

# Syllabus English 262 21<sup>st</sup> Century World Literature

**Instructor:** Douglas Cole  
**Office:** 4141  
**Phone:** 206 587-2921  
**Office Hours:** 8:30-9 daily, or by appointment  
**E-Mail:** docole@sccd.ctc.edu  
**Credits:** 5  
**Meeting times:** TBA

**Required Texts:** McOndo, by Alberto Fuget and Sergio Gomez  
United States of Banana, by Giannina Braschi  
We Need New Names, by NoViolet Bulawayo  
Trickster: Native American Tales a Graphic Collection by Matt Dembicki  
Three Bargains, by Tania Malik  
The Road, by Cormac McCarthy  
The Dream Life of Sukhanov, by Olga Grushin  
*Fish and Elephant or Blind Mountain*

## **Course Description:**

In this course, we will be critically exploring literature created by writers from all over the world. In our exploration, we will be searching for what it is that distinguishes them as "modern," "post-modern," or otherwise something entirely new that marks them as 21<sup>st</sup> century literature. What do we mean when we say a work is "modern?" What do we mean when we say a work is "Post Modern"? Are their traits and trends that distinguish work created in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Also, are there differences between what is modern/post-Modern, etc...in one country as opposed to another? What is a modern/post-modern work in China compared to a modern/post-modern work in South Africa? These are only a few of the questions we will be asking while we critically investigate these works.

We will also use the work we examine as a way to better understand different cultures around the world. With globalization marching fast and furious across the globe, who knows how much and how fast cultures will change. What is true now may not be so ten years from now; nevertheless, we will make our journey with a mind for understanding and exploring the history and culture and cross-influences that show up in the work. Part of this journey will, then, include exploring the heritage of critical theory which has grown around the literatures of the world.

We will make our journey through the medium of research groups, panel presentations, seminar discussions, critical writing and exams.

## **Course Objectives:**

Some of the things we will accomplish during this course are

- to develop skills for the analysis of literature
- to explore themes and symbolism through various literary texts
- to explore secondary materials, such as biographies, critical essays and essays on

literary theory in order to expand our perspective on themes and symbolism in literature

- to examine how cultural and historical events have shaped the literature of different cultures
- to develop a deeper understanding of world cultures through a study of literature, society, religion and history
- to perfect skills in critical reasoning, formal discussion, and oral presentation
- to compare literary forms and examine the historical and cultural connections between literatures of different cultures
- to see beauty in a well-crafted piece of literature

### **Life-long learning:**

The "New Critical" approach to literature has held that "appreciating a work of literature need have no connection with the author's intention, with the author's life, or with the social and historical circumstances that may have influenced the author." I respect the freedom to try and consider the beauty of a work of art without considering the other elements which surround and inform it. People should have a chance to respond as directly and freely as they can to a work of art. But I also find art and literature to reveal and shape reality and history in such a profound way that I, personally, can't ultimately ignore the factors of culture and history. So I suppose I am imposing the idea that we do include these perspectives (biography of the artist, historical time, social forces), even if I am not saying that you must always take these into consideration. In essence, both are true: your personal responses to art *and* the surrounding voices and experiences that touch that art. The connections between the two are perhaps where I find art to live. It can comment on fundamental human truths, or as Faulkner once said, "the great concerns of the heart." And in that respect, art is a teacher, an historian, a leader, a muse. It always has something to tell us, something that may not be very new, as James Baldwin writes, but "always must be heard." My only hope is that we all will find something in the works we read this quarter which speaks truth to us.

### **Responsibility:**

We will be reading the works of people from many different cultures; therefore, it is our responsibility to be open and respectful to the worlds with which we are not familiar, for we may find that while the beliefs in one culture do not coincide with our own, we can still find beauty and maybe even some "universal" truths along the way. But we must keep our minds *open* while reading these works, and not automatically respond based on our set of cultural values. I'm not saying we have to eject what we are to really "hear" these works, but we must perhaps be more aware of our cultural habits of thinking in order to be more ready to understand the literature and culture that shapes the literatures of the world.

### **Collaborative Learning:**

#### **1) Seminars:**

The seminars are a place to find your voice more freely. I know that in the big group, or the giant family, it can sometimes be hard to feel comfortable to speak, and so we will have several seminar discussions which will provide the space for you to be able to speak. It is imperative, then, that the environment of the seminars be supportive to all ideas which are not distractions but are honest attempts to deeply engage the art of the novels or stories and the ideas that they suggest.

#### **2) Panel Groups:**

At the beginning of the quarter every one will sign up for a panel group. There will be seven of these groups, and they will be responsible for a one-hour activity/presentation on a particular reading or assignment. The presentations by the panels can be in any form you want and may involve writing, performance, or discussion. The aim of the panels is to find creative ways to enhance our understanding of the readings. One week before the panel is to present their activity, they will submit to me a brief outline of their activity.

We come with different learning styles and different life experiences, and it is fundamental that we respect those differences. All of the collaborative work, therefore, will be done with the utmost respect to the individuals in the various groups.

**Critical Thinking and Language Proficiency:**

The readings for this quarter will obviously range quite far in style and content. But one thing in our approach will be consistent: we will read with a critical eye. Now, this is not a negative attitude. No. A critical eye is an eye of awareness. Awareness of the overtly expressed ideas the writers present as well as the implied and suggested ideas that rise from a well-wrought symbol in literature. Awareness of themes that recur and new world-views arising. It will be our mission to understand with a "negative capability," as John Keats writes, which is not to be confused with negativity. A negative capability allows us to suppress our automatic responses for a moment in order to more clearly see into the world of a work of art. Then, with a syncretic mind, we can turn around and consider the relationships of ideas from different cultural perspectives, what they have in common, what they have to add to our understanding of the human experience. We will make this exploration through discussion and exams and through written reading responses, where you will have the chance to express your thoughts about the themes in the works of art you encounter.

## Assignments:

1. Analytical Reading Responses: for each reading assignment, we will write a one-page response (a minimum of one page). This response must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. The responses cannot summarize the texts, however, but should explicate themes and engage the ideas we encounter.

2. Seminars: each person in class is responsible for attending all seminars with books, notes, and a list of questions of their own for discussion. Each student will also perform the duties of both the facilitator and note-taker for seminars at least once during the quarter.

3. Facilitator: each person in class will be responsible for facilitating a group discussion at least once during the quarter. In order to facilitate these discussions, it will be the facilitator's responsibility to design a plan of discussion, touching on various themes in the texts, as well as symbolism and critical approaches. Facilitator's will create effective discussion questions and keep discussions organized around the works we are reading.

4. Observer Notes: each person will also be responsible at least once during the quarter for taking notes during a seminar discussion, noting the ideas discussed and the speakers in the group who are involved.

5. Panel Groups: there will be six panel presentations during the quarter. Each person will sign up for a panel group, which will be responsible for conducting research on one of the texts. This might involve researching biographical material on one of the authors, critical reviews of a text, the historical context as well as philosophies or other ideas which might relate to the work. The panel group will then be responsible for leading the class in a one-hour activity. Each member of the panel group will also be responsible for a two-page summary, due on the day of the panel presentation. The summary should describe the process of the research as well as summarize and evaluate the materials found during the research process. It will be the goal of the panels to:

-engage the class as a whole through discussion of the topics, providing questions or exercises

for the class, or any other kind of active learning process. (This could be some kind of activity in which the whole class participates or a performance or a presentation that does not simply lecture to the class.)

\*One week before the panel is set to make their presentation, they will submit a proposal to the instructor, outlining their plan for the activity/presentation.

6. Mid-term exam: there will be a mid-term, written exam. Each student will need to obtain a "blue book" for this exam.

7. Final Exam. There will be a two-part final exam. Part one will be a take-home essay. Part two will be an in-class comprehensive exam made-up of multiple choice, short answer, and true and false questions. The questions for the exam will be based on class discussions and the assigned readings, which include books and hand-outs and any materials given by the panel groups.

**Grading:**

Grading will be based primarily on a points schedule related to the various steps of the research process, the panel presentation, class participation, and of course the final research paper.

Panel Presentation/2 page Summary:	200 points*
Analytical Reading Responses:	200 points
Mid-term:	200 points
Final	200 points
Class Participation:	200 points**
Total:	<hr/> 1,000 points

**\*Panel Presentations:**

The panels will be assessed by class evaluation, using criteria which evaluates the organization of the activity, the preparation of the members of the panel group, and how well the activity enhances understanding of the reading material. The panel members will also fill-out a self-assessment, evaluating their own in-put, level of interest, and responsibilities. The class assessment and the self-assessment will be completed at the end of the presentation.

**\*\*Class Participation:** Attendance will count as part of the participation grade. You will be allowed 4 unexcused absences. After that, each absence will result in the lowering of the participation grade as a whole by 10 per absence. If you come in late, it will be your responsibility to make sure I change the absence to a tardy. Tardiness will count as 1/2 of an absence. Points for quizzes, seminar facilitation, observer notes, and being prepared for and active in class discussion as well as seminar discussions will count for class participation.

**Plagiarism:** Policies on plagiarism are outlined in the Student Handbook and Resource Guide. Basically, any work turned in which is not your own constitutes plagiarism and will result in failure of the class and possibly expulsion from the school.

**Late Assignments and Make-up work:** Assignments turned in late will have 10 points deducted from them for each day they are late. Assignments will not be accepted a week after they are due. There is no make-up work.

**Special Needs:** If you need course adaptations or accommodations in the classroom because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with the instructor, or if you need special arrangements in case the building is evacuated, please inform the instructor at

once.

### **Structuring the Panels:**

These are more or less suggestions for directions the panels may take. If your research should go in a different direction, write a brief proposal outlining your idea. Also, panels should think of creative ways for presenting their materials. **Panels should not simply stand before the class and present their findings.** They might arrange group activities based on certain themes, and as the class then discusses these ideas, the panel can present their research as well. They might prepare a performance or a video to artistically represent their ideas. Or the panels might set up debate teams in the class, depending on their topics. Or they might give out certain hand-outs of information to groups and have the groups distill the information and present it to the class as a whole (if you get materials to me at least a day in advance, I can make photocopies or overheads). There are innumerable ways your group might go about involving the class. The essential purpose of the panels is to be creative. Try to make it fun.

### **The Panels:**

**Panel One** What do we mean by the term "modern"? "Post-Modern"? How have scholars defined these terms in America? In Latin America? In Africa? In Russia? Other countries? What is the difference between a "modern" novel and a "Post-modern novel"? And do works created in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century bring some other, new trait or concerns to the art?

**Panel Two** *McCondo & United States of Banana*. This panel will be responsible for doing research on the Latin American writers. You might look for biographical information on the writers and critical materials on their books. You might research Magic Realism and look into how these writers are intentionally commenting on it.

**Panel Three** *Three Bargains*. This group may take the same kind of approach as Panel Two, however focusing on Malik's cultural milieu and book. What literary trends of the 20<sup>th</sup> century does Malik's work resemble or break from? What cultural trends does her work explore, especially in terms of diaspora? In what ways does her work connect with traditional cultural traditions of India?

**Panel Four** *Trickster* Louis Owens is a good source of information on Many Native American writers and Native American literary traits and concerns. You might look at his book, *Other Destinies*, as a starting point for your research on Dembicki. Paula Gunn Allen is an excellent source for criticism that focuses on women's issues and feminist criticism.

**Panel Five** *The Road*. I highly recommend taking a look at a book called Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy, various writers on his work.

**Panel Six:** *The Dream Life of Sukhanov*. Begins your exploration by finding out about the author and her life. How does her work comment on contemporary Russian Culture? How does



her work bear traits of modernism? Post Modernism? Or even the kind of 21<sup>st</sup> Century tropes and traits pointed out in the work of other writers we have read so far and how their work is stamped by their time?

**Panel Seven** *Fish and Elephant* or *Blind Mountain*. The film has distinctly feminist themes. Incorporate an examination of feminism in china and how it relates to and differs from feminism in the West. What traditional cultural value systems such as Confucianism and Taoism have contributed to feminism in china or hindered its development. How do you see these ideas showing up in the film?

## Course Schedule English 262

### Week One ():

- Readings:
- Introductions, Writing Sample
- Review of Syllabus
- Un Chien Andalou* (Surrealist Film) and Modernism
- Panel group sign up, meeting and preparation
- Facilitator/Note-taker sign-up

### Week Two ():

- Readings: *McOndo*
- Reading Quiz Monday**
- Analytical Reading Response Due Monday
- Different critical approaches
- 1st Panel Group Presentation Tuesday
- Open discussion/preparation for seminars
- Seminar discussion Friday

### Week Three ():

- Readings: *United States of Banana*
- Open discussion/preparation for seminars
- 2nd Panel Group Presentation Wednesday
- Seminar discussion Friday

### Week Four ():

- Readings: *Three Bargains*
- Analytical Reading Response Due Monday
- Reading Quiz Monday**
- 3rd Panel Group Presentation Tuesday
- Open discussion/preparation for seminars
- Seminar discussion Friday

### Week Five ():

- Readings: *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*
- 4th Panel Group Presentation Monday .
- Open discussion and preparation for exam questions
- Mid-term Exam Wednesday and Thursday**

### **Week Six ():**

- Readings: *The Road*
- Reading Quiz Monday**
- Analytical Reading Response Due Monday
- 5th Panel Group Presentation Tuesday
- Open discussion/preparation for seminars
- Seminar discussion Friday

### **Week Seven ():**

- Readings: *We Need New Names*
- *The Africans, Part One* (Film Series with Ali Mazrui)
- Open discussion/preparation for seminars
- Seminar discussion Friday

### **Week Eight ():**

- Reading: *The Dream Life of Sukhanov*
- Reading Quiz Tuesday**
- Analytical Reading Response Due Tuesday
- 6th Panel Group Presentation Wednesday.
- Open discussion/preparation for seminars
- Seminar discussion Friday

### **Week Nine ():**

- Reading: *Fish and Elephant* or *Blind Mountain*
- Discussion of the film Wednesday, Thursday
- Open discussion/preparation for seminars
- Seminar discussion Friday

### **Week Ten ():**

- Reading: -Open discussion of any works not discussed so far
- Analytical Reading Response Due Monday
- Reading Quiz Monday**
- 7th Panel Group Presentation Tuesday.
- Open discussion

### **Week Eleven ():**

- Review
- Take-home portion of the final, Thursday, must be returned on Friday.

**Week Twelve** (March 18-20):

**Finals Week** The final is scheduled for Wednesday, March 21 from 8 to 10