

Studies in World Literature

(ENGL 499.01; Abilene Christian University; Spring 2013)

Professor

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Course time and site

The class will meet 4:30 to 5:50 PM, Tuesday and Thursday, in CH 321.

Primary audience and prerequisites

Awarding three (3) credit hours, this course is designed to serve as the curriculum capstone for the English major. Senior English majors are the primary audience. Status as a senior-level student, therefore, is to be considered a prerequisite.

Course content

Studies in World Literature (ENGL 499) allows the designer of the course relatively wide latitude in his / her selection of texts. In the present semester, the designer has focused upon prominent writers of the twentieth century, often giving precedence to Nobel laureates.

Required textbooks

Akhmatova, Anna. *Poems of Akhmatova*. Trans. Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward.
New York: Mariner Books, 1973. Print. ISBN 0395860032.

Chang, Eileen. *Love in a Fallen City*. Trans. Karen S. Kingsbury. New York: New York Review of Books, 2007. Print. ISBN 1590171780.

Coetzee, J.M. *Disgrace*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. ISBN 0143036378.

Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
Print. ISBN 0691049866.

Kazantzakis, Nikos. *Zorba the Greek*. Trans. Carl Wildman. Touchstone Books. 3rd ed.
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. Print. ISBN 0684825546.

Mistral, Gabriela. *Madwomen*. Trans. Randall Couch. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008.
Print. ISBN 0226531902.

Naipaul, V.S. *An Area of Darkness*. New York: Vintage, 2002. Print. ISBN 0375708359.

Ōe, Kenzaburō. *Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness*. Trans. John Nathan. New York: Grove, 1977. Print. ISBN 9780802151858.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New York: Harper, 1997. Print. ISBN 0812979656.

Saramago, José. *Blindness*. Trans. Giovanni Pontiero. San Diego: Harvest, 1999. Print. ISBN 0156007754.

Soyinka, Wole. *Collected Plays 2*. New York: Oxford UP, 1975. Print. ISBN 0192811649.

Undset, Sigrid. *Gunnar's Daughter*. Ed. Sherrill Harbison. Trans. Arthur G. Chater. Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics. New York: Penguin, 1998. Print. ISBN 0141180641.

University mission statement

Abilene Christian University seeks to educate its students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

Course goals

Within the context of the University's larger mission, stated above, this course seeks to accomplish the following goals:

- Through primary readings: To expand the student's awareness of cultural distinctions, worldviews, and diverse aesthetic criteria throughout the world.
- Through secondary readings: To challenge the student to analyze the concept of "world literature" and to develop his / her definition of that concept.
- Through background research: To raise the student's awareness of the cultural assumptions that may influence the production, interpretation, and appreciation of literary texts.
- Through examinations and paper assignments: To enhance the student's skills of literary analysis, formal documentation, and written communication.
- Through in-class presentations: To render the student a more active learner, one who does original research and conveys findings to others in an efficient and engaging manner.
- Overall: To render the student a well-informed participant in global culture, competent to move smoothly across cultural divides.

Student-learning outcomes and means of achievement/demonstration

1. *Outcome:* Habits of mind that foster integrative thinking between the liberal arts core curriculum and their major field of study.

Achievement/demonstration: Students are required to research and compose a research paper that situates a selected literary work within the culture of its origin, including the artistic, historical, political, and scientific facets of that culture.

2. *Outcome:* Achievement and demonstration through advanced research and/or creative projects the ability to frame questions, carry out critical analysis, and produce work of substantial complexity and quality related to their chosen field of study.

Achievement/demonstration: In addition to the formal research paper, students are required to construct an in-class presentation, a creative project that both anticipates and answers questions a first-time reader of the author/text selected. The presentation must be comprised of image and text, while supplemented, where appropriate by music, artifacts, or audience participation.

3. *Outcome:* Reflect and demonstrate their ability to think critically, globally, and missionally about their discipline.

Achievement/demonstration: Students are required to compose a reflective paper on an assigned text in which critical insights, global implications, and faith-and-vocations questions are formulated and addressed.

Course procedure

The course will be conducted as a combination of lecture, student presentations, group discussion, and oral interpretation. Where appropriate, films and audio recordings will be used to supplement the assigned readings.

Classroom etiquette

Students are asked to silence phones and to refrain from using electronic devices for irrelevant purposes upon entering the classroom. Beverages are allowed, but students are asked to refrain from bringing food to class unless health issues are involved.

Grade weights

Discussion questions	10% of grade
In-class presentation	20% of grade
Reflective paper	10% of grade
Research paper	30% of grade
Journal	10% of grade

Midterm exam 10% of grade

Final exam 10% of grade

Discussion questions (10% of grade)

The student is asked to bring a discussion question to class, hand-written or typed, for consideration by the group. Ten (10) discussion questions will be required for the semester, each one on a different assigned literary text. A discussion question need not have a definitive answer; raising a significant issue of interpretation, of application, or of illustration is sufficient. In general, these questions should focus on *why?* or *what?* rather than upon *how many?* The goal in other words, is to create an open-ended question that will provoke thoughtful hypothesizing, not mere exercises in recall. Questions may be submitted to the professor in handwritten or in computer-generated form. No electronic submissions will be accepted. The question should be raised and submitted during the assigned time frame for the relevant literary work.

In-class presentation (20% of grade)

The student is required to make one (1) in-class presentation on a selected author from the required-reading list. This presentation should be offered during the time span allotted for the selected author. The discourse and information level should be designed to connect with first-time readers of the author / literary text under discussion. The in-class presentation, moreover, must embody at least three (3) of the five areas listed below:

Historical background

One area of background study that seems self-justifying and, thus, mandatory is an analysis of the historical period in which the literary work was composed. The New Historicist approach to criticism would likely add to that research a further analysis of the contemporary reader's time and culture, insisting on an exploration of the dynamic tension(s) between those two chronological windows. Complicating matters still further, a New Historicist would likely move on to consider his own placement in history and the influence of that placement upon his response to the text under study. However one might care to approach this particular element of background work, the presenter should clarify some of the relevant national events—political, economic, military, and other—that exerted an influence on the work's content. A random smattering of dates and historical time markers will not be particularly helpful to first-time readers. More needful is a pointed, pertinent discussion of the nation-shaping events a non-native reader would need in order to make the literary text more intelligible. An additional service one might provide for the untutored reader is a gesture toward some of the most helpful, dependable, and reader-accessible histories encountered in approaching this area of background research.

Biographical background

Authorial-biographical approaches to a literary work run the risk of becoming reductionist—i.e., the risk of compelling elements of the text, willy-nilly, to mirror prevalent events in the creator's life. Acknowledging that very real pitfall, one might still insist that an interpretive guide would be of great assistance to first-time readers were he or she to clarify some prominent life events that may well have shaped the work's content. The temptation for such a guide would be an overly broad presentation—i.e., an indiscriminate barrage of biographical data rather than a selection of key events for deeper treatment. The latter approach, of course, would be preferable. As regards the personality's writing life, some attempt should be made to provide an overview of the author's *oeuvre*, one would assume, so that the work under study may be situated within that larger corpus of work. Of additional help to uninformed readers would be some mention of the most important biographies of the author's life, including a brief exposition of any scholarly tensions or debates that exist between the biographers' interpretations and reconstitutions of that life. If there is a definitive biography—one upon which other biographers routinely rely—it should be identified. If several biographies appear to be equally authoritative, their titles should be provided.

Cultural background

Perhaps one of the most challenging areas of background research involves popular culture. To better conceptualize this shaping matrix of the literary work under study, one might ask, "What would the author have assumed his original audience knew?" That audience—comprised for the most part, one would naturally posit, of native speakers of the language and of compatriots—would have had access to a range of cultural associations the outsider lacks. Reconstituting this element of the text's background, therefore, demands an exploration of intertextuality (i.e., of the literary works of the same time period and culture with which the original audience would have been conversant), as well as an exploration of popular cultural life of the relevant era: entertainment, theater, music, and folklore. This background study, though admittedly difficult, is a necessary step in further establishing interpretive boundaries for the pursuit of thematic possibilities. First-time readers would benefit, no doubt, from even a rudimentary introduction to the tools with which that cultural background might be explored and, to the degree possible, reconstructed. Once again, a broad survey of cultural phenomena would likely be less helpful than a pointed, pertinent examination of a few text-related links to popular culture.

Critical background

An essential source of information when one is reconstructing the background of a literary work is contemporary reviews, which offer the perceptions of well-read critics who have served as the initial consumers

(a crass mercantile term, I realize) and evaluators of the text. Book reviews, appearing at the time of the work's original publication and penned by native speakers of the relevant language, may be difficult to find in English but are sometimes available as addenda in scholarly critical editions of a given title, as well as in edited compendia of critical essays. In addition, some book reviews may well have been penned in English by bilingual critics among the author's original, indigenous audience, so that translations are not always necessary. The goal in this type research, of course, is to access the understanding of well-versed insiders who initially engaged the work on its home ground. While the evaluative and interpretive opinions of such critics need not be accepted slavishly—or at all, for that matter—they can be utilized to form a more accurate impression of the work's original impact. Any access to such a review is helpful to the “outsider” reader, but accessing a multiplicity of voices, representing a multiplicity of opinions, is more beneficial still.

Generic background

The contextualization of a literary work, finally, entails an understanding of the relevant genre. How was the genre developing, in other words, at the time this particular work appeared, and what distinctive contributions (if any) to that development were made by the work? In addition, how was the genre's development in the relevant nation or culture distinct from larger, global developments in the genre? This kind of research is often encountered in scholarly introductions to a given text but can also be accessed in developmental histories of the specific genre under study. Clearly, the student will not have time to read broadly in contemporary examples of the genre—with the likely exception of works of poetry and with the possible exception of works of drama—but an accurate reconstruction of a text's background must offer some account of its situation in the larger, evolving genre that has rendered it a recognizable literary type. Literary genre histories, therefore, are probably the logical choice for one undertaking such research. It goes without saying that one might benefit most from a literary study that traces a given genre's development in the specific country in which the literary work originated.

The in-class presentation should last twenty (20) minutes and must be accompanied by a learning aid: a photocopied handout; an electronic collage of text and image; a selection of relevant music, accompanied by guidance on its application to the author / text; a selection of relevant artwork, also accompanied by some guidance for application to the author / text; or another, similar aid. These learning aids need not be highly involved or sophisticated—an inordinate amount of time, in other words, need not be invested—but should be helpful and memorable to the audience.

The presentation will be evaluated on the following criteria, in descending order of importance: (1) the quality and the pertinence of the information provided; (2) the quality, pertinence, and accessibility of the learning aid accompanying the mini-lecture;

and (3) the communicative effectiveness of the student's engagement with the task and with his / her audience. A sign-up sheet will be circulated early in the semester so that students may declare their interests in particular authors and titles.

Reflective paper on work of selected author (10% of grade)

Within two (2) weeks of the in-class presentation, the student is required to submit a reflective essay, probing his or her response to the literary work(s) connected with the author chosen for presentation. The purpose of the essay is to map one's interior topography and to survey the ways in which the relevant literary text(s) matched (or, better still, meshed with) the reader's emotive landscape. The style may be moderately informal, and, given the introspective nature of the assignment, no formal citation of research resources is required or desired, though informal references to pertinent popular links are certainly acceptable, welcome, and, possibly, needful. The primary goal of the essay is to determine the degree of otherness (or sameness) the reader encountered in his or her engagement with the selected author's work and to trace that reaction to its sources.

Some specific questions might be profitably raised: What values—ethical, artistic, or other—did the reader bring to the text(s) under study? How did the lived experiences of the author presented upon correspond (if at all) to the lived experience of the reader? To what degree was the author's vision—worldview, ethical stance, hierarchy of values—harmonious with the student's own? In short, why might this reading experience have elicited the response experienced? The student should feel no compulsion to offer uncritical praise, nor would a wholly negative response to the literary work be optimal. The goal here is to produce a thoughtfully subjective essay that oscillates between the reader's interior life and the conditions set by the selected text(s).

Finally, a required faith-and-vocation component is to be included in this reflection paper. Questions relevant to religious faith, spirituality, and orthodoxy are to be engaged: is there a discernible religious stance present in the work of this author? Is some form of non-doctrinaire spirituality present? Is there a recognizable orthodoxy (of whatever kind—doctrinal, creedal, cultic, or other) exerting an influence, positively or negatively, in the author's writing? Is your own faith flagrantly discordant or, perhaps, comfortably consistent with the religious dimension of the person and literature on which you focused your recent presentation? Has this literary encounter affected your own faith and sense of vocation? The required faith-and-vocation component in the reflection assignment may be lengthy or relatively brief, but it must be evident in the paper's body.

Responding to the above questions, this reflective essay should be typed and double-spaced, and it should be secured with a staple or paper clip before submission. Please include headers and page numbers. No electronic submissions will be accepted. Length: Four to five (4-5) pages. Due: Two (2) weeks after the in-class presentation.

Self-inventory journal

The student is required to conduct a skills-and-accomplishments inventory in the form of a personal journal. Specific topics to be addressed will be provided by the professor,

including, among others, self-assessment of the student's scholarship (research and creative activities), accomplishments, co-curricular activities, service, leadership, internships, integrative thinking, and general knowledge. Prior to its final submission, the journal will be checked periodically throughout the semester to ensure progress. It should be typed and double-spaced, and it should be secured with a suitable device before submission. Please include headers and page numbers. No electronic submissions will be accepted. Length: Twenty (20) pages.

Research paper (40% of grade)

The student is required to produce a scholarly introduction for one of the titles below, all of which were written by Nobel laureates. The discourse level of the introduction should be moderately formal; the student may wish to consult the kind of introductions provided by the Oxford World's Classics series or by the Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics series as examples. The tone may be personal (i.e., first-person pronouns with personal asides) or objective (third-person pronouns with textual explication only). Both types of discourse are found in published introductions, and either is acceptable here. Select one of these titles, then, to be read out of class, for this assignment:

Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*
 Albert Camus's *The Stranger*
 Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*
 Elfriede Jelinek's *Wonderful Wonderful Times*
 Yo Man's *Change*
 Herta Müller's *Traveling on One Leg*
 Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

A critical or scholarly introduction to a text provides varied types of contextual information, situating the literary work in the life and times of the author, as well as in the shaping matrices of the nation and culture from which it sprang. Issues of publication history are often handled, in addition, especially if there were (or are) complications involved in the work's textual transmission. Indications of thematic tensions and directions, moreover, are provided for the reader who feels the need of informed guidance in conceptualizing the ultimate message(s) and theme(s) conveyed by the author.

Textual evidence, carefully selected and non-exhaustive, will ordinarily accompany insights as to thematic emphases, allowing the inexperienced reader a glimpse of how critical analysis is accomplished. If the literary work has had a particularly telling impact upon its society, that fact is often explored in an introductory essay of this kind. Pertinent (though not exhaustive) references to criticism by contemporaries, both of the author and of the reader, may be touched upon. The research sources upon which the introduction has drawn, finally, are provided so that readers can pursue further study and document the conclusions reached in the introduction. A minimum of eight (8) outside research sources is required for this assignment.

The paper should be typed and double-spaced, and the documentation should be in accordance with the MLA system of documentation. The paper should be stapled or paper clipped for submission in class. No electronic submissions will be accepted. Length: Nine to ten (9-10) pages. Due: Week Thirteen.

Major exams (20% of grade)

Major exams will be designed in a collaborative effort between the professor and the students. The purpose of the exams is to allow the student an opportunity to clarify and formulate his or her response to the primary texts using interpretive principles provided by secondary readings.

The two major exams, the midterm and the final, will be out-of-class writing assignments. In each case, students will be given a quotation from Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* and be asked to respond to the scholar's assertion. The response will draw on several of the major works read for that unit of study, and several days will be allotted for its completion. For examinations, formal documentary procedure is unnecessary: a mere reference to title and author will be sufficient, and parenthetical page references will be dispensed with.

The exam papers will be dropped off at my office (Chambers 317) in hard copy—no electronic submissions, please—and should be stapled or paper clipped. While grammatical accuracy and felicitous phrasing are not all-important in this assignment, they are of at least some importance. More evaluative weight, however, will be given to the cogency of the interpretive argument being advanced. The student's personality will be warmly welcomed into this short essay; humor, barbed irony, self-deprecation, understatement, faint (or feigned) praise, and other verbal devices at which the writer is adept are appropriate here, as are encomium, affirmation, and advocacy. Due dates will be negotiated with students.

Grading scale for Department of English

A (Excellent)	100-91
B (Good)	90-81
C (Average)	80-71
D (Below average)	70-61
F (Failing)	60 and below

Grading standards for formal written work

Members of the department of English make a conscientious effort to apply these compositional criteria in grading a student's written work. If a student has a question about a score or grade, the faculty is committed to meeting privately with that student, if it is deemed helpful, to clarify the criteria on which the paper was evaluated, as well as to propose strategies for improvement on future assignments. The compositional criteria follow:

A paper Excellent / outstanding / fluent / thought-provoking / original.

This paper is a superior and carefully organized response to the assigned topic, each paragraph having a controlling idea and excellent supporting detail, the style fluent and the content thought provoking. There are few if any mechanical errors. The presentation shows thought and original insights on the part of the writer, independent of the teacher and/or text.

B paper Good / above average / clear / well organized.

This paper is a good response to the assigned topic, in which each paragraph has a controlling idea that is adequately supported by detail. The sentences are clear and show some variety. Mechanical errors are not distracting to the reader. The writer has mastered the material presented by the text and teacher.

C paper Average / adequate / competent / fair / unoriginal.

This paper is an adequate, routine response to the assigned topic. A central idea is stated, perhaps too generally, but it is more or less held to and supported in token fashion. The style is moderately clear and the mechanics reasonably competent. Errors in grammar, punctuation, usage, and organization do not seriously interfere with a reader's understanding of the paper.

D paper Below average / inadequate / ineffective / unclear / under-developed.

This paper is an inadequate response to the assigned topic, by reason of significant mechanical errors that make the communication ineffective, weaknesses of word choice, or insufficient support/understanding of the topic. There may be a stated controlling idea, but the relation of details to it is unclear.

F paper Failure / blocked communication / plagiarism or cheating / major errors / illiteracy / directions not followed / badly under-developed.

This paper is an altogether unacceptable response to the assigned topic, whether by failure of the writing, the thought, or both. The voice of the writer fails to appear because someone else's language has been appropriated or because gross errors have blocked communication. A controlling idea is not stated or, if stated, is incoherent or underdeveloped. Errors in diction may suggest illiteracy.

Late policy and make-up work

Papers submitted late will be penalized five (5) points per day late, including weekends and holidays. After a paper has accumulated a forty (40) point deficit, the late penalty will be frozen at that stage. The maximum score possible on such a paper is, of course, sixty (60), though this score is not assured. When the paper is eventually submitted, any

points deducted will reduce that figure accordingly. No late work will be accepted after the completion of the Final Exam.

A make-up for a missed exam is permissible, so long as the excuse is valid: illness, family crisis, personal dilemma, and so forth. When an exam is taken late, the student will be required to respond to an additional essay question. The make-up exam, in other words, will be slightly longer (only slightly) than the original. Students are asked to contact the professor when they have missed a scheduled exam and desire to make it up.

Attendance policy

To do well on exams and papers, auditing lectures and participating in open class discussions is a must. To encourage such interaction, the departmental attendance policy will be enforced with a paternal rigor: a student must be present for 80% of the class meetings. Six (6) absences in a T-R class format are allowable, but upon the seventh absence, a student may be legitimately dropped with a grade of WF. Substantial tardies will be deducted from the attendance quota, so students should take care to arrive in class on time. Two (2) substantial tardies will count as an absence. (A substantial tardy occurs when a student has missed a significant portion of the lecture or of an in-class activity that cannot be made up or repeated.)

Policy on dropping course

Students are reminded that Friday, April 12, is the last day for student-initiated withdrawal from a course. After that date, the course may not be dropped by at the student's discretion. Those who have simply ceased attending will be given a failing grade, not a "W." Students are encouraged to confer with the professor before dropping the course.

Academic integrity policy

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another's phrasing or writing, the presentation of that phrasing or writing as if it were one's own. Intentionally deceptive plagiarism will warrant a zero (0) on the assignment and possible disciplinary action at the university's administrative level. Unintentional plagiarism, too, will be penalized but less severely. Points may be deducted from an assignment in which unintentional plagiarism has occurred.

Academic dishonesty, such as cheating on an exam, will result in a zero (0) for the assignment and possible disciplinary action at the university's administrative level.

Violations of academic integrity and other forms of cheating, as defined in ACU's Academic Integrity Policy, involve the intention to deceive or mislead or misrepresent, and therefore are a form of lying and represent actions contrary to the behavioral norms that follow from the nature of God. Violations will be addressed as described in the Policy.

While the university enforces the Policy, the most powerful motive for integrity and truthfulness comes from one's desire to imitate God's nature in our lives. Every member

of the faculty, staff and student body is responsible for protecting the integrity of learning, scholarship, and research.

The full Policy is available for review at the Provost's office web site and the following offices: provost, college deans, dean of campus life, director of student judicial affairs, director of residential life education, and academic departments.

Matters of conscience and sensibility

Matters of conscience will be respected in this course. Should any student find an assigned reading objectionable on ethical or spiritual grounds, therefore, the instructor is completely willing to assign a substitute reading of similar length. The substitution will be handled privately and discreetly upon request by the student. Should a given text create emotional or psychological crisis, the student must alert the professor so that another work can be substituted.

The above provisos do not cover instances in which a student's theological, political, or ideological convictions are challenged by the assigned readings. A prominent component of higher education is a cultivation of tolerance and an understanding of those—in this case, published authors—with whom we disagree. The required works were not selected with an intention to “convert” the student to any particular viewpoint. They were most definitely selected, however, to challenge one's unexamined assumptions about the human experience.

Reading schedule

The following schedule will guide the order of reading. Students are responsible for the following titles and selections during the time frames listed. Should logistics require the alteration of this schedule, the student will be informed well in advance. When an assignment requires “selected poems,” it is the student's prerogative to choose several titles from the required collection.

Week One

What Is World Literature? (Damrosch 1-36, 110-44, 281-303).

Week Two

Poems of Akhmatova (read Introduction and selected poems).

Week Three

Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness: “The Day He Himself Shall Wipe My Tears Away” (Öe 3-110); “Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness” (Öe 171-219).

Week Four

Gunnar's Daughter.

Week Five

Disgrace.

Week Six

Disgrace.

Week Seven

Madwomen, by Gabriela Mistral (read Introduction and selected poems).

Week Eight

Zorba the Greek.

Week Nine

Zorba the Greek.

Week Ten

An Area of Darkness (Naipaul 1-84, 164-96, 199-233).

Week Eleven

The God of Small Things.

Week Twelve

Blindness.

Week Thirteen (research project due)

Blindness.

Week Fourteen

Love in a Fallen City: “Aloeswood Incense” (Chang 5-76); “Love in a Fallen City” (Chang 111-67).

Week Fifteen

Collected Plays 2: “The Trials of Brother Jero” (Soyinka 143-71); “Jero’s Metamorphosis” (Soyinka 173-213).

Week of Finals

Final exam: To be announced.