ENGL 650.600 – Readings in 20th- and 21st-Century Literature
Spring 2016
Dr. Larry Oliver

As indicated in the course catalog, this course will explore English-language literary works of the 20th and 21st centuries, and will provide an introduction to current critical discussions in modern and postmodern literary studies in their historical and social contexts. Obviously, choosing a small group of texts as being representative of over a century of English-language literature is a challenging task. In order to give the course coherence and continuity, we will explore how the required readings engage various issues associated with being physically and/or psychologically connected to or removed from a particular place (sometimes troped as “roots” and “routes”). The primary works listed below invite a variety of critical approaches. However, our emphasis will be on race/ethnicity, postcolonial, and ecocritical approaches (without excluding other approaches). Though race/postcolonial and the eco theorists have viewed each other with suspicion in the past, there is a growing body of scholarship that attempts to bring them together under the broad concept of “justice.” We will begin with several essays on postcolonial, race/ethnicity, and ecocritical theory that will help establish a critical foundation and common vocabulary for the rest of the course. Our readings and discussions (and your research papers) will necessarily engage current critical conversations on such topics as indigeneity, borders, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, transatlantic and oceanic studies, and environmental justice and sustainability. You will practice close reading of the texts, giving due attention to matters of style and form. Major project will be a 12-15 page research paper and oral report. Primary readings will likely include Margaret Atwood, Oryx and Crake; W. E. B. Du Bois, Darkwater; J. M. Coetze, Waiting for the Barbarians; William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! Jhumpa Lahiri, The Lowland; Tim O’Brien, In the Lake of the Woods; Natasha Trethewey Native Guard; and Helena Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus.

This course will satisfy the English without Borders distribution requirement.