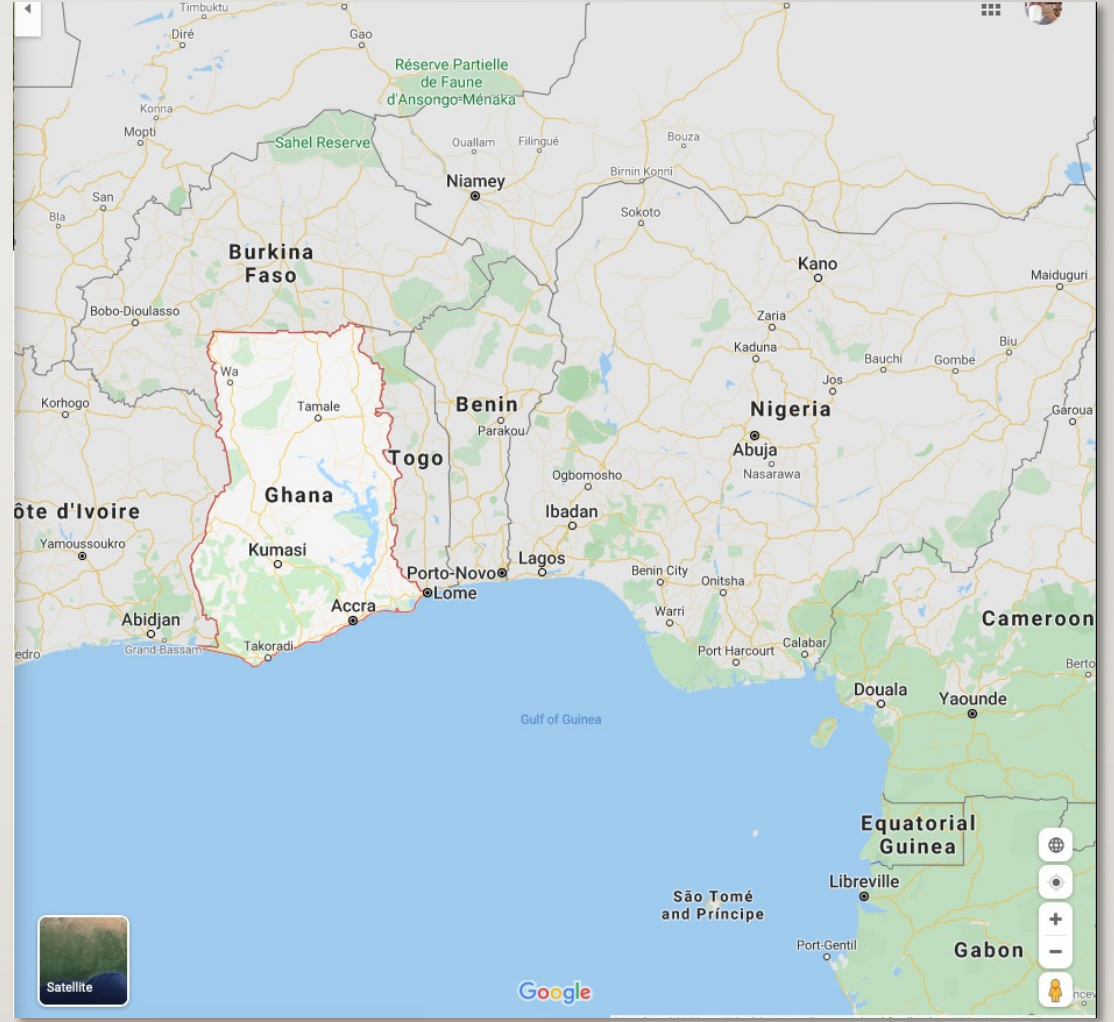
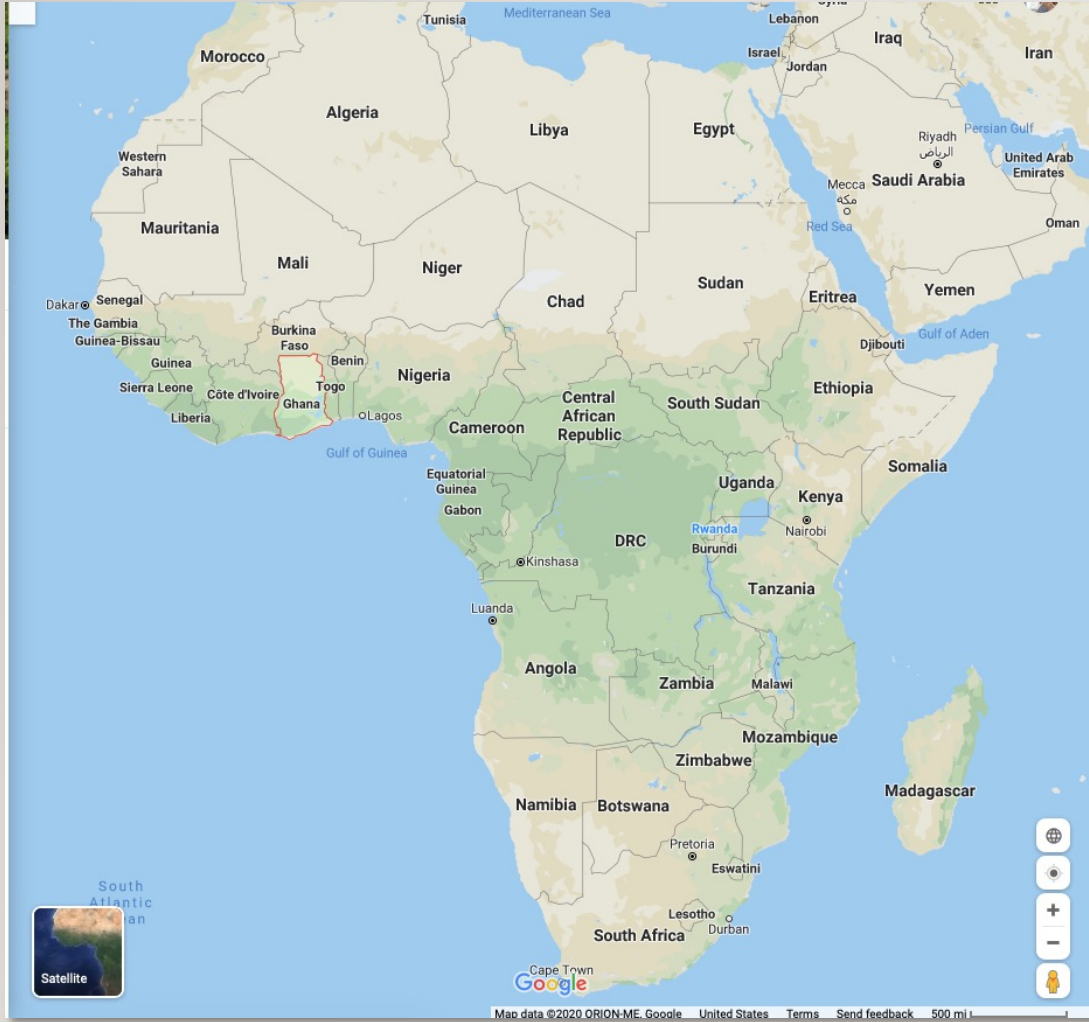


Ask me about majoring in English! jjjeon@uci.edu

CLASS #7.2: *GHANA MUST GO* 1/3

ENGL 10: GLOBAL FICTIONS



1.

Kweku dies barefoot on a Sunday before sunrise, his slippers by the doorway to the bedroom like dogs. At the moment he is on the threshold between sunroom and garden considering whether to go back to get them. He won't. His second wife Ama is asleep in that bedroom, her lips parted loosely, her brow lightly furrowed, her cheek hotly seeking some cool patch of pillow, and he doesn't want to wake her.

He couldn't if he tried.

She sleeps like a cocoyam. A thing without senses. She sleeps like his mother, unplugged from the world. Their house could be robbed—by Nigerians in flip-flops rolling right up to their door in rusting Russian Army tanks, eschewing subtlety entirely as they've taken to doing on Victoria Island (or so he hears from his friends: the crude oil kings and cowboys demobbed to Greater Lagos, that odd breed of African: fearless and rich)—and she'd go on snoring sweetly, a kind of musical arrangement, dreaming sugarplums and Tchaikovsky.

She sleeps like a child.

But he's carried the thought anyway, from bedroom to sunroom, making a production of being careful. A show for himself. He does this, has always done this since leaving the village, little open-air performances for an audience of one. Or for two: him and his cameraman, that

TAIYE SELASI

silent-invisible cameraman who stole away beside him all those decades ago in the darkness before daybreak with the ocean beside, and who has followed him every day everywhere since. Quietly filming his life. Or: the life of the Man Who He Wishes to Be and Who He Left to Become.

In this scene, a bedroom scene: The Considerate Husband.

Who doesn't make a peep as he slips from the bed, moving the covers aside noiselessly, setting each foot down separately, taking pains not to wake his unwakable wife, not to get up too quickly thus unsettling the mattress, crossing the room very quietly, closing the door without sound. And down the hall in this manner, through the door into the courtyard where she clearly can't hear him, but still on his toes. Across the short heated walkway, from Master Wing to Living Wing, where he pauses for a moment to admire his house.

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At fifty-one moved his things in, but found it too quiet.

At fifty-three took a second wife.

Elegantly planned.

Now he stops at the top of the square, between doorways, where

Dictionary

Search for a word



in me·di·as res

/ɪn ˈmɛdēəs ˈres, ˈmädē ˌäs/

adverb

into the middle of a narrative; without preamble.

"having begun his story in medias res, he then interrupts it"

- into the midst of things.

Translations, word origin, and more definitions

flatline beep—but the silence beforehand, the break in the action. There is always this break, Olu knows, no exceptions. So, seconds just after the gun goes off and the sprinter keeps driving or pops up too soon, or the gunshot victim, feeling bullet break skin, brings a hand to his wound or does not, the world stopped. Whether the sprinter will win or the patient will make it has less to do finally with how he crosses the line than with whatever he did in these still prior moments, and Kweku did nothing, and Olu doesn't know why.

How could his father not realize what was happening and how, if he realized, could he stay there to die? No. Something must have *happened* to debilitate, to disorient, some strong emotion, mental disturbance, Olu doesn't know what. What he does know is this: active male under sixty, no known history of illness, raised on freshwater fish, running five miles daily, fucking a nubile village idiot—and say what you want, the new wife is no nurse: it is futile to blame but there might have been hope, chest compressions done right/had she just woken up—doesn't die in a garden of cardiac arrest.

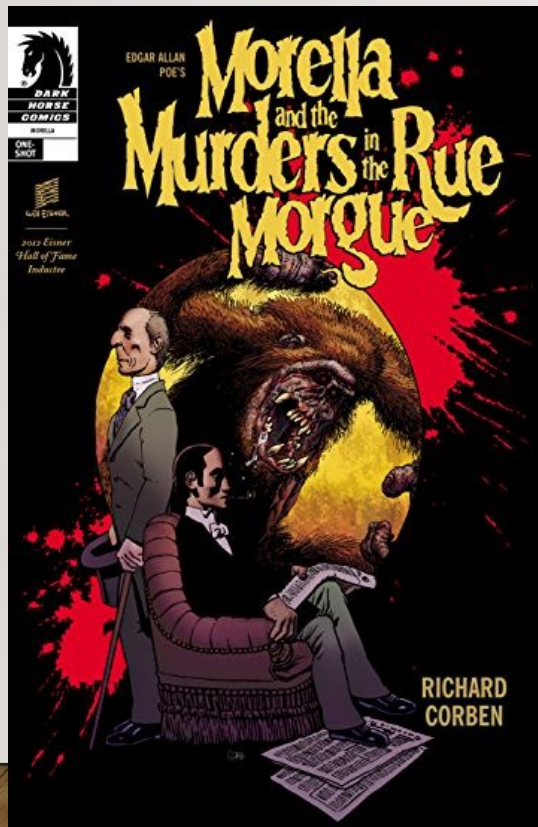
Something must have arrested him.

3.

Dewdrops on grass.

Dewdrops on grass blades like diamonds flung freely from the pouch of some sprite-god who'd just happened by, stepping lightly and lithely through Kweku Sai's garden just moments before Kweku arrived there himself. Now the whole garden glittering, winking and titling like schoolgirls who hush themselves, blushing, as their beloveds

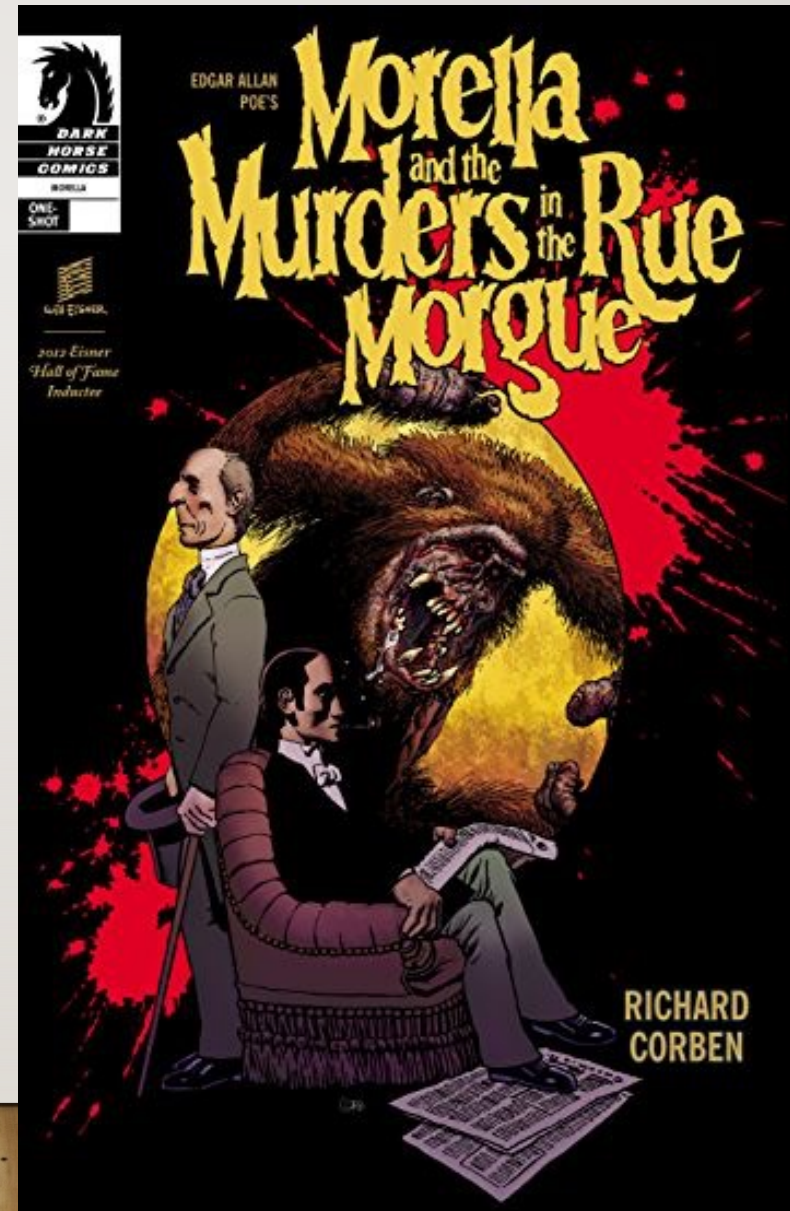
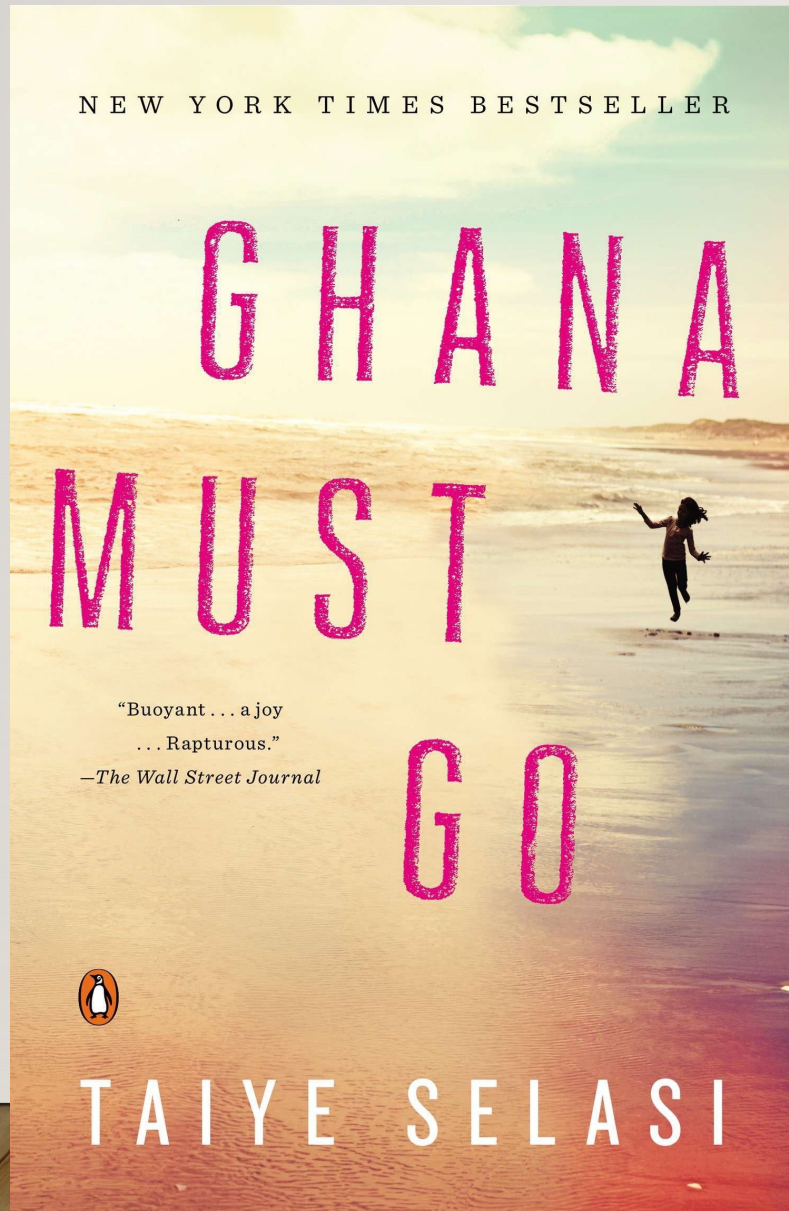
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He went to the waiting room.

Olu looked up.

He sat by his son, put a hand on his knee. Olu abandoned Achebe and looked at his knee as if only now aware it was bouncing.

"Watch your brother and sister. I'll be right back."

"Where are you going?"

"To check on the baby."

"Can I come with you?"

Kweku looked at the twins.

A funny wooden Japanese logic-game puzzle. They slept like his mother. Olu looked at them, too. Then pleadingly at Kweku.

"Come on then."

They walked down the hospital hallway in silence. His cameraman walked backward in front of them. In this scene: a Well-Respected Doctor goes striding down the hallway to save his unsavable daughter. A Western. He wished he had a weapon. Little six-shooter, silver. Two. Something with more shine than a Hopkins M.D. And a more formidable opponent. Or an opponent less formidable than the basics of medical science. The odds.

Presently, Olu. "What is it?"

End scene.

"Nothing." Kweku chuckled. "Just tired, that's all." He patted his son's head. Or his son's browbone more accurately, his son's head having moved from where he remembered its being. He looked at Olu closely now, surprised by the height (and by other things he'd seen but never noticed before: the wide latissimus dorsi, the angular jawline, the Yoruba nose, Fola's nose, broad and straight, the taut skin the same shade as his own and so smooth, baby's bum, even now in adolescence). He wasn't pretty like Kehinde—who looked like a girl: an impossible,

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the blueprint is obvious, where he can see the design, and considers it as the painter must consider the painting or the mother the newborn: with confusion and awe, that this thing which sprang to life there inside the mind or body has made it here to the outside, a life of its own. Slightly baffled. How did it get here, from in him to in front? (Of course he knows: with the proper application of the appropriate instruments, it's the same for the painter, the mother, the amateur architect—but still it's a wonder to look at.)

His house.

His beautiful, functional, elegant house, which appeared to him whole, the whole ethos, in an instant, like a fertilized zygote spinning inexplicably out of darkness in possession of an entire genetic code. An entire logic. The four quadrants: a nod to symmetry, to his training days, to graph paper, to the compass, perpetual journey/perpetual return, etc., etc., a gray courtyard, not green, polished rock, slabs of slate, treated concrete, a kind of rebuttal to the tropics, to home: so a homeland re-imagined, all the lines clean and straight, nothing lush, soft, or verdant. In one instant. All three. Now here. Decades later on a street in Old Adabraka, a crumbling suburb of colonial mansions, whitewashed stucco, stray dogs. It is the most beautiful thing he has ever created—

except Taiwo, he thinks suddenly, a shock of a thought. Whereon Taiwo herself—with black thicket for eyelash and carved rock for cheekbone and gemstone for eyes, her pink lips the same color as the inside of conch shells, impossibly beautiful, an impossible girl—sort of appears there in front of him interrupting his performance of *The Considerate Husband*, then goes up in smoke. It is the most beautiful thing he has ever created *alone*, he amends the observation.

Then continues along the walkway through the door into the Living Wing, through the dining room, to the sunroom, to the threshold.

Where he stops.

Why had he hated this view? Of this beach, of the backs of these fishermen, glistening brown, of the long wooden boats, evangelical names in bright tricolor paint on their splintering sides, *Black Star Jesus*, *Jah Reign*, *Christ the Fisher of Men*, in the red, yellow, green of the national flag and the national spirit of open-source ethos, this mixing of Anglican, Rastafarian, Ghanaian? What was there to hate in this? There was only openness. As far as he could see. A cheerful openness. An innocence. An innocent beach on the road to Kokrobite at seven A.M., November 1975, little country lurching, cheerful, unaware, to revolution. Little taxi lurching, blasting revolution, to grief.

And then her.

Not a bridge, her fulfillment the brick.

No jubilation, no drumming, no goats, and no fish.

Fola stayed waiting with his half-sisters Shormeh and Naa, their eyes filed with old hate and new grief. A crowd had gathered excitedly as they'd alighted the taxi and lingered now watching as he entered the hut. No one needed details (irresistibly gripping). His cameraman, among, didn't follow him in.

He ducked as he entered, forgetting his height. Or its size, this small shanty, his childhood home. He carried his son, half asleep, six months old then, the American-born boy-child, to her.

The one bed.

She was lying on her back with her arms at her side, with the mats on the floor, the same mats he remembered. Dark, and so cool with the dome overhead. It was a well-structured hut, however minimal. Rounded clay walls with the massive thatch roof sixteen feet at its peak, a triangular dome. His father had built it. An artist, they told him, a Fante, a wanderer, a "genius like him." (He'd been jailed after punching a drunk English sergeant who'd hassled his wife, jailed, then

publicly flogged. There by the tree in the middle of the "compound," this cluster of huts. Stripped to shorts at midday. "He left," said the villagers simply. Thereafter. Just packed up his things, walked away, as he'd come. Others, now dead, claim he walked into the ocean in a sparkling white *bubu*, to his waist, then his head, without stopping. Further, forward, under, into the ocean. Like Jesus. With weights. Under moon. Into black. ↵

His brother looked surprised as he entered but said nothing. "Leave me," he said to his brother. His brother left.

She could have been sleeping from the way she was lying there. He'd heard families say this and chuckled before. "We thought she was napping," of beloved old Grandma, rushed putrefied to hospital days after death. *Idiots*, he'd think. Now he understood the confusion. She looked like she was sleeping. But was making no noise. Wasn't dreaming of the places that she'd never been to.

She was dead, in the village, the only place she'd ever go. His heart broke in one place. The first break. He didn't feel it. Olu giggled, soft, the only sound in the room. Kweku looked at Olu, suddenly remembering that he was holding him. Olu looked, awestruck, at the butterfly on her toe.

Black and blue (swordtail), just coming to rest, an almost neon shade of turquoise, black markings, white dots. It fluttered around his mother's foot, a lazy lap, then lifted off, flapping blithely toward the triangular dome and out the little window. Gone.

"This is your grandmother." Changed the tense. "Was." Olu looked at Kweku, not recognizing the voice. And he at his mother. "I told you," he mustered. "I told you I'd return—" but couldn't manage the rest.

So he sat on the floor, on a raffia mat. In the heat and the smell of it, the stench of new death. He rubbed Olu's back until the child fell asleep (fifteen minutes, not more, such a well-behaved boy). Then