

The New Curriculum

Editor's note: This column will host a series of articles by Chowan College faculty members who will introduce courses of the new curriculum leading to bachelors degrees. D. H. Nicholson's perspective on his modern world literature course is the first of this series.

English 206

Survey of Modern World Literature

"Travelers with closed minds can tell us little except about themselves."

Chinua Achebe
Nigerian Novelist

Mr. Achebe's statement can serve as a springboard into a discussion of modern world literature where the student is introduced to writers not found within the modern "Western" canon. We can remember the wonderful experiences we have had when introduced to American or European writers. We can have similar experiences when we read works of writers from major regions of the non-Western world—sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle-East, South Asia, East Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. To be exposed to such writers and their works is to be introduced to an intellectual geography of immense proportions.

To read of the rage of Middle Eastern female writers who appear to be "ensconced" with the other "daughters of Eve" in a patriarchy, where they are also defined and ruled by the patriarch's interpretation of religion, is to expose ourselves to a part of the world radically different from what most of us might take for granted. To study parts of the world where religious and political systems do not valorize the individual, where self-fulfillment would be considered tantamount to abandoning the demands of family, village, or caste is to be startled into regions where individualism as opposed to community can bring exposure and personal danger. We are introduced to such when we read Nawal Al Sa Dawi's "Growing Up Female in Egypt" from her larger *Memoirs of a Female Physician* and other works which speak out on behalf of Arab women, works which are not generally available in the Arab world and works for which then-President Anwar el-Sadat had her imprisoned in 1981.

We readily see the superfluosity of female life in an African society when we read Kenya writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo's "Minutes of Glory" from his larger work *Secret Lives and Other Stories*, where Wanjiru will have minutes of glory from her destitute life as a bargirl and prostitute only when she can feel Western and non-African by using her Christian name and stealing money to buy temporary physical beauty. Naguib Mahfouz, Egyptian-born and the only Arab writer ever to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (1988), and his "Zaabalawi" describe the mystical search which becomes a defining moment in the narrator's life as he tries to live a life devoted to Islam. Pramodya Ananta Toer's "The Birth" reminds the reader of the terrible cost of Dutch colonial rule on Indonesia. Japanese writers like Higuchi Ichiyo and Kawabata Yasunari (this latter writer is Japan's first Nobel Laureate in Literature-1968) force us to see people so different from our Eurocentric or Western perspective that we are "surprised" to discern our former enemies in World War II as people who are beautiful and good, as people who are full of hope and faith in the midst of the calamities that befall them. Rabindranath Tagore (1913 Nobel Prize in Literature) and Mahatma Gandhi take us on literary tours

which both conflict and attempt to answer the need for India's independence from British rule.

Shmuel Yosef Agnon, in 1966 the first Hebrew writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, shows us in his "The Tale of the Scribe" a fundamental pattern which is also found in Jewish history: the physical and spiritual cost of stasis and tradition. Rigoberta Menchu is a human rights activist in Guatemala who was awarded the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize; she describes her life under one of the most repressive regimes in all of Latin America in her book *I... Rigoberta Menchu. An Indian Woman in Guatemala* from which we get her short excerpt: "The Bible and Self-Defence: The Examples of Judith, Moses, and David," where she discusses, to our discomfort, ways in which religion can be used as a weapon by those who want to exploit and oppress the Indian.

We could go on and on about this survey of modern literature. However, a course such as this invites us to read and explore writers and their works from parts of the world vastly different from our own. The course, I believe, helps us to see this world as both emergent and increasingly interdependent. We are too interconnected to deny others chances to tell us their stories of hope and faith. It is not enough for us to tell only of ourselves.

Students participate in state "Clean Sweep" program

During the 1995-96 academic year, the Chowan Science Club adopted a project to assist in the effort to improve the campus environment and clean the area around Lake Vann during the weekend of Sept. 22-23. The project was held in conjunction with North Carolina's annual "Clean Sweep Program."

Members of the club worked during the weekend and collected nine large trash bags of liter and refuse. Because a large portion of the trash consisted of discarded aluminum drink cans, the club agreed to institute a recycling project and placed aluminum recycling containers at various locations around the campus.

During the academic year, almost 300 pounds of beverage cans were collected in the containers and sold to aluminum processors for recycling.

The club officers presented a check to the department of science to be used toward the purchase of a piece of laboratory equipment needed for the new environmental biology program.

The club expressed appreciation to the student body for their help in the project and encouraged all students to join the effort for a more attractive campus and healthier environment.

Timberlands

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its way over me. The thrill of the hunt had ended, and the result seemed anticlimactic. As much as I wanted to express exhilaration and embrace Dick with joyful hugs, the mood was so solemn that I found it an effort to smile. With gratitude and a sense of relief, we broke from the staid surroundings of the office and walked into the warm sunshine with Maria, headed for David's traditional "sale luncheon" to celebrate a sense of accomplishment.

Driving back to Murfreesboro, Dick and I both felt somehow compelled to detour past the old Thomas estate. The autumn drive took us past majestic hardwood timbers surrounding the old homestead and outbuildings. Proud pines towered over the car as we carefully edged our way down the sandy roadway David had just positioned into the property. I know that trees have a life expectancy... I know that they can become beetle-infested if left too long in the forest... and I know that the land will be replanted. Still, as I inhaled the soft pungency of sweet pine, I couldn't help but feel sadness at the prospect of the forest starting over with the knowledge that it would not complete its noble growth cycle within my lifetime.

The lumber business is in David Jennette's blood. His father taught him well, and four years at North Carolina State earned him a degree in Forestry. He moved to Windsor, North Carolina at an early age and disclosed that he always knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life. In partnership with his late father, the two founded "Timberlands Unlimited, Inc." in 1986. When I asked David a few simple questions about forestry, he jumped from his chair and dug out a copy of Tree Facts, a booklet he compiled for elementary school students to enhance forest study during his guided field trips. His love for the land is apparent.

An ordinary occurrence for many residents of North Carolina, the recent sale of selected lumber from the estate of Ruth M. Thomas provided an exceptional glimpse into an authentic southern tradition for Dick and me, as two Midwestern transplants. In addition to the harvest area, the generous estate has also given the college a variety of untouched ecosystems for biological research, enhancing the new major in biology.

"The autumn drive took us past majestic hardwood timbers surrounding the old homestead and outbuildings."



Garth Faile, science department chair, second from right, accepts a check from Matt Suggs, treasurer of the Chowan Science Club. The gift was made possible through the sale of aluminum cans collected by the club in a campus clean-up campaign. Others pictured are, left to right, Gilbert Tripp, associate professor of science and club adviser, Carla Culbertson, club president, Suggs; Faile; and Jeremy Funk, club vice president.