This seminar will explore various ways in which literature has laid claim to cultural authority over the course of the twentieth century as it passed from the “high modernism” of the early part of the century to the dissolution of modernism after the Second World War. Particular emphasis will be placed on the interplay and tension between three ways of imagining the role played by literature within modern and postmodern culture: literature as a site of individual and collective memory; literature as a practice of transgressive knowledge; and literature as a means of political engagement. Texts will include works of autobiography, cinema and fiction by Gide, Proust, Aragon, Bataille, Leiris, Sartre, Genet and Djebar.
This course is an introduction to “postcolonial” theory from the Francophone world, conceived broadly as a diverse and historically expansive body of texts unified by a common commitment to analyzing, contesting, and transforming, colonial relations of power and knowledge. Rather than viewing such strategies of critique as a ready-made and easily adaptable critical methodology, we consider them instead as an evolving field of intellectual production shaped by shifting and sometimes conflicting historical and political circumstances, and in dynamic relation to other philosophical and literary developments in both French and non-Western contexts. Throughout our readings we privilege texts that problematize colonialism as a cultural, symbolic, and discursive system, while also advancing a self-reflexive critique of emergent postcolonial thought and literature.

We begin by distinguishing among various strains of anti-colonial writing that emerged in particular colonized spaces and espoused different solutions to the problem of postcolonial sovereignty with different implications for culture, notably in early nineteenth-century Haiti, 1940s Martinique, and mid-20th-century Africa. We move on to study the 1950s and 60s as a moment of intense cross-pollination of theoretical, philosophical, and literary influences, focusing on the work of Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, and Frantz Fanon. We conclude by exploring the relationship between French postcolonial theory and “poststructuralism,” and problematizing binaries of oppression and resistance, through readings of Édouard Glissant, Abdelkebir Khatébi, Jacques Derrida, and Achille Mbembe. While the course will approach Francophone postcolonial thought independently of the use that has been made of it by subsequent anglophone postcolonial theory, we will supplement our readings with essays intended to spark debate and enable a critical reading of their work. Taught in English, with texts available in both English and French.
In this course, students revise and expand a paper written in a previous course with an aim towards producing a publishable work of approximately 20-25 pages in length. In the revised article, students develop an original argument relative to a significant problem or research question; demonstrate knowledge of relevant primary and secondary sources and the ability to evaluate them critically; engage with an appropriate theoretical or scholarly methodology; and draw out clearly the significance of their findings. The class meets regularly as a group for the purpose of discussion and feedback on individual work. Students submit written assignments and make short presentations on essential elements of their revision, including the argument, the current state of research on the topic, and their contribution to the field. In addition, they receive and write a reader’s report similar to those used to referee journal submissions. Throughout the course, students will meet individually with the professor to discuss their progress. Work written or revised over the course of the quarter will be shared and discussed in the final class meeting. This course is required for 2nd and 3rd year graduate students in French. It will be taught in English. Enrolled students must submit the seminar paper they wish to revise to the professor no later than December 30, 2017.