

Writing Africa: Comparative African and European Palavers and Perspectives
 Summer Seminar for High School Teachers
 June 28 - July 30, 2004 (5 weeks)
 Office for Institutional Diversity
 WA 319
 Central Michigan University
 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the “palaver.” Thank you for inquiring about the 2004 NEH Summer Seminar for Secondary School Teachers on “Writing Africa: Comparative African and European Palavers and Perspectives.” This letter will explain the nature of the seminar, my plans for it, as well as the various activities I hope you will experience during your five-week stay here at Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant.

Scope and methodology

Africa as a continent is familiar to us. Ironically, what some of us know is informed by the general negative representation and writing of Africa in many of the texts we read or the films we watch. The discussion of the writing and imagining of Africa in the western consciousness and in literature as well as in the African mind will continue to be of thematic interest in our time and in the future, primarily, because of the historical relationship between Africa and the West. We are told that even before the voyages of discovery Africa was a presence in western literature. We only need to think of the Africa of the Greeks or the Romans. 1492 and its subsequent transformation of world history, global cultures, and the “New World” redefined Africa’s status from “terra incognita” to foregrounded continent, giving the continent an important, albeit sad, status in the shaping of world history and cultures.

Clearly, Africa has obsessed western imagination, as evidenced by such books as Sir H. Rider Haggard’s Allan Quartermain, She, and King Solomon’s Mines, Edgar Wallace’s Sanders of the River, Graham Greene’s The Heart of the Matter and A Burnt-Out Case, and Karen Blixen’s Out of Africa and Shadows in the Grass to mention only a few. Although some of these books may have been based on the actual experiences of the writers in Africa and became popular with western audiences (for example, Sir H. Rider Haggard’s She, Allan Quartermain, and King Solomon’s Mines), they still exemplify what Christopher Miller has referred to as a “colonialist inscription” of Africa. In other words, the Africa presented is often a western construct. Contemporary Hollywood films such as Ebola, Congo, The Ghost and the Darkness, and The Gods Must Be Crazy have not done much to challenge the representation of Africa, either.

We will read texts by three African authors: Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka (Nigerians) as well as Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghanaian) against those of Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad (Europeans). It will be our task in this seminar to uncover, critique, and respond to the various possible readings of the selected works, bearing in mind the ways in which story, narrative strategies, point of view, characterization, history, gender, and historical context affect each reading. Our goal in this seminar is not to engage in a

history lesson or a cataloging of stereotype session of sorts, but to explore new approaches to reading, interpreting, and discussing the seminar texts.

We are going to talk, discuss, debate, joust with words, challenge one another into critically rethinking our perspectives on some of these works, previous discussions on them, as well as the way we have taught them in the past. I am interested in looking at ways in which these books and authors query, talk or respond to one another.

We will watch several films during this seminar to expand the levels of interpretive and analytical paradigms involved in reading Africa. We will look at these films as alternative narratives that tell similar or divergent stories about Africa. We will watch and critique films by Africans, Europeans, and Hollywood, discussing them as alternative narratives and comparing them with the seminar texts. Our goal is to engage in multiple conversations with these texts (print narrative and films).

In general, the seminar will emphasize intensive, comparative, critical readings and energetic discussions of the works across cultural, gendered, generational, and geographical boundaries. Participants' individual and collective contributions to critical discussions of the primary texts and secondary readings are important.

Participants

This seminar is open to Middle and High School teachers of the Humanities, particularly of English as well as teachers of Social Studies, who are interested in teaching African literature or infusing Africa into their courses. Indeed, one of the most effective means of entering into other cultures is through literature from and about those cultures. It is my belief that African literature can enhance the teaching and interpretation of African history, politics, and cultures by further providing the teachers and students with alternative paradigms and perspectives on the story of Africa.

Current events in our society constantly highlight the difficulty that many of our schools are facing, especially in the inner cities and school districts with limited resources. We cannot ignore the efforts of our colleagues to provide quality education with limited resources. I use this opportunity to extend a special invitation to Middle and High School teachers in the inner cities or districts with limited resources, who are also interested in introducing African literature into their curriculum.

I am excited by this possibility of a cross-disciplinary and cultural fertilization of the palaver, because it is comparative, necessary, and important, if we are to move beyond our traditional, often single-discipline-centered way of reading literature. What a difference it would make if our students read texts in relation to the history, culture, and politics of particular places and times which created them, while still exploring the relevance of those texts in our societies today, or the commonalities between the African societies and the United States. What a world we would open up to our students. Can it be done? I would say "yes," but the process begins with us. So, I am inviting all of you to join me in this important process.

Seminar Director

I am a Professor of English at Central Michigan University and currently the Associate Vice President for Diversity and International Education. The topic of this seminar grows out of my own research and teaching interests, particularly, the exploration of ways in which gender, history, and culture intersect in the construction of postcolonial identities, that is, the identities of those people and cultures which have experienced colonization, and subsequently, often, examine themselves in relation to that history. I am interested in how these societies attempt to represent themselves or create new identities for themselves as new nations, ancient cultures “married” to new, i.e., western cultures.

Guest Lecturers

Dr. Aliko Songolo, Professor of French & African Literatures and Director of the African Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison will spend some days with us as our guest faculty on the Congo/Zaire. He will discuss the place of the Congo/Zaire in the representation of Africa and in European consciousness and literature. **Dr. Chudi Uwazurike**, Professor of Political Science, International Relations and Sociology at City College, New York will spend a few days with us as a guest faculty and will provide needed historical background on the colonial enterprise in Africa. Dr. Uwazurike is a published novelist, playwright, and founder of [African Profiles International Magazine](#).

I have also planned two Internet sessions as part of the seminar. The sessions will focus on using the Internet for locating critical information and resources on literature, especially, African literature and literature about Africa. **Dr. Aparna Zambare**, the Humanities Bibliographer at the Central Michigan University Park Library will lead these Internet sessions, which will address the use of Internet resources for teaching African and Postcolonial Studies.

Daily seminar schedule 8:30-12:30

The seminar will meet formally three mornings a week, three and a half to four hours (3 ½ - 4) per session, during which we will analyze and discuss the primary and assigned secondary readings. All film screenings will be scheduled in the evenings.

Seminar Texts:

Primary Texts:

Achebe, Chinua. [Things Fall Apart](#) and [Arrow of God](#)

Aidoo, Ama Ata. [No Sweetness Here](#)

Cary, Joyce. [Mister Johnson](#)

Conrad, Joseph. [Heart of Darkness](#)

Soyinka, Wole. [Ake](#) and [Death and the King's Horseman](#)

Secondary Texts: information will be provided in the seminar's schedule.

Scheduled activities

Films:

Lectures and films will be used to supplement our seminar discussions. We will watch the film adaptations of Conrad's [Heart of Darkness](#) and Cary's [Mister Johnson](#) as well as several African films and incorporate their discussions into the seminar. Participants will find CMU's diversity/multicultural film collection a useful resource.

Field Trips:

We will take a field trip to the Detroit Institute of Art and the African American Museum of History, as well as to the Jim Crow Museum. Additional field trips (non-academic) to geographical sites around Michigan will be scheduled in collaboration with the group.

ID Cards:

Participants will be given CMU **Visiting Scholar** status. Each participant will be given a Central Michigan University temporary identity card (unless otherwise requested). Participants will be added to the already existing Internet listserv for “Writing Africa” to encourage discussions.

Responsibility of seminar participants

Each participant is required to keep journals or portfolios in which s/he responds to the daily/weekly readings and seminar discussions. In addition to the journals, each participant is required to produce a final project, 8-10 pages, using the model of a palaver. The final project will be turned in (for binding) no later than one week before the end of the seminar. The project may take the form of a research paper/essay, course syllabus, creative response to the works, or an implementable unit. Each participant will receive a bound copy of the collective projects at the end of the seminar.

CEU & CMU credits

CMU credits can be earned for the seminar. Participants are responsible for all tuition associated with CMU credits. Michigan teachers may be able to receive **SB-CEU** for the seminar (request is being processed). However, non-Michigan teachers will be responsible for verifying if they can receive CEU as well as for preparing the necessary application. Arrangements must be made with the seminar director for either course credit or CEU.

Institutional Context

Central Michigan University (CMU) is a mid-sized university located in Mount Pleasant, a community of 54,624 (including the student population at CMU) situated in the center of Michigan's lower-peninsula. CMU has a population of about 19,000 on-campus and about 9,000 off-campus students. CMU's 854-acre main campus features 59 major facilities, including the **Park Library** that recently underwent a fifty million dollar (\$50m.) renovation that transformed it into an “electronically supported 21st century information center.” It supports about 1.3 million print volumes, manuscript collections, microfilm reels, maps, and visual items, and supports research on various subjects. In addition, its extensive computer stations, adjoining café & sandwich shop, and extended study hour section (also with extensive computer stations) make the library the most popular place on campus. Materials that are not available in the library can be requested through inter-library loan. Seminar participants will have visiting scholar privileges and full access to the resources of the library and computer centers. The library also has extended study hours. The University Center Bookstore and other bookstores near campus have large selections of books and will order books for clients upon request. Visit the Park Library at <http://www.cmich.edu/libraries.htm>

Mount Pleasant is located within a two-to three-hour drive of every major population center in the state. Major highways link Mount Pleasant and afford easy access to and from its central location. Mount

Pleasant lives up to its name in many ways. The Isabella County Parks system has some of the most scenic landscapes found in mid-Michigan. Various activities take place in the summer in or near Mt Pleasant. In the past some of these activities have ranged from scheduled concerts by famous musicians and entertainers at the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe's Soaring Eagle Casino and Resorts, theater productions at the University, music performances, local antique shows, and festivals. The Dow Gardens in Midland and the Midland Center for the Arts are approximately thirty minutes east of Mt. Pleasant.

Housing

Participants will live on-campus in one of the new University Residence Halls, within walking distance of the **Park Library**, which houses our seminar room and numerous computer stations.

The **cost for housing** is estimated at between \$70- \$100/week. The Park Library, the University Center, and bookstore are within a five- to seven-minute walk from the New Towers Residence Hall. The residence halls are also within walking distance of the Student Activity Center (SAC), several restaurants, and shopping areas. There are also food stores in the residence halls. Participants will live in four-room air-conditioned and internet-ready suites. Each suite has a shared living room, two baths, and a telephone (local calls are free) as well as supplies cabinet. Each room is furnished with a bed, mattress, reading desk, dresser, and phone jack. Linen service is available. The halls are equipped with a laundry facility on each floor, two student lounges, and cafeteria, where participants can purchase hot meals. A kitchenette is available on each floor for those who wish to cook for themselves. The halls have a computer lab and rooms are connected to CMU's mainframe computer. Thus, participants will have access to the Internet, be able to conduct library searches using CMU's computerized Centra and WEB Home page, and continue the discussions of topics explored during the seminar. All halls have a general TV area and seminar rooms. Visit the New Towers Residence Halls at <http://www.reslife.cmich.edu/reslife/halls/newtowers.htm>

Meals:

Meals can be purchased at \$66- \$75 for 13 meals weekly (does not include weekends). We will meet once a week for group dinner.

Parking

For those who might drive into Mt. Pleasant, temporary parking is available at the cost of \$7.00/wk.

Fitness Facilities

We have secured an extremely reduced rate for participants at the University Student Activity Center (SAC). The cost will be a total of \$25 for five weeks. Valid IDs are required with paid stickers. Visit the SAC at <http://www.cmich.edu/tour/athletic-facilities/pages/sac.htm>

Stipend

NEH provides each participant \$3250.00 as stipend to defray the cost of meals, books and reading materials, travel, accommodation, and other expenses. Participants will receive one-third of the amount, approximately \$1000.00 upon arrival. The remaining amount will be issued at the end of the

third week of the program. Check out the NEH website for more details.

<http://www.neh.gov/projects/si-school.html>

Seminar Assistant

Beginning January 14, 2004, the seminar assistant is Constansia Maundu. Her e-mail address is maund1c@cmich.edu (The “1” in the address is numeral “1” not an ell). Otherwise, send email messages to: maureen.eke@cmich.edu.

Reminder of the application procedure and deadline

Perhaps the most important part of the application is the application essay that must be submitted as part of the completed application. This essay should include any personal and academic information that is relevant; reasons for applying to the particular project; your interest, both intellectual and personal, in the topic; qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish by participation; and the relation of the study to your teaching.

Application information: If you have not downloaded your information now, please [click here](#) for application information. **Your completed application should be postmarked no later than March 1, 2004** and should be addressed to:

Writing Africa–04
NEH Summer Seminar for High School Teachers
Office for Institutional Diversity
WA 319
Central Michigan University
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

Again, thank you for your interest. I hope this letter addresses the questions that you may have at the moment. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Maureen N. Eke, Ph.D.
Professor of English &
Assoc. Vice President for Diversity and International Education

CMU, an AA/EO institution, strongly and actively strives to increase diversity within its community. See <http://www.cmich.edu/aaeo/>.