ENGL 650 – Readings in 20th- and 21st-Century Literature
Dr. Larry Oliver
Spring 2015

Description:

As indicated in the course catalog, this “readings” 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 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 various fields of study such as indigeneity, borders, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, transatlantic and oceanic studies, globalization, animals, and environmental justice and sustainability. We will also examine issues of genre, for as colonized peoples (including colonized US minorities) “wrote back” to the empire, they subverted, revised, or hybridized Eurocentric literary forms such as the pastoral. Of course, you will practice close reading of the texts, giving due attention to matters of style and form.

This course will satisfy the English without Borders distribution requirement.

Required Texts (tentative):

J. M. Coetzee, Disgrace
W. E. B. Du Bois, Darkwater
T. S. Eliot, The Wasteland
William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!
James Joyce, “The Dead”
Barbara Kingsolver, Flight Behavior
Toni Morrison, A Mercy
Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried and In the Lake of the Woods
Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things
Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony
Helena Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus