

SCAND 462/WO 462:

**Isak Dinesen and Karen Blixen:**

***Out of Africa and Colonialist Literature and Film***

Winter 2006

M/W 2:30 – 4:20 pm

Marianne Stecher-Hansen, Associate Professor (marianne@u.washington.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30 – 4:20 (305U Raitt Hall)

**Course Focus:**

How are Western representations of Africa constructed? How are colonial and postcolonial Africa represented in literature and film? Where are the borders between conventional 'imperialist' literary representations, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and later texts, such as those by Danish writer Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), *Out of Africa* (1938) and *Shadows on the Grass* (1962)? A central focus of the course will be representations of race and gender and reflections on colonialism in *Out of Africa* and in related literary tales, essays, letters, and paintings by Karen Blixen. This course also includes essays by Edward Said and selected critics, in addition to films by Sydney Pollack and Leni Riefenstahl.

Students will be encouraged to develop their own observations on the texts in short, non-graded writing assignments or "response letters."

**Student Learning Objectives:**

1. To gain a knowledge of the "African oeuvre" of Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen) in biographical, cultural, historical, literary and political contexts.
2. To develop a vocabulary for the study of literary representations of race and gender.
3. To exercise tools for literary analysis and to improve interpretative skills for discussing and writing about literary and cinematic works.
4. To develop the skills of inquiry-driven research and scholarship

**QUESTIONS: Areas of investigation and potential directions for research:**

- How are literary representations of Africa constructed in the work of Dinesen and, comparatively, in that of other Western writers?
- How are colonized peoples represented in *Out of Africa*, and in other relevant fictional works and films by twentieth-century Western writers and directors?
- Are there "borders" between conventional "imperialist" representations such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and "progressive" colonialist texts such as *Out of Africa*?
- How do theoretical perspectives inform or illuminate the study of colonialist literature and film dealing with Africa?
- How is gender represented in the literary work of Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen) and how does this relate to the representation of race?

- Using Karen Blixen as a case study, what is the relationship between biography and a constructed artistic persona?

**Required Texts:**

1. Course Reader (at AVE Copy) \*
2. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*
3. Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*
4. Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), *Seven Gothic Tales* (selections)

**Recommended** (Not required):

5. Isak Dinesen, *Letters from Africa, 1914-1931*
6. Isak Dinesen, *Daguerreotypes and Other Essays*.

**Evaluation criteria:**

Grades will be based on course participation and the completion of integrated writing assignments. The principle assignment is the development of an interpretative essay, which relates in an original way to the overriding concerns of the course.

Note that Ad Hoc W (Writing) credit is available for this course. Students will engage in graded and non-graded writing assignments throughout the quarter. The final course grade will be based on the following criteria:

**Grading Criteria:**

- 10% Participation in class workshops, groups discussions, and class conference.
- 10% Midterm essay, in-class
- 10% Final essay, in-class

**Course Portfolio:**

- 50% Term paper, 8 - 12 pages  
(Sequenced assignment: proposal, peer-review, revision)
- 20% four non-graded response "letters" and 2-page self-assessment

**Weekly schedule and Reading Assignments:**

\*Indicates selection in course reader

**Week 1:**

Wed. Jan. 4 Introduction: Blank Spaces and Imagined  
Continents  
Marketplace'  
Lecture on 'European Storyteller in the American  
READ: Isak Dinesen, "The Blank Page" \*

**Week 2:**

Mon. Jan. 9 History, Geography, and the Text  
READ: Dane Kennedy, excerpt of *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya*\*

READ: Isak Dinesen, "Barua A Soldani" from  
*Shadows on the Grass*  
Documentary Film clip of Blixen's 1961 recitation

Wed. Jan. 11                      Crisis in Representation and Colonialist  
Literature  
Pp. 293 - 316.\*  
READ: Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized."  
READ: Dinesen, *Out of Africa: Kamante and Lulu*  
and *A Shooting Accident on the Farm* (Parts 1 and  
2), pp. 3 - 149.  
Letter #1 due

**Week 3:**

Mon. Jan. 16                      Holiday: Martin Luther King Day

Wed. Jan. 18                      Literary Metaphors and the Politics of  
Representation  
READ: *Out of Africa: Visitors to the Farm* (Part  
3) and *From an Immigrant's Notebook* (Part 4), pp.  
153 - 304,  
especially, "Kitosch's Story" and "The Iguana"  
READ: Ngugu wa Thiong'o, excerpt from *Detained: A*  
*Writer's Prison Diary*, pp. 29 - 43.

**Week 4:**

Mon. Jan.23                      Manichean Aesthetics, Hollywood, and Other  
Critical Views  
READ: Dinesen, *Out of Africa*, Part 5: *Farewell to*  
*The Farm*, pp. 307 - 372.  
READ: Abdul JanMohamed, "Isak Dinesen: The  
Generation of Mythic Consciousness," pp. 49 -  
77.\*

Wed. Jan. 25                      View clips of Sydney Pollack, *Out of Africa*  
(1985) [Part I]  
READ: Mette Hjort, "International Heritage:  
Toward an Ethics of the Bio-Pic," pp. 191 -  
233.\*  
Letter #2 due

**Week 5:**

Mon. Jan. 30                      View clips of Sydney Pollack, *Out of Africa*  
[Part II]  
READ: Simon Lewis, "Culture, Cultivation and  
Colonialism in *Out of Africa* and Beyond," pp.  
111-128.\*  
Proposal for Term Paper Due

Wed. Feb. 1                                   **Midterm Essay in-class**  
Introduction to Conrad, "Introduction," pp. ix  
- xxxviii.

**Week 6:**

Mon. Feb. 6                                   'Imperialist' Fiction or Critique of  
Colonialism?  
85  
READ: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 15 -  
Some history of the Belgian Congo

Wed. Feb. 8                                   READ: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, pp.  
85 - 123, plus notes.  
READ: Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism  
in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.' (TBA)  
(Paper proposals returned)

**Week 7:**

Mon. Feb. 13                                   Clips from *Heart of Darkness* (1993),  
directed by Nicolas Roeg  
Said, "Conrad and Nietzsche," pp. 70 - 82.\*  
Excerpt from *The Gay Science* (in-class)

Wed. Feb. 15                                   Other Critical Views on Conrad  
More clips from *Heart of Darkness* (1993)  
Other articles on Conrad (TBA)  
Letter #3 due

**Week 8:**

Mon. Feb. 20                                   Holiday: Presidents Day

Wed. Feb. 22                                   Peer-editing Workshop: Term paper [50 min.]  
(Bring 2 copies of completed first draft)  
Documentary Film: *Karen Blixen: Storyteller*  
(1985)

**Week 9:**

Mon. Feb. 27                                   Gothic Tales, African Fantasies, and Gender  
Representation  
READ: Dinesen "The Dreamers" from *Seven Gothic  
Tales*

Wed. March 1                                   READ: Dinesen, "The Monkey" from *Seven Gothic  
Tales*  
READ: Dinesen, "Oration at Bonfire," in  
*Daguerreotypes*, pp. 64 - 87.\*  
Letter #4 due

**Week 10:**

Mon. March 6 Contemporary Colonialism: Nostalgic Narratives and Powerful Bodies  
VIEW: Leni Riefenstahl, *A Dream of Africa* (2003)  
READ: Dinesen, "Farah," "The Great Gesture" and "Echoes from the Hills" in *Shadows on the Grass* (1961)

Wed. March 8 First Annual 2006 UW Conference:  
"Out of Africa and Other Reflections on Colonialist Literature and Film"  
(Oral Paper Presentations with Peer-Evaluation)

Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup> 2:30 - 4:20 pm  
Final Essay and Evaluations  
Course Portfolio Due (including Research Paper)

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READER CONTENTS (in assigned order):

1. Isak Dinesen [Karen Blixen], "The Blank Page" in *Last Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), pp. 99 - 105.
2. Dane Kennedy, excerpt from *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890 - 1930* (Durham, Duke U Press, 1987), pp. 148 - 201.
3. Edward W. Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors" in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard U Press), pp. 293 - 316.
4. Ngugu wa Thiong'o [James Ngugi], *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 29 - 43.
5. Abdul R. JanMohamed, "Isak Dinesen: The Generation of Mythic Consciousness," in *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts Press, 1983), pp. 49 - 77.
6. Mette Hjort, "International Heritage: Toward an Ethics of the Bio-Pic," in *Small Nation, Global Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 191 - 233.
7. Simon Lewis, "Culture, Cultivation and Colonialism in *Out of Africa* and Beyond," in *White Women Writers and Their African Invention* (Gainesville: U of Press of Florida, 2003), pp. 111-128.
8. Edward Said, "Conrad and Nietzsche," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard U Press), pp. 70 - 81.
9. Isak Dinesen, "Oration at Bonfire," in *Daguerreotypes and Other Essays* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 64 - 87.\*

**Appendix:**

Judith Thurman, "Tania" (Book Two) in *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 109 - 247.

