Stanford



Ato Quayson

Jean G. and Morris M. Doyle Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Professor of English and of African and African American Studies and, by courtesy, of Comparative Literature

Curriculum Vitae available Online

Bio

BIO

Ato Quayson is the Jean G. and Morris M. Doyle Professor in Interdisciplinary Studies and Professor of English. He studied for his undergraduate degree at the University of Ghana and took his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, after which he held a Junior Research Fellowship at Wolfson College, Oxford before returning to Cambridge to become Reader in Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature in the Faculty of English from 1995-2005. He was also Director of the Centre for African Studies (1998-2005) and a Fellow of Pembroke College while at Cambridge (1995-2005). Prior to Stanford he was Professor of African and Postcolonial Literature at New York University (2017-2019) and Professor of English and inaugural Director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto (2005-2017). In 2016 he was appointed University Professor at the University of Toronto, the highest distinction that the university can bestow.

Professor Quayson has published 6 monographs and 10 edited volumes. His monographs include Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing (1997), Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process? (2000), Calibrations: Reading for the Social (2003), and Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation (2007). Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism (2014) was co-winner of the Urban History Association's 2015 Best Book Prize (non-North America) and was named in The Guardian as one of the 10 Best Books on Cities in 2014. His most recent book is Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2021), winner of the Warren-Brooks Prize in Literary Criticism for 2022. Edited volumes include Relocating Postcolonialism (with David Goldberg, 2001), African Literary Theory: An Anthology of Literary Criticism and Theory (with Tejumola Olaniyan, 2007), Fathers and Daughters: An Anthology of Exploration (2008), Labor Migration, Human Trafficking, and Multinational Corporations, (with Antonela Arhin, 2012), The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature, 2 volumes (2012), A Companion to Diaspora and Transnational Studies (with Girish Daswani, 2013), The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel (2016), The Cambridge Companion to the City in World Literature (with Jini Kim Watson, 2023), and Decolonizing the English Literary Curriculum (with Ankhi Mukherjee, 2023). He also wrote a new Introduction and Notes to Nelson Mandela’s (2003). Works-in-progress include Accra Chic: A Locational History of Fashion in Accra (with Grace Tolequé; Intellect Books and Chicago University Press) and Exile and Diaspora in African Literature.

He curates Critic.Reading.Writing, a YouTube channel on which he discusses various topics in literature, urban studies and the humanities in general:https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjoidh_R_bJCnXyKBkytP_g and is the host of Contours: The Cambridge Literary Studies Hour (https://www.cambridge.org/core/browse-subjects/literature/contours-the-cambridge-literary-studies-hour), where he holds dialogues with various scholars to address pressing issues, themes, and concepts in 21st century literary studies from medieval literature to the present day and from all areas of global literary studies from both the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

Professor Quayson has served as President of the African Studies Association (2019-2020) and is an elected Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (2006), the Royal Society of Canada (2013), the British Academy (2019), and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2023).

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- Professor, English
- Professor, African and African American Studies
- Professor (By courtesy), Comparative Literature

ADMINISTRATIVE APPOINTMENTS

- Chair, Department of English, Stanford University, (2022- present)
- Founding Director, Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies, University of Toronto, (2005-2016)
- Director, Center for African Studies, (1998-2005)

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2023)
- Corresponding Fellow, The British Academy (2019)
- Fellow, Royal Society of Canada (2013)
- Fellow, Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (2006)
- Fellow, Du Bois Institute of African American Studies (2004)
- Member, Cambridge Commonwealth Society, The University of Cambridge (1995)
- Cambridge Commonwealth Scholar, The University of Cambridge (1991-1994)

BOARDS, ADVISORY COMMITTEES, PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- President, African Studies Association (2019 - present)
- Vice-President, African Studies Association (2018 - present)
- Chair of Program Committee, American Comparative Literature Association (2016 - 2019)
- Member, MLA Elections Committee (2016 - 2018)
- Member, MLA Advisory Committee (2015 - 2017)
- Editor, Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry (2014 - present)
- Member, European Research Council (2013 - 2018)
- Member, Executive Board of the African Literature Association (2012 - 2015)
- Member, Editorial Board of Research in African Literatures (2010 - present)
- Member, Executive Board of the African Studies Association (2010 - 2013)
- Member, Editorial Board of New Literary History (2009 - present)
- Member, MLA Divisional Committee on Postcolonial Literature (2007 - 2012)
- Member, International African Institute (2001 - 2006)

ADDITIONAL PROGRAM AFFILIATIONS

- Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE)

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

- PhD, University of Cambridge , English (1995)
- B.A., Hons (First Class), University of Ghana , English and Arabic (1989)

LINKS

- YouTube Channel discussing relationship between literature and other things: https://www.youtube.com/@CriticReadingWriting

Research & Scholarship

CURRENT RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY INTERESTS

All my published work has drawn heavily on comparative and interdisciplinary research frameworks. The book I am currently working on, which is Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature, continues in this interdisciplinary orientation. The book turns on two questions that seem to me pertinent to the discussion of literary tragedy in the postcolonial world. The first has to do with the status of ethics in periods of historical transition. I take seriously German philosopher Axel Honneth's proposition that identity derives from a "practical relation-to-self" that is neither limited purely to beliefs about oneself, but lie in the dynamic processes by which individuals come to experience themselves as possessing a certain status, or as being the focus of particular concern, or as capable of acting as responsible agents, or as making valued contributions to shared projects. The problem, however, is when the practical relation-to-self also involves the exercise of ethical choices and when the foundation of such choice-making is put under pressure by the massive material, epistemological, and cultural changes that take place in the different phases of transition between tradition and modernity, colonialism and post-coloniality, and in the global dispersal of diasporas that have characterized life in the postcolonial world. As I argue in the book, historical transition in postcolonial writing is thematized as a set of enigmas that the literary characters are only partially aware of. But it is the enigmatic quality of historical transition, and the varying and contradictory responses that it calls forth that raise serious questions about the status of ethical choice. The book will survey work from Plato, Aristotle, Judith Butler, the German Idealists and ancient Sanskrit theatre on key tragic questions such as the dialectical relation between determinism and contingency, the relation between stasis and mobility, the atrophy of the public commons in the face of historical transition, and the distortions of nostalgia in the spaces of diaspora before centering on the writings of African and postcolonial writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Tayeb Salih, J.M. Coetzee, Arundhati Roy, Toni Morrison, Samuel Beckett, and many others. The book will be interdisciplinary and comparative from first to last.

I intend for the next few years to focus on an interdisciplinary comparison of cities from both Global North and Global South. Cities provide a useful entry into questions of various temporal intersections and multi-synchronicities of people, infrasctructures, governmentalities, and aspirations. The key interest in this new research will be for me an opportunity to bring things together that are normally considered completely apart, if at all: the nature of boredom among occasional chess players in New York's Washington Square Park and Johannesburg's soup kitchens; streetside food vending in Toronto, Singapore, and Lagos; the different means by which charity is elicited on the subways of San Francisco, London, and Paris; and the significance of trees in gauging political engagement in Chicago and Rio, among others. To me each vector of urban analysis opens up a portal or window into different layers and interweaves to understand which we have to establish different relations of proximity and distance with the object under study. And urban phenomena yield connections with other phenomena that they may not on the surface have seemed related at all. That is what I understand by interdisciplinary studies of the urban.

Teaching

COURSES

2026-27

- Interdisciplinary African Urban Studies: OSPGEN 26 (Sum)
- Introduction to Themes in Black Studies II: AFRICAAM 276 (Spr)

2025-26

- Interdisciplinary African Urban Studies: OSPGEN 26 (Sum)

- Introduction to Themes in Black Studies I: AFRICAAM 176 (Win)
- Introduction to Themes in Black Studies II: AFRICAAM 276 (Spr)
- Spatial Concepts in African Literature: AFRICAAM 122, ENGLISH 170 (Aut)
- Toni Morrison: Modernism, Postmodernism, and World Literature: AFRICAAM 262, AFRICAAM 362E (Win)
- Toni Morrison: Modernism, Postmodernism, and World Literature: ENGLISH 362E (Win)

2024-25

- Foundations of Global Black Diaspora Studies I: Diaspora, Literature, Cosmopolitanism: AFRICAAM 123 (Aut)
- Interdisciplinary Introduction to African Urban Studies: OSPGEN 26 (Sum)
- Introduction to Themes in Black Studies I: AFRICAAM 176 (Spr)
- Philosophy, Literature, and the Arts Core Seminar: DLCL 333, ENGLISH 333, PHIL 333 (Win)
- Toni Morrison: Modernism, Postmodernism, and World Literature: AFRICAAM 262 (Win)
- Toni Morrison: Modernism, Postmodernism, and World Literature: ENGLISH 362E (Win)

2023-24

- Interdisciplinary Introduction to African Urban Studies: OSPGEN 26 (Sum)
- Philosophy, Literature, and the Arts Core Seminar: DLCL 333, ENGLISH 333, PHIL 333 (Aut)
- Toni Morrison: Modernism, Postmodernism, and World Literature: AFRICAAM 362E (Win)
- Toni Morrison: Modernism, Postmodernism, and World Literature: ENGLISH 362E (Win)

STANFORD ADVISEES

Doctoral Dissertation Reader (AC)

Marina Machado de Oliveira

Doctoral Dissertation Advisor (AC)

Mpho Molefe

Orals Evaluator

William Parish

Doctoral (Program)

Makaiya Bullitt-Rigsbee, Mpho Molefe

Publications

PUBLICATIONS

- **Fuku Americanus and the Tragic Intertext: Junot Diaz's The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (Book Review)** *CAMBRIDGE JOURNAL OF POSTCOLONIAL LITERARY INQUIRY*
  Book Review Authored by: Quayson, A., Diaz, J.
  2026
- **DECOLONIZING THE ENGLISH LITERARY CURRICULUM Introduction** *DECOLONIZING THE ENGLISH LITERARY CURRICULUM*
  Mukherjee, A., Quayson, A.
  edited by Quayson, A., Mukherjee, A.
  2024: 1-20
- **Reading for Justice On the Pleasures and Pitfalls of a Decolonizing Pedagogy** *DECOLONIZING THE ENGLISH LITERARY CURRICULUM*
  Quayson, A.
  edited by Quayson, A., Mukherjee, A.

2024: 256-279

- **Stories and Empathy in a Time of Crisis: An African Viewpoint** *AFRICAN STUDIES REVIEW*
  Quayson, A.
  2022; 65 (4): 965-984
- **The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race (Book Review)** *REVIEW OF ENGLISH STUDIES*
  Book Review Authored by: Quayson, A.
  2022
- **On Postcolonial Suffering: George Floyd and the Scene of Contamination** *CAMBRIDGE JOURNAL OF POSTCOLONIAL LITERARY INQUIRY*
  Quayson, A.
  2021; 8 (2): 127-137
- **Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature**
  Quayson, A.
  Cambridge University Press.2021
- **INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIAL SPATIALITIES** *INTERVENTIONS-INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES*
  Quayson, A.
  2020; 22 (8): 967–76
- **Morphology as Infrastructure: Notes on Method** *WESTERN HUMANITIES REVIEW*
  Quayson, A.
  2019; 73 (3): 181–215
- **The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel in English,**
  edited by Quayson, A.
  Cambridge University Press.2016
- **Oxford St., Accra: City Life, and the Itineraries of Transnationalism,**
  Quayson, A.
  Duke University Press.2014
- **Blackwell Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism**
  edited by Quayson, A., Daswani, G.
  Blackwell Publishers.2013
- **The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature, Vols. 1&2** *Cambridge History Series*
  edited by Quayson, A.
  Cambridge University Press.2012
- **Labor Migration, Human Trafficking, and Multinational Corporations**
  edited by Quayson, A., Arhin, A.
  Routledge.2012
- **Fathers and Daughters: An Anthology of Exploration**
  edited by Quayson, A.
  Ayebia Publishers.2008
- **Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation**
  Quayson, A.
  Columbia University Press.2007
- **African Literary Theory: An Anthology of Literary Criticism and Theory**
  edited by Olaniyan, T., Quayson, A.
  Blackwell Publishers.2007
- **Calibrations: Reading for the Social**

Quayson, A.
Minnesota University Press.2003

- **Nelson Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom** *Penguin Classics*
  edited by Quayson, A.
  Penguin Books.2002
- **Relocating Postcolonialism**
  edited by Goldberg, D., Quayson, A.
  Blackwell Publishers.2001
- **Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?**
  Quayson, A.
  Polity/Blackwell.2000
- **Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing**
  Quayson, A.
  James Currey/Indiana University Press.1997