

Jonathan Bishop Highfield, Professor, Postcolonial Literatures

Department of Literary Arts and Studies
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Education

Ph.D. English, University of Iowa (1995)
M.A. English, University of Iowa (1995)
B.A. English, Transylvania University (1988)

Areas of specialization

Postcolonial literatures
Postcolonial ecocriticism
Colonialism and ecology
Food studies

Academic Experience

Professor, Postcolonial Literatures, Department of Literary Arts and Studies, Rhode Island School of Design, 2009-present
Research Member of CAST, Critical African Studies, housed at the University of Pretoria, 2020-present
Graduate Program Director, Nature, Culture, Sustainability Studies, 2018-2021
Concentration coordinator, Literary Arts and Studies, Rhode Island School of Design, 2018, 2013-2014, 2005-2007, 2000-2001
Department Head, English, Rhode Island School of Design, 2007-2010
Associate Professor, Postcolonial Literatures, Department of English, Rhode Island School of Design, 2003-2008
Fulbright scholar, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, 2001-2002
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Rhode Island School of Design, 1995-2002

Selected Courses Taught

African Literatures
African Poetry
Appalachian Literature and Culture
Australian Poetry and Prose
Caribbean Literature
The Cookbook: Rhetoric of Recipes
The Detective Novel
Food Migrations
Foodways and Sustainable Food Systems (NCSS)
Irish Literature
Literature of the Indian Ocean World
Literatures of the Indian Subcontinent
Postcolonial Film
Postcolonial Literatures 1: Africa and the Americas and 2
Postcolonial Literatures 2: Ireland, India and the Pacific
Seminar: "Eating the Way Back Home": Food, Literature, and Identity
Seminar: Joyce, Synge, and Yeats
Seminar: Suffera No More: Caribbean Literature and Politics

Seminar: Three African Writers

Seminar: “To Plough Van Diemen’s Land”: Convicts in Australian Literature

Travel Courses Taught

Seminar: Dialogue Across the Diaspora: Haiti, South Africa, Art, and Narratives of Resistance, in association with the Centre for Curating the Archive, University of Cape Town, and the Slave Lodge Museum, Fall 2013

Narrative Flows: Waters of Faith, Identity, and Sustenance in Bengal, co-taught with Lili Hermann, Landscape Architecture, and Nick de Pace, Architecture, Spring 2009

Ulysses in Ireland, WS 2002, WS 2004

Publications – Books

Food and Foodways in African Narratives: Community, Culture, and Heritage. New York: Routledge, 2017

Imagined Topographies: From Colonial Resource to Postcolonial Homeland. Bern: Peter Lang, 2012

Publications – Edited Collections

The State of the Art(s): African Studies and American Studies in Comparative Perspective. Co-edited with Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang and Dora Edu-Buandoh. Accra: Afram Publications, 2006

Publications – Chapters in Books

“Genocide and Food in Postcolonial Narratives” in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Food Studies*. Darra Goldstein, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024

“More Than a Corner Store: Food, Structural Violence, and the Black Community” in *Generation C*. Toban Shadlyn, Julie Woods, Sahib Singh, Tim Maly, and Justin Cook, eds. RISD Center for Complexity, 2021

“Postcolonial Foodways in Contemporary African Literature” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*. J. Michelle Coghlan, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020

“Food and Foodways in African Narratives” in *Décentrement et travail de la culture*. Sylvie Camet, editor. Paris: Academia, 2017

“Here is some baobab leaf!”: Sunjata, foodways and biopiracy” in *The Natures of Africa: Ecocriticism and Animal Studies in Contemporary Cultural Forms*. Fiona Moola, editor. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016

“Obscured by history: Language, culture, and conflict in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*” in *Critical Insights: Cultural Encounters*. Nicholas Birns, editor. Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2012

“No Longer Praying on Borrowed Wine: Agroforestry and Food Sovereignty in Ben Okri’s *Famished Road* Cycle” in *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*. Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers, editors. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011

“Driving the Devil into the Ground: Settler Myth in André Brink’s *Devil’s Valley*” in *Trauma, Resistance, Reconstruction in Post-1994 South African Writing*. Rajendra Chetty and Jaspal K. Singh, editors. Bern: Peter Lang, 2010

“Relations with Food?: Agriculture, Colonialism, and Foodways in the Writing of Bessie Head” in *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*. Alex Hunt and Bonnie Roos, editors. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010

“A Breath Out of the Heart of the Country”: The Landscapes of David Malouf” in *Fact and Fiction: Readings in Australian Literature*. Amit Sarwal and Reema Sarwal, editors. New Delhi: AuthorsPress, 2008

“Voicing the Mountains: The Poetry of Contemporary Appalachia” in *The State of the Art(s): African Studies and American Studies in Comparative Perspective*. Accra: Afram, 2006

Publications – Articles

“Food Migration from Africa to the US,” *African Independent*, Issue 2, March/April 2018

“Finding the Voice of the Peasant: Agriculture: Neocolonialism and Mulk Raj Anand’s Punjab Trilogy.” *Rupkatha Journal*, Vol. 1, N. 1: 2009

“‘Hell that springs from the grave of memory’: Sacrifice, Whiteness, and Extinction in Wilson Harris’s *Jonestown*.” *The Jonestown Report*, Vol. 10: November 2008

“Refusing to be fat Llamas: Resisting violence through food in *Sozaboy* and *Purple Hibiscus*.” *Kunapipi*, Vol. XXVIII, N. 2: 2006

“Suckling from the Crocodile’s Tit: Wildlife and Nation Formation in Australian Narratives.” *Antipodes*, December 2006

“Blood and Blossom: Violence and Restoration in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and Vera’s *The Stone Virgins*.” *The International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability*, Vol. 1, N. 1: Spring 2006

“The Dreaming Quipucamayoc: Myth and Landscape in Wilson Harris’ *The Dark Jester*.” *Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 1, N. 2: October 2004

“Archaeology of Reconciliation: Ciaran Carson’s *Belfast Confetti* and John Kindness’s *Belfast Frescoes*.” *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 28, N. 2/Vol. 29, N. 1: Fall 2003

“‘Relief Data Unreliable’: Mapping Amazonia.” *Passages: Interdisciplinary Journal of Global Studies*, Vol. 2, N. 2: 2000

“Faerielands and Peonies: Imaginative Reconnections and Resistances.” *Working Title: Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 1, N. 1: Fall 1994

Publications – Book Reviews

Review of *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*. By Byron Caminero-Santangelo. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2014. In *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* (Spring 2016) 23 (4): 739-739

Publications – Poems

“Hippobear: A Dream Poem.” *Kudzu Review*. Vol. 1 issue 2: Spring 2012

“Oyster Bay Requiem.” *Poui: Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing*. Vol. XII: Fall 2011

“Two Dublin Elegies” and “To the Liffey.” *Hiram Poetry Review*. Issue #70: Spring 2009

“Palette.” *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*. Vol. 5: September 2007

“Radio Amazon” and “The Good Cup of Tea.” *The New Review*, Spring 1999

Invited Talks

“Finding the Phantom Food: Representing Postcolonial Foodways” keynote address at Critical Food Studies: South Africa and Beyond, a virtual conference sponsored by The University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of Pretoria (UP) and the University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN), November 17-19, 2021

“Riding the Indian Ocean’s Waves: Displacement of People and Movement of Food Across Four Continents.” Global Africa, Migration, Literature and the Arts Intercollegiate Symposium at Rutgers University, March 28- 29, 2019

- “Die Tafel en die Duiwel: Foodways and displacement in the Cape of South Africa.” Sponsored by the African Studies Program, Sustainable Literacy Institute, and the Global Foodways Program at the College of Charleston, January 29, 2019
- “Food: The emptiness of displacement and the satiety of community” on the panel “The Social and Cultural Life of Food” at the Third International Conference on Food Security. Cape Town International Conference Center, December 3, 2017
- “All Yesterday’s Meals: Food as Archive” at the “International Symposium on Food Studies: Transnational Conversations.” The University of Pretoria, July 22-23, 2016
- “Using Food and Foodways as a Means of Understanding Culture: A South African Example.” Two lectures at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, January 29, 2016
- “A Foodie’s View of History: South Africa, Incarceration, Bunny Chow, and Smileys.” Invited talk at the Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, New Jersey, December 4, 2015
- “All Yesterday’s Meals: Food as Archive” at the symposium “Towards an Archive of Freedom: Why Now?” The Centre for Curating the Archive, University of Cape Town, October 28-29, 2015
- “Imagined Topographies: From Resource to Homeland in the Postcolonial State” and “Obscured by history: Language, culture, and conflict in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*.” Two lectures at the graduate school of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities, University of Sousse, Tunisia, February 28, 2012
- “Food and Foodways in African Literature.” Colloquium: “La notion de décentrement.” Bibliothèque de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Sousse, University of Sousse, Tunisia, February 25, 2012
- “No Longer Praying on Borrowed Wine: Agroforestry and Food Sovereignty in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*.” Colloquium on Literary Studies and Environmental Studies in Africa. University of Kansas, March 28-29, 2008

Selected Presentations

- “How do you read water? Speaking and eating the palimpsest in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *The Dragonfly Sea*,” Reading Ecologies: The Environment, Race, and the Human Condition in African Literature, at the 50th Annual Meeting of the African Literature Association, Nairobi, Kenya, June 25-28, 2025
- “Insisting on local knowledge with compassionate laughter,” Byron Santangelo and Environmental Justice in Africa, at the African Studies Association Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, USA, December 12-14, 2024
- “Die Tafel en die Duiwel: Foodways and displacement in the Cape of South Africa” at Ecotones 7: Reconfiguring, Repurposing the City: Urban Ecotones in the Global South, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa, October 28-30, 2021
- “More Than a Corner Store: Food, Structural Violence, and the Black Community” at Generation C, a hybrid conference sponsored by the Center for Complexity at RISD, June 15-18, 2020
- “Fish, Rice, and Sweets: Food, literature, and the Bengali ecotone” at Ecotones 4: Partitions and Borders, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta, Kolkata, India, December 13-15, 2018
- “Rice and Resistance” on the panel “Conquest and Catastrophe” at “Transforming Public History from Charleston to the Atlantic World,” Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, June 13-17, 2017
- “Daleks and Cybermen; or what IBM’s Watson wants to be when it grows up” on the panel “Myth and the Doctor” at the 2016 Northeast Popular Culture/American Culture Association conference, Keene State College in Keene, New Hampshire, October 21-22, 2016

- “Extinction, Global Warming, and Interspecies Gay Sex: Doctor Who, Humanity, and the Silurians” on the panel, “Myth and the Doctor” at the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association International Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland, July 22-24, 2015
- “My mother is dead. My father is dead’: Erasing violence and living on the mountain in K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*” on the panel “Fractured Lands, Erased Voices: Violence in Narratives of Africa and the Diaspora,” African Studies Association, Indianapolis, Indiana, November 20-23, 2014
- “Baobab and the healing qualities in the Sunjata epic.” Creating Myths as Narratives of Empowerment and Disempowerment, Higher Institute of the Human Sciences, Jendouba, Tunisia, March 10-12, 2014
- “The poetry of our urban future’: Disjunctions and urban temporality in *Umgidi* and the works of Pitika Ntuli.” African Literature Association, Charleston, South Carolina, March 23-25, 2013
- “Hunger and Violence in Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Basi and Company* and *Sozaboy*.” African Studies Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November 29-December 2, 2012
- “Must we eat ourselves?: food and foodways in African narratives.” International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, January 5-7, 2011
- “Pork sausage and porgy: Food, exile, and identity in M.G. Vassanji’s *No New Land*.” British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference, Savannah, GA, February 25-26, 2010
- “Translocation and foodways in the narrative of Sundiata.” GNEL/ ASNEL Conference, University of Münster, Germany, May 21-24, 2009
- “From Gotenborg to ‘A small Village Northeast of Addis Ababa’: Marcus Samuelsson’s *Soul of a New Cuisine*, Identity, and the Globalization of Food.” African Literature Association, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont, April 15-19, 2009
- “Black Tyger, Elvis Presley, and Yam Pepper Soup: Food and the Global Capitalist System in Nigeria.” British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference, Savannah, Georgia, February 2008
- “Driving the Devil into the Ground: Settler Myth in André Brink’s *Devil’s Valley*.” Conference on Colonialism, NIU Galway, June 2007
- “Refusing to be fat Llamas: Resisting violence through food in *Sozaboy* and *Purple Hibiscus*.” “Food and History: Health, Culture, Tourism and Identity,” University of Central Lancashire, June 2006
- “Violence and Restoration in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Stone Virgins*.” International Conference on Sustainability, University of Hawai’i, February 2005
- “Mythic Tears: The Resurfacing of the Crocodile in Postcolonial Literatures” British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference, Savannah, Georgia, February 2004
- “‘The wood would always win’: Resisting genetic trophy hunting.” British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference, Savannah, Georgia, February 2001
- “Suckling from the Crocodile’s Tit: Nationalism and Wildlife in Australian Narratives.” British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference, Savannah, Georgia, February 2000
- “Now is the time to sing, Comrade, brave songs of the struggle...’: Voicelessness in Mulk Raj Anand’s Punjab Trilogy.” British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia, March 1999
- “Mapping the Divide: Ciaran Carson’s *Belfast Confetti*.” British Commonwealth and Post-colonial Studies Conference, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia, May 1998
- “The Politics of Postcoloniality.” British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia, April 1997

“Only the innocents and the dotards stay here’: Rural Culture in the Postcolonial State.” British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia, April 1996

Exhibitions, Performances, and Workshops

“Are You Being Followed?” curated in collaboration with the class of Dialogue Across the Diaspora, Center for Reconciliation, May 8 – June 5, 2018

“Juvie Talk,” premiere performance of Richard Ross’s book of monologues from incarcerated youth, publicity, production, and performance by Literature Seminar students, December 9, 2016

“Art and Activism,” a workshop with Richard Ross, author of *Architecture of Authority*, *Juveniles In Justice*, and *Girls In Justice*, February 10, 2015

“Rhythm & Change,” a panel discussion with Patricia Barbeito on the intersections of social change, the Arts, and reflection, using the Danny Glover produced films, *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975*, *Trouble the Water*, and *Soundtrack for a Revolution*, as jumping off points. January 18, 2014

“Unearthing Legacy,” curated in collaboration with the class of Dialogue Across the Diaspora, Red Eye Gallery, January 23 - February 7, 2014 <http://unearthinglegacy.tumblr.com>

Readings in the Writing Center, faculty reading series in collaboration with the RISD Writing Center, 2013-2014

A conversation with and a reading by the poet Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, Chace Center Auditorium, November 16, 2011

Teach-in on Haiti, featuring presentations by Anthony Bogues, Ed Cardoza, and Cindy Siegel, March 13, 2010

First Annual English Department Student Show, Benson Hall Gallery, January 31- February 4, 2000

African Film Festival, April 5-6, 1997 and April 14-16, 1999

Memorial concert for Ken Saro-Wiwa, featuring readings from his poetry and performances by the Malian band Babemba and the Nigerian dance troupe MiniAfricana, November 11, 1996

External Graduate Theses Examiner

Carlyn Strydom, “The role of national museums in South Africa: A critical investigation into Iziko Museums of South Africa focusing on the representation of slavery.” MPh Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2016

Kwesi Quayson, “The Rhetorical Profile of the Highlife Song Text: A Layered Proposition.” PhD Thesis, University of Cape Coast, 2018

Stephen Symons, “Shadows asking an echo to dance: Navigating ambiguity: How former conscripts (1980-1990) navigate memories of induction into the SADF in post-apartheid society.” PhD Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2019

Dominique Wnuczek-Lobaczewski, “‘Die Swakheid van sommige’: Navigating race through Foodways of the women of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.” PhD Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2022

Other Professional Experience

Advisory Board Member, *Kente – Cape Coast Journal of Literature and the Arts*

Editorial Board Member, *Journal of English Language and Literature*, published by Veda Publications, Vijayawadw, India

Editorial Board member, *Décentrement*, journal published by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Sousse, Tunisia

Consultant reader, *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*

Member of the African Studies Association

Member of the African Literature Association

Independent evaluator for the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities of the Nehaissiu deGannes play,
The Door of No Return, 2005-2006

Chair of Rhode Island Rhodes Scholar Selection Committee, 2004

Member of Committee on Departmental Offerings, English, University of Cape Coast, 2001-2002

Grant review panelist for the Rhode Island State Council of the Arts, 1998

Certified whisky taster, Dublin, Ireland, 1996

Volunteer tutor in English in the Providence School System, 1995-1996

Teacher, Volkshochschule Erding and Volkshochschule Dorfen, 1989-1990

University Service, Rhode Island School of Design

President, Full-Time Faculty Association, NEARI, 2016-present

Member of indigenous studies Search Committee, Literary Arts and Studies, 2021

Member of Academic Policies Committee, 2016-2019

Member of RISD Fulbright Interview Committee, 2016-2023

Vice-President, Full-Time Faculty Association, NEARI, 2005-2016

Member of Global Partners and Programs Committee, 2012-2015

Member of English Department Search Committee, 2009-2010, 2004-2005, 1996-1997

Member of the Academic Task Force Committee, 2008-2010

Member of Writing Center Task Force, 2007-2009

Member of Director of International Programs Search Committee, 2006-2007

Member of the International Studies Committee, 2005-2007, 2002-2003, 1995-1996

Member of Museum Summer Intern Selection Committee, 2006

Member of the Humanities Fund Committee, 1999-2000, 2002-2005

Member of Watson Committee, 2002-2003

Chair of the International Programs Committee, 2000-2001

Chair of the Academic Policies Committee, 1999-2000

Member of the Instruction Committee, 1995-2000

Member of the Ad hoc Committee on Governance, 1998-1999

Chair of English Department Search Committee, 1997-1998

Member of search committee for Museum Academic Liaison, 1996

Faculty advisor for *Mixed Media*, the RISD student newspaper, 1996-1998

Languages

Fluent in German

Basic conversational skills and reading ability in Spanish