

Prizewinners: Anglophone Novelists and the Nobel, 1991–2007

Mondays and Wednesdays at 3:15–5:05 p.m. in room 160-319

<http://www.stanford.edu/people/goldstone/nobelists.html>

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Description

This course is an experiment in examining the global phenomenon of the late-twentieth-century novel in English through the most naive possible lens: the Nobel Prize in Literature. We read works by the five English-language novelists to win the Nobel since the Cold War: Nadine Gordimer, Toni Morrison, V. S. Naipaul, J. M. Coetzee, and Doris Lessing. We will have two aims: to read each novel carefully, as a work which (as the Nobel Prize promises) merits serious, close attention; and to reflect on the meanings of the prize and the kinds of literature it has celebrated in the last twenty years. If the Nobel singles out certain writers as representatives of a *world* literature, what is world literature? How do we—or, at any rate, the Swedish Academy—come to see these novelists, operating in the most disparate contexts, as somehow sharing this ultimate literary value in common? And what *is* that value? Is it aesthetic, ethical, political?

Topics include: postcolonial writing and race, realism and novelistic form, the relation to American and British canons, and the sociology and politics of the Nobel. In addition to a major novel by each writer, we will read their Nobel lectures, as well as a certain amount of scholarly work on the Nobel and on individual writers.

Grading

Seminar participation: 20%. You are expected to come class prepared and ready to engage in discussion. The purpose of the seminar format is to allow you to take intellectual risks, trying new ideas, ways of expressing yourself, styles of argumentation, and modes of collaborating with others; the purpose of including participation in your grade is to encourage you to do so. Participation also includes your work in any presentations or other short exercises I assign. You are, of course, expected to attend every class. If you have a serious reason why you must miss class, please contact me ahead of time. More than two unexcused absences will place you in danger of failing. If however you become seriously ill—especially if you have flu-like symptoms—*please stay home*, and get in touch with me as soon as you are well enough to do so.

First paper: 30%.

Second paper: 50%.

Office Hours and How to Reach Me

My office is 460–315. My office hours are Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 1:30–3:00. I will also usually be available by appointment. I respond quickly to e-mails at [andrew.goldstone@](mailto:andrew.goldstone@stanford.edu)

stanford.edu. For urgent questions, feel free to call my cell phone (I'll give out the number on the first day of class) between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m.

Honor Code

All students are to observe the Honor Code:

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm>.

Students with Disabilities

Students who have a disability that may require an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services in a class should contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible so that accommodations can be arranged.

Readings

Required

*: Assigned selections are to be found in a course packet, available at the Bookstore.

All readings not found online or in the course packet are available at the Bookstore. Alternate editions are fine.

Allén, Sture. "Presentation Speech." 1991. nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. ([link](#))

———. "Presentation Speech." 1993. nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. ([link](#))

*Attridge, Derek. *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*. University of Chicago Press, 2004. 0226031160.

Attwell, David. "Race in *Disgrace*." *Interventions* 4, no. 3 (November 2002): 331–41. ([link](#))

*Eve Bertelsen, "The Quest and the Quotidian: Doris Lessing in South Africa." Chap. 2 in *In Pursuit of Doris Lessing: Nine Nations Reading*, edited by Claire Sprague. Macmillan, 1990. ISBN 0333492927.

*Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Translated by M. B. DeBevoise. Harvard UP, 2004. 067401345X.

*Clingman, Stephen. *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*. Allen & Unwin, 1986. 0048000825.

Coetzee, J. M. *Disgrace*. Penguin, 1999. 0143115286.

*———. *Elizabeth Costello*. Penguin, 2003. 0142004812.

———. *Foe*. Penguin, 1986. 014009623X.

———. "He and His Man." nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. ([link](#))

Engdahl, Horace. "Presentation Speech." 2001. nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. ([link](#))

*English, James. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Harvard UP, 2005. 0674018842.

- Gordimer, Nadine. *July's People*. Penguin, 1981. 9780140061406.
- . "Writing and Being." nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. ([link](#))
- Lessing, Doris. *The Fifth Child*. Vintage, 1988. 0679721827.
- . "On Not Winning the Nobel Prize." nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. ([link](#))
- *McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Harvard UP, 2009. 9760674033191.
- Morris, Mervyn. "Sir Vidia and the Prize." *World Literature Today* 76, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 11–14. ([link](#))
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage, 1987. 9781400033416.
- . "Nobel Lecture." nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. 1993. ([link](#))
- Naipaul, V. S. *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Vintage, 1961. 0375707166.
- Naipaul, "Two Worlds." nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. ([link](#))
- *Portelli, Alessandro. "Beloved (Toni Morrison, United States, 1987)." Translated by Michael F. Moore. In *The Novel*, edited by Franco Moretti, 1:886–92. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 9780691049472.
- *Sprague, Claire. "Doris Lessing: 'In the World, But Not of It.'" Introduction to *In Pursuit of Doris Lessing: Nine Nations Reading*, edited by Claire Sprague. Macmillan, 1990. ISBN 0333492927.
- Thieme, John. "Naipaul's Nobel." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 37, no. 1 (2002): 1–6. ([link](#))
- Wästberg, Per. "Presentation Speech." 2003. ([link](#))
- . "Presentation Speech." 2007. ([link](#))

Optional

- Attridge, Derek, and Peter D. McDonald, eds. Special issue on *Disgrace*. *Interventions* 4, no. 3 (December 2002). ([link](#))
- Espmark, Kjell. "The Nobel Prize in Literature." nobelprize.org. Swedish Academy. ([link](#))
- Gordimer, Nadine. "The Gap Between the Writer and the Reader." *The New York Review of Books* 36, no. 14 (September 28, 1989). ([link](#))
- Peterson, Nancy J. "Introduction: Canonizing Toni Morrison." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 39, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1993): 461–79. ([link](#))

(Note on assigned Nobel Prize documents)

As part of our reflection on the idea and the institution of prizewinning literature, we will be reading and reacting to the official Nobel presentation speeches and to authors' own Nobel lectures. Where audio or video is available on the web, you are welcome to listen or watch rather than read. Occasional short, ungraded response assignments, announced in class the previous week, will help you to think critically about these materials.

Schedule

I. Literary Dynamite?

March 29. Introduction. What is prizewinning fiction? What is Anglophone fiction? What does the Nobel Prize mean? What does the Nobel Prize *do*?

March 31. Theory and background. Prize culture.

Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, chap. 4 (excerpt).

English, *The Economy of Prestige*, chap. 3 and 13.

Optional: Espmark, "The Nobel Prize in Literature."

Nobel journalism assignment due.

II. Nadine Gordimer (South Africa), 1991

April 5. Gordimer, *July's People*.

April 7. Gordimer, *July's People*.

Allén, "Presentation Speech" (1991). ([link](#))

Gordimer, "Writing and Being." ([link](#))

Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer*, introduction and chap. 6 (excerpt).

Optional: Gordimer, "The Gap Between the Writer and the Reader." ([link](#))

III. Toni Morrison (United States), 1993

April 12. Morrison, *Beloved*. Concentrate on the first half of the novel, through p. 156.

April 14. Morrison, *Beloved*. Concentrate on all of part I (up through p. 195).

Portelli, "*Beloved* (Toni Morrison, United States, 1987)."

Optional: Peterson, "Canonizing Toni Morrison." ([link](#))

(April 16. Add/drop deadline.)

April 19. Morrison, *Beloved*.

Allén, "Presentation Speech" (1993). ([link](#))

Morrison, "Nobel Lecture." ([link](#))

April 21. Morrison, *Beloved*.

McGurl, *The Program Era*, chap. 6 (excerpt).

IV. Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (Trinidad; United Kingdom), 2001

April 26. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

April 28. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

May 3. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

Short paper due: 5–7 pp. on a single novel.

May 5. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*.
 Engdahl, "Presentation Speech" (2001). ([link](#))
 Naipaul, "Two Worlds." ([link](#))
 Thieme, "Naipaul's Nobel." ([link](#))
 Morris, "Sir Vidia and the Prize." ([link](#))

V. John M. Coetzee (South Africa), 2003

May 10. Coetzee, *Foe*.
 May 12. Coetzee, *Foe*.
 Attridge, J. M. *Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, chap. 3 [packet].
 May 17. Coetzee, *Disgrace*.
 Wästberg, "Presentation Speech" (2003). ([link](#))
 Coetzee, "He and His Man." ([link](#))
 May 19. Coetzee, *Disgrace*.
 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, Lesson 2.
 Attwell, "Race in *Disgrace*." ([link](#))
Optional: Any other article in the special issue of *Interventions* on *Disgrace*. ([link](#))
Research warmup assignment due.
 (May 21. Course withdrawal deadline.)

VI. Doris Lessing (Persia; Rhodesia; United Kingdom), 2007

(May 24. No class.)

May 26. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (wrap-up discussion).
 Lessing, *The Fifth Child* (read the whole novel).
 (May 28. Dead Week begins.)
 (May 31. Memorial day; no class.)
 June 1, Tuesday, 2 p.m.–4 p.m. in 420-371.
 Lessing, *The Fifth Child*.
 Sprague, "Doris Lessing: 'In the World, But Not of It.'"
 Bertelsen, "The Quest and the Quotidian: Doris Lessing in South Africa."
 June 2. General reflections: what unifies these prizewinners? What divides them?
 Lessing, "On Not Winning the Nobel Prize." ([link](#))
 Wästberg, "Presentation Speech" (2007). ([link](#))
 (June 3.)
Research paper, 10–12 pp., due at 11:59 p.m.
 (June 10. Senior grades due.)
 (June 15. All grades due.)