campaign to include aboriginal peoples in the patriation process and in the Constitution" (1990: 174). In her references to *April Raintree*, however, Fee seems to focus equally on both April and Cheryl.

As predicted by Ndivo in 2014, there have been quite a number of research articles focussing on Owuor's *Dust*. Most of these articles discuss the characters, psychology, politics, history, and the economic situation in Kenya. In his review, Ndivo does touch on four important female characters in Owuor's *Dust*: Akai Lokorijom, Arabel Ajany Oganda, Selene Hughes, and Justina.

For example, Boiyo Amos Burkeywo's M.A. thesis, available from the University of Nairobi digital Research Archive, focuses on historical perspectives under the title "Narrating Kenyan History through Fiction." Indeed, many researchers are quick to spot the similarities between the fictitious anecdotes in the novel and real-life occurrences readily available in historical accounts. This may explain why Thando Njovane (2023) in the abstract to his article under the title "Colonial Moments, Postcolonial Selves: History, Trauma and Silence in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*" refers to it as a novel that "concerns itself with British colonial heritage in Kenya, the Mau Mau War and the private losses of the Oganda family". Karumba's (2017) M.A. thesis focusses on history as well, under the title of "Historical Consciousness and Character Formation in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*."

In an M.A. dissertation presented to the University of Pretoria in 2018, Maryanne Wairimũ Mũrĩthi has done a thorough analysis of Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* as postcolonial crime fiction. In her study, Mũrĩthi sets out purposely to study a text by a female writer, precisely because it seems as if male writers "have received considerable academic attention for writing crime narratives in their critiques of the postcolonial state" (2018: 1). Mũrĩthi then focusses on what she refers to as "the affective labour carried out by the female characters" (2018: 1). She starts by introducing the idolized "Black Mother", as portrayed by Marcus Mosiah Garvey in his same-titled poem,³ before discussing the novel's central character, Akai-ma. Akai-ma, wife of Nyipir Oganda, is the mother of Moses Odidi, and Arabel Ajany in Owuor's *Dust*.

An article by Christina Kenny (2016) focuses squarely on Akai-ma, the Turkana woman around whom the story of *Dust* unfolds, characterizing her in the following terms: "[T]he life force of Akai is a narrative lodestone, her actions and

³ Accessible on <https://allpoetry.com/The-Black-Mother>

relationships shape the events of the novel” (Kenny 2016: 1). Despite being from a minority ethnic group, Akai is a phenomenal character who does not readily fit into any category. Kenny notes that “Akai finds the boundaries of nation and family complex and stifling, unpredictable and violent” (2016: 5). In the novel, Akai is described as “a consummate shirker of herding duties and a cook who always burnt food more likely to be found hunting, swimming, challenging young men to wrestling matches” (Owuor 2014: 237). In both instances, Akai’s character traits do not follow female stereotypes in Kenyan literature, where mothers are usually portrayed as caring, peaceful, unpaid domestic labourers.

In Kenny’s 2016 article, it is clear right from the title, “She Is Made of and Coloured by the Earth Itself: Motherhood and Nation in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust*,” that the focus will be on female character(s) and issues of motherhood. Kenny describes the novel as a “sense memory, a synaesthesia of bodies, emotions and landscapes, suffused in a sensation of *uhuru* indefinitely postponed” (2016: 1). This is probably a great way to describe the female state, the reality of being a woman in Kenya at that time, with the word “uhuru” referring to the different “freedom(s)” that all feminisms strive for/aspire to/crave. Even Mũrĩthi (2018) acknowledges that “[m]otherhood in particular has an assigned and therefore legible nationalist role” (2018: 16).

Discussion

There are some course outlines that appear to be balanced in terms of the gender of the creative writers whose texts are placed on the list of primary texts. This is an indication that scholars are conscious of the need for balance and are actively making an effort to achieve it. From the samples provided, however, it is clear that not all the course outlines are balanced; and where an imbalance occurs, it seems to be in favour of the male writers, in both the Kenyan and Canadian universities. It would also seem as if the academy were aware of the likelihood of an imbalance; and makes an effort at affirmative action. This would explain the units that are expressly for the study of female writers or, in the case of the aboriginal Canadians, indigenous writers, and literature. These attempts at affirmative action are, effectively, confirmation of the existing imbalance. Unfortunately, even where such a call to affirmative action is in place, sometimes faculty members may not comply.

The logical sequence when scouting for a niche in graduate studies is for students to work with materials that they have already encountered. It follows, therefore, that as and when the creative work of female writers is not included

on the course outlines, fewer students will undertake research in such work, even if the number of female writers equals the number of male writers. The natural consequence of that is that fewer research projects will focus on the novels, plays or poetry of female writers. The spiral of diminishing choices continues to the choices of the researchers. Even the researchers who choose to work on the creative works of female writers may not focus on the female characters. The case of Armstrong's *Slash* is, indeed, an intriguing example: the female writer chooses a male protagonist. As much Armstrong's character choices may reflect her larger concerns, the choice of a male protagonist, nevertheless, automatically draws the attention of readers and researchers to the male character and, consequently, to the issues that males deal with; thus, alienating the females in the society under discussion. This discrimination becomes cumulative since, under the circumstances, even female researchers should not be blamed for focussing on male characters. Predictably, in the case of *Slash*, most research articles focus on issues such as politics, land rights, and cultural practices from the masculine perspective.

Although not referring to creative writing, one of the contemporaries of Wangari Maathai, known in Kenya and beyond as an activist, politician, writer and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (2004), and Rebeka Njau, Mary Gakunga, in her biography comments about some of the challenges faced by Kenyan women in their professional careers, that:

"Lack of recognition was a demoralizing factor. Promises made at the initial recruitment stage in 1967 that my Master's Degree qualifications would be considered for commensurate remuneration were not fulfilled. There was also the gender factor. Regardless of her performance, the woman's upward mobility or professional progress has always been deliberately blocked, as long as there is a man competing with her." (Gakunga 2011: 189)

Eventually, in writing her own biography, Rebeka Njau does give insight into the nature of some of the challenges, by confessing this painful truth, while writing about *Ripples in the Pool*, that:

"When the novel came out, in January 1975, some people who did not believe that women had as much intelligence as men, believed that Elimo [her husband] had written it for me. One church man was candid enough to say to my face: "You did not write this book. Your husband must have written it for you." I found the remarks offensive but I did not blame him.

The fact that Elimo's name was often in the news and mine wasn't, made people conclude that I was not capable of writing such a story. I wrote every word of it, without help from anyone." (Njau 2019: 178)

It is gratifying to note that a list of "22 Kenyan Books You Should Read in 2022," published by the writer and activist Maureen Kasuku, includes works by female writers and works by male writers on the basis of quality of work and readership. There are more and more females on campuses in Kenya, and our research and discussion reveal an increasing appearance of works by female writers on the selected reading lists, as well as an increasing number of research articles that discuss these works and sometimes focus on the female characters in these works.

Conclusion

These female writers under study who have been published, and studied at university level, have succeeded in spite of oppression and discrimination from various quarters, and through a variety of angles. The fact that they found time to write; got their work published; have been included in primary reading lists of university literature units; and have even received critical reviews and had research articles focussing on their creative work published, is indeed a major achievement. Each of them has taken time to speak or write about the various difficulties they faced: as women; and as members of a less dominant group. They contribute valuable and rarely accessible knowledge about unique circumstances.

Further comparative studies between Kenyan and Canadian Indigenous women writers would provide an interesting counterpoint from which to explore the tenets of 'decolonising' not only the mind, but also education and culture, through feminist research. Students and researchers in Kenya would benefit immensely from engaging more seriously with the novelistic female characters created by Kenyan women writers, and with Aboriginal women's literature in other parts of the world.

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- Van Styvendale, Nancy Lynn (2010): *The Im/possibility of Recovery in Native North American Literatures*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Alberta.
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Appendices

The reading lists of the selected literature units offered at Kenyatta University

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME

ALT 102 (August 2014)

1. Bukenya, Austin and Nandwa Jane. 1983. *African Oral Literature for Schools*
2. p'Bitek, Okot. 1986, *Artist the Ruler*
3. Finnegan, Ruth. 2012. *Oral Literature in Africa*
4. Okepwho, Isidore. 1979. *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of Performance*
1992. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity*
5. Chesaina, Ciarunji. 1991. *Oral Literature of the Kalenjin*
6. Chesaina, Ciarunji. 1997. *Oral Literature of Embu and Mbeere*
7. Kabira, Wanjiku Mukabi and Karega wa Mutahi. 1988. *Gikuyu Oral Literature*
8. Kabira, Wanjiku Mukabi. 1983. *The Oral Artist*
9. Akivaga, Symonds Kichamu and Asenath Bole Odaga. 1984. *Oral Literature: A School Certificate Course*
10. Kipuri, Naomi. 1983. *Oral Literature of the Maasai*
11. Ogutu, Onyango Benedict and Roscoe Adrian Alan 1974. *Keep My Words*
12. Lo Liyong, Taban. 1972. *Popular Culture of East Africa*
13. Knappert, Jan. 1979. *Myths and Legends of the Swahili*
14. Adagala, Kavetsa and Kabira, Wanjiku Mukabi (eds) 1985. *Kenyan Oral Narratives*
15. Miruka, Simon Okumba. 1994. *Encounter with Oral Literature* and 1994. *Understanding and Teaching Proverbs*. In: Bukenya, Austin; Kabira, Wanjiku Mukabi and Okombo, Okoth (eds.) *Understanding Oral Literature*

16. Indangasi, Henry et al. (eds) 2006. *Our Landscapes, Our Narratives: Proceedings of the Conference on East African Oral Literature*.
17. Indangasi, Henry and Odari, Masumi (eds) 2005. *The Nairobi Journal of Literature*, n°5
18. Kenyatta, Jomo. 1965. *Facing Mount Kenya*
19. Okoth, Dancan Okombo and Nandwa, Jane (eds) 1992. *Reflections on Theories and Methods in Oral Literature*

ALT 208 (January 2018)

Primary Course Texts

1. Achebe, Chinua. 1960. *No Longer at Ease*
2. Macgoye, Marjorie Oludhe 1986. *Coming to Birth*
3. Imbuga, Francis. 1989. *The Burning of Rags*
4. Short stories
5. Poems

Secondary References

1. Gwen, Lisa (ed.) 2008. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Vol. 1&2. London: Sage.
2. Knowles, J. Gary; Cole, Ardra L. and Promislow, Sara (eds). 2008. *Creating Scholartistry: Imagining the Arts-Informed Thesis or Dissertation* (Arts-Informed Inquiry series, Vol. 4). Halifax, Canada: Backalong Books.
3. Lunsford, Andrea; Ruzskiewicz, John J. and Walters, Keith. 2007. *Everything's an Argument with Readings*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
4. Silverman, David 2005. *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practicle Handbook*. 2nd edition. London: Sage.
5. Woolf, Judith. 2005. *Writing about Literature: Essay and Translation Skills for University Students of English and Foreign Literature*. London: Routledge.

ALT 303 (2015)

Primary reading list

1. Conrad, Joseph 1899. *Heart of Darkness*.
2. Negritude poetry (selected ones to be distributed in class)
3. Ginsberg, Allen. 1956. *Howl*
4. The poetry of Nissim Ezekiel (Selected ones to be distributed in class)
5. Achebe, Chinua. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*
6. El Saadawi, Nawal 1985. *God Dies by the Nile*
7. Laing, B. Kojo. 1992. *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars*

Secondary References

1. Wellek, Rene and Warren, Austin. 1948. *Theory of Literature*
2. Lodge, David. 1988. *Modern Criticism and Theory*
3. Forster, Edward Morgan. 1927. *Aspects of the Novel*
4. Waugh, Patricia. 2006. *Literary Theory and Criticism*

ALT 402 (July 2014)

Primary reading list

1. Sophocles. c. 429 BC. *Oedipus the King*.
2. Shakespeare, William. 1603. *Hamlet*.
3. Brecht, Bertolt. 1948. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.
4. Imbuga, Francis. 1979. *The Successor*.

Secondary references

1. Clarke, Ronald F. 1965. *The Growth and Nature of Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Weiss, Samuel A. 1974. *Drama in Modern World*. D. C. Heath Canada, Limited.
3. Allen, Edgar L. 1970. *From Plato to Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Great Thoughts and Ideas of the Western Mind*. New York: Fawcett Books.
4. Beckerman, Bernard. 1970. *Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis*. New York: Alfred A. Knoff.
5. Boulton, Majorie. 1980. *The Anatomy of Drama*. London: Routledge and Kegan.
6. Frye, Northrop. 1966. *Anatomy of Criticism*. New York: Atheneum.
7. Pfister, Manfred. 1977. *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. Trans. John Halliday. European Studies in English Literature Series.
8. Richard Benson Sewall. 1994. *The Vision of Tragedy*. Revised edition. Perseus Books Group.
9. Richmond Y. Hathorn. 1962. *Tragedy, Myth, and Mystery*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
10. Newton, Kenneth M. 2008. *Modern Literature and the Tragic*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
11. Gray, Ronald D. 1976. *Brecht the Dramatist*. London: CUP.
12. Cunningham, John E. 1965. *Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama*. Evans Bros.

POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME

ALT 802 (August 2016)

Primary reading list

1. Conrad, Joseph. 1899. *Heart of Darkness*.

2. Head, Bessie. 1973. *A Question of Power*.
3. El Saadawi, Nawal. 1985. *God Dies by the Nile*.
4. Ogola, Margaret. 1994. *The River and the Source*.
5. Owuor, Yvonne Adhiambo. 2013. *Dust*.
6. Sembène, Ousmane. 1960. *God's Bits of Wood*.
7. wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. 2006. *Wizard of the Crow*.

Secondary References

1. Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen (eds.) 1994. *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. London, New York: Routledge.
2. Atkins, G. Douglas. 1989. *Contemporary Literary Theory*. London: Macmillan.
3. Eagleton, Mary. 1991. *Feminist Literary Criticism*. London: Longman.
4. Eagleton, Terry. 1996. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Blackwell.
5. Blamires, Harry. 1991. *A History of Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan Press.

ALT 805 (September 2018)

Primary reading list

1. Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2006. *Half of a Yellow Sun*.
2. Emecheta, Buchi. 1979. *The Joys of Motherhood*.
3. Farah, Nuruddin. 1986. *Maps*.
4. Laye, Camara. 1953. *The African Child*.
5. El Saadawi, Nawal. 2008. *Zeina*.
6. Sembène, Ousmane. 1962. *Voltaïque*.
7. Wanner, Zukiswa. 2008. *Behind Every Successful Man*.
8. Allfrey, Ellah W. (ed.) 2016. *Africa39: New Writing from Africa South of the Sahara*.
9. Beier, Ulli (ed.) 2008. *Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*. 5th Edition.

ALT 806 (September 2014)

Primary reading list

1. THE NOVEL IN THE CARIBBEAN
 - 1.1 Lamming, George. 1953. *In the Castle of my Skin*
 - 1.2 Rhys, Jean. 1966. *Wide Sargasso Sea*
 - 1.3 Naipaul, Vidiadhar S. 1961. *A House for Mr. Biswas*
 - 1.4 Hodge, Merle. 1970. *Crick Crack Monkey*
2. POETRY IN THE CARIBBEAN
 - 2.1. Walcott, Derek. 1965. *The Castaway*

- 2.2. Walcott, Derek. 1969. *The Gulf*
- 2.3. Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. 1973. *The Arrivants*
3. DRAMA IN THE CARIBBEAN
 - 3.1. Walcott, Derek. 1970. *Dream on Monkey Mountain*
 - 3.2. Walcott, Derek. 1980. *Remembrance and Pantomime*
 - 3.3. Rhone, Trevor. 1976. *Schools Out*
 - 3.4. Rhone, Trevor. 1976. *Smile Orange*

Secondary references

1. Dabydeen, David & Tagoe, Nana W. 1987. *A Reader's Guide to the West Indian and Black British Literature*
2. King, Bruce (ed). 1979. *West Indian Literature*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
3. Ramchand, Kenneth. 1970. *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*. London: Faber and Faber.
4. Walsh, William. 1973. *Commonwealth Literature*. London: OUP.
5. Gilkes, Michael. 1981. *The West Indian Novel*. London: Longman.
6. Baugh, Edward (ed). 1978. *Critics on Caribbean Literature*. New York: St. Martins Press
7. Paquet, Sandra P. 1982. *The Novels of George Lamming*. London: Heinemann.
8. Mugubi, John. 2003. "The Child Character in Adult Literature: A Study of Six Selected Caribbean Novels". Ph.D Dissertation.
9. Odhiambo, Christopher J. 1991. "Caribbean Definition in the Works of George Lamming". MA Dissertation, KU.
10. Lowenthal, David & Comitas, Lambros (eds) 1993. *Consequences of Class and Color: West Indian Perspectives*. Anchor Press.
11. Hardeck, Donald E. et al (eds) 1979. *Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Encyclopedia*. Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press Inc.
12. Griffiths, Gareth. 1978. *A Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing Between Two Cultures*. London: Marion Boyars.
13. Dance, Daryl Cumber (ed.) 1986. *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Source Book*. New York: Greenwood Press.
14. Smith, Roland (ed.) 1996. *Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature*. London: Longman.
15. James, Louis. 1968. *Islands in Between*. London: OUP.
16. Cudjoe, Selwyn R. (ed) 1990. *Caribbean Women Writers*. Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications.
17. Salkey, Andrew. (ed.) 1973. *Caribbean Essays*. Evans Bros Ltd.

ALT 808 (December 2014)

Reading list

1. Allot, Miriam. 1959. *Novelists on the Novel*.
2. Bailey, Tom. 1999. *On Writing Short Stories*.
3. Block, Lawrence. 1979. *Writing the Novel: From Plot to Print*.
4. Burroway, Janet. 1982. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*.
5. Doubtfire, Dianne. 1978. *The Craft of Novel Writing*.
6. Elbow, Peter. 1998. *Writing With Power*.
7. Egri, Lajos. 1965. *The Art of Creative Writing*.
8. Forster, Edward M. 1927. *Aspects of the Novel*.
9. Dickson, Frank A. & Smythe, Sandra (eds). 1970. *A Handbook of Short Story Writing*.
10. Gardner, John. 1983. *On Becoming a Novelist*.
11. Gardner, John. 1984. *The Art of Fiction: Notes for Young Writers*.
12. Jackowska, Nicki. 1997. *Write for Life*.
13. Jamieson, Alan. 1996. *Creative Writing, Researching, Planning and Writing for Publication*.
14. Jonathan, Raban. 1969. *The Technique of Modern Fiction*.
15. Kinross-Smith, Graeme. 1992. *Writer: A Working Guide for New Writers*.
16. Knorr, Jeff & Schell, Tim. 2001. *Mooring Against the Tide*.
17. Lamott, Anne. 1994. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*.
18. Friedland, Louis S. (ed). 1964. *Letters on the Short Story, Drama and Other Literary Topics*.
19. Mills, Mark. 2002. *Crafting the Very Short Story: An Anthology of 100 Masterpieces*.
20. Minot, Stephen. 1965. *Three Genres: The Writing of Fiction, Poetry and Drama*.
21. Mphahlele, Es'kia. 1966. *A Guide to Creative Writing: A Short Guide to Short-story and Novel Writing*.
22. Perry, Dick. 1969. *One Way to Write Your Novel*.
23. Pitkin, Walter B. 2010. *The Art and the Business of Short Story Writing (1913)*.
24. Williams, Joseph M. 1981. *Style*.
25. Willis, Meredith Sue. 1993. *Deep Revision*.
26. Strunk Jr, William & White, Elwyn B. 1957. *The Elements of Style*.
27. Catron, Louis E. and Norman A. Bert. 2017 (2nd ed.) *The Elements of Playwriting*.
28. Rowe, Kenneth T. 1939. *Write That Play*.

ALT 819: Women in Literature (2nd Semester 2022/2023; January – April 2023)

Course description

This course explores the portrayal and presentation of women in literature by both male and female writers by interrogating a selected body of fictional writing (novels, drama and

poetry). The texts will also be used in examining the images of women and the roles they play in literature. It will also scrutinize the role, impact and authenticity of male feminist writers. The major thematic concerns and the use of language will be among the key issues to be delved upon in the reading of the said texts. The course will ground women issues on Feminist literary theory and criticism. It will, thus, present a brief historical survey of feminist writing, while paying close attention to postulations of feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Helen Cixous, and Judith Butler, among others. It will also revisit the issue of gender and identity and how the two shape female subjectivity.

Course Requirements

Students are required to:

Read all the primary texts before they are discussed in class, as well critical writings about these texts.

Attend all classes and participate actively in class discussions (after oral presentations)

Give an oral presentation on an assigned text or seminar question.

Sit all CATs and the final examination. Except for a documented absence such as hospitalization, ALL students MUST take the same CAT and final examination at the same time. Failure to show up for a CAT or exam at the stipulated time will be considered as a wilful forfeiture of points.

Assessment

Students will:

Write an in-class CAT (20%)

In-class presentation (20%)

Write an in-class final examination (60)

Topics

1. Introduction: Feminist Activism (Historical Context). Books: Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Virginia Woolf (1929) *A Room of One's Own*, Alice Walker (1983) *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*
2. Feminist Postulations by Leading Female Theorists:
 - a. Women Identity, Gender and Subjectivity: A focus on Simone de Beauvoir
 - b. Language, psyche and sexuality and women's writing: Hélène Cixous
 - c. Gender identity, subversion and gender performance by Judith Butler
 - d. Toril Moi
3. Dynamics of Patriarchy and Images of Women in Patriarchy.
4. Women Identity, Sexuality and Subjectivity
5. Writing Women Lives: Autobiography
6. Women and Struggle for Selfhood, definition and Liberation.
7. Women Writers of Color:
8. African Women Writers: Place of women in African literary tradition

9. Contemporary Women Writing and Global Consciousness.
10. Eco-Feminism

Primary Texts

1. *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy (India)
2. *This Mournable Body* (2020) by Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe)
3. *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (Great Britain)
4. *So Long a Letter* (1981) by Mariama Bâ (Senegal)
5. *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019) Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor (Kenya)
6. *Devil on the Cross* (1980) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Kenya)
7. *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2004) by Wangari Maathai (Kenya)
8. *Song of Solomon* (1977) by Toni Morrison (African American)
9. *God Dies by the Nile* (1974) by Nawal el Saadawi (Egypt)
10. *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie (Nigeria)
11. *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy (Russia)
12. *Selected Poems by Women Writers*

Secondary Reading List

1. Abel, Elizabeth (ed.) 1980. *Writing and Sexual Difference*. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press.
2. Bowlby, Rachel. 1997. *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh Univ. Press.
3. Cameron, Deborah (ed.) 1998. *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. Second Edition. Routledge.
4. Campbell, JoAnn (ed.) 1996. *Toward a Feminist Rhetoric: The Writing of Gertrude Buck*. Univ. of Pittsburgh Press.
5. Claridge, Laura and Elizabeth Langland. 1990. *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism*. Amhurst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press.
6. Falco, Maria J. (ed.) 1996. *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Penn State Univ. Press.
7. Hoeveler, Diane Long. 1998. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontes*. Penn State University Press.
8. Lange, Cheryl. 2008. "Men and Women Writing Women: The Female Perspective and Feminism in U.S. Novels and African Novels in French by Male and Female Authors." *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research* XI:1-6.
9. Latha, Rizwana Habib. 2001. "Feminisms in an African Context: Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 50: 23-40.
10. Pratt, Annis. 1981. *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

11. Robbins, Ruth. 2000. *Literary Feminisms*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
12. Saint-Martin, Lori (introduction). 2000. "Feminist Readings of Contemporary Male Writers." *Quebec Studies* 30: 3-56.
13. Williamson, Alan. 2001. "Introduction." *Almost a Girl: Male Writers and Female Identification*. Charlottesville: Virginia UP.

N/B: *The list is in no way exhaustive. Students are encouraged to read widely. As we move along this reading list will expand as we interrogate the evolution of theory and development of theoretical trends. Credit will be given for wide reading and comparative reflection on such reading.*