ENG 204 – World Literature, 17th Century to the Present
Tuesday & Thursday, 8:00 – 9:15 a.m.
Willard 219
Instructor: Dr. Rod Waterman
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Text: No assigned textbook. Individual texts to be distributed as handouts or electronically

Welcome to World Literature. This is a survey class with a very broad definition, and we will try to honor the intent of the class with our selection of reading materials in poetry and prose from a variety of cultures. The course catalog suggests and emphasis “on literatures other than British and American,” and we will indeed largely be reading literature in translation from other languages or by authors whose backgrounds are truly diverse and international. So while we will read occasional pieces from British and American authors for the purpose of context, the rest of our readings will have their origins in Asia, Africa, Russia and Eastern Europe.

It is impossible to generalize about a course whose title is “World Literature,” but it is not impossible to conceive of a rough thematic commonality among the materials we will be reading, and to that end we will be considering texts many of which are thematically linked around notions of home, exile and alienation. This is not to say that they all fall into this category and we will not try to force square pegs into round holes, but many of the texts we will read do circle around some of those general concerns.

Finally, no set textbook has been assigned for reasons that will be explained in class. Texts will be distributed through handouts or electronically as pdf documents transmitted via email. You should check your CCSU email accounts regularly for these documents and for other updates about the class.

Class Policies:
Attendance/Tardiness
Attendance forms part of the final grade. If you come to every class, you will ace that part of the grade. It’s like free money. Of course, there are always circumstances which arise from time to time that make it impossible for you to attend. Accordingly, you may miss up to three classes without penalty. However, attendance will be taken, so records of attendance will be kept. Needless to say, you may not sign in for someone else, nor may you have someone else sign in for you. That would be bad. Absences in excess of three classes will begin the process of nibbling away at your attendance grade. For every class you miss after three, there will be an incremental reduction in your attendance grade. However (and this is very important), missing a class does not eliminate or reduce the need for you to do the reading. If you miss a class, it is still your responsibility to do the reading, and it is also your responsibility to find out what happened in the class discussion. Also, you really can’t afford to be absent on days when an exam is scheduled. As far as tardiness is concerned, please try to avoid it if at all possible. If
you’re unavoidably late, please get to class as soon as you can. Above all, please do not disrupt the class if you are late. Please take your seat with as little disruption as possible. The class will start on time whether you’re there or not, and it will not stop when you arrive. If you enter as quietly as possible, the class can continue smoothly without being de-railed by your arrival.

**Participation**
Participation is also part of the final grade (it’s bundled with attendance). This is not to say that you have to be talking all the time and waving your hands in the air to get the instructor’s attention. Obviously, everyone is different. Some people don’t like to talk in class. You can participate by contributing comments to the discussion. You can also participate by paying attention to the discussion. Active non-participation (sleeping, zoning out, and conducting conversations outside of the discussion) will jeopardize your participation grade. I will, however, ask that you do the reading in advance of the class, and that you formulate and write down questions about the poems, and that you bring those questions to class. Those questions will form the basis of much of our conversations and discussions. Those questions will also form a part of your participation and attendance grade. The instructor will provide blue books for you to compose your questions and you should bring them to class and submit them at the end of each class. This will form a part of your participation grade.

**Classroom Etiquette**
The classroom should, ideally, be an oasis of civility and calm, away from all the noise in the rest of our lives. It’s where we talk about things that we don’t get the chance to talk about anywhere else, particularly in this case, where we will be considering material that you probably won’t see anywhere else in your lives. We get to talk about art, about ideas, about reading. This is a rare opportunity for us to engage in an activity that probably doesn’t happen in any other part of our day. So let’s try to give the class, and each other, the respect we all deserve. In other words, let’s be respectful to each other. That means not conducting any side conversations, whispered or otherwise. That means being on time (see attendance above). And it means conducting a conversation with as much respect for each other as possible. That doesn’t mean that all discussion has to flow through the instructor, but it does mean that we should try to achieve an engaging and fulfilling conversation with each other as we discuss these works of literature before us. It means that we listen to each other, and that we try to respond to the comments and the thoughts of others.

**Cellphones and Other Electronic Devices** This is connected to Classroom Etiquette above. PLEASE DO NOT USE YOUR CELLPHONES IN CLASS. In any way at all. Not to send text messages; not to check your Facebook page; not to tweet; not for any reason. During regular class discussion periods, you are asked merely to observe the simple courtesy of not using your phones or electronic devices. We are trying to foster an atmosphere of focused and intelligent consideration of literary history. We can’t do that properly if we’re texting our friends about how dull the instructor is. The instructor may well be very dull indeed, but we owe it to each other to suspend our urges for telecommunication for at least 75 minutes, at least twice a week. If we can’t do that, we’re probably doomed as a civilization.
Plagiarism
Plagiarism is bad. Don’t do it. Plagiarism, roughly defined, involves using someone else’s words, and passing them off as your own. This usually happens in papers and take-home exams. Sometimes it happens inadvertently, by not attributing quoted materials to their proper sources. Sometimes it happens more deliberately, when someone else’s writing is lifted wholesale and inserted into a paper. It’s usually fairly easy to tell when this has happened, because the plagiarized words sound a lot better than the words around them. That’s kind of a clue to the instructor. The penalty for plagiarism is severe. You’ll fail the assignment, which will probably mean that you’ll fail the class, since it’s hard to recover from losing a significant portion of your grade. It’s just not worth it. Plus, karma.

Study Methods:
Reading
We read all the time, even when we’re not quite aware of it. We read signs, instructions, advertisements, pamphlets, cereal boxes. But in this class we will be reading deliberately, and intensively. Reading can be hard, because it requires that we turn on as many of our sensors as possible. We won’t just be reading across the top of these texts; we’ll be reading into them, trying to understand what is happening on as many levels as possible. Some of those levels of reading include the following:

Sense
This might be the most basic reading level. What do the words mean, individually, and in the order in which we see them on the page. Who is speaking? What are they speaking about? To whom are they speaking? Are there things we don’t understand? How might be clarify that gap in our understanding? Is it merely that there are words we don’t recognize, or are there things happening that make no sense to us? All of this might seem relatively straightforward, but it is also a potentially deceptive activity – in other words, we might think we understand what is going on, but perhaps there is more going on than we realize initially. By the same token, we might think that we have no idea what is happening in a text, but perhaps we know more than we give ourselves credit for. We just have to remain patient, and keep working on our reading.

Context
There is always context for a piece of literature. Poems and stories never exist in a vacuum. Authors have histories; authors exist in history; they are social beings, produced and influenced by their circumstances. Those circumstances can be more or less important in informing our reading of a given text. We can add what we know about the author, and the historical circumstances of the literary work’s production, to our sense of the text, to our analysis of it.

Analysis
With analysis we move to the next level, after reading for a basic sense of “what is happening,” to try to determine what is going on behind the basic meaning. We do this by analyzing the way the language is organized; the way words live next to each other, what is left out, in addition to what is included.

Meaning
By analysis, we come closer to understanding the meaning(s) of a text. Notice the parenthetical(s) in that last sentence. This suggests that there may be more than one meaning in a given text. Does a poem only ever mean one thing? Is there a single answer to a poem or a story that
puzzles us? Probably not. There are almost always at least two meanings to any document we might read, particularly a literary document. Some meanings are more plausible than others. Some meanings are fairly unlikely. We have to talk about which meanings make more or less sense.

**Interpretation**

That’s where interpretation comes in. Having satisfied ourselves that we understand all of the words in a text; having analyzed the way the poem or story is organized; having arrived at meanings that make at least some sense, we are then in a position to come up with some kind of interpretation. This is our version, an intellectualized take, with justifications, close analysis, argument and examples, of what the text is really doing.

**A Reading**

If we can perform all of the tasks above, and come up with our own cogent articulation of as much as possible of what we think is going on in a given text, we have then performed **A Reading**, as distinct from “reading.” This is no mean feat, and something to be rather proud of. We will learn together how to do this. And, who knows, you may find that cereal boxes, pamphlets, advertisements and other stray pieces of text become more interesting once you really know how to read them closely.

**Assignments, Exams, and Grades:**

Exam I: (25%)
Exam II: (25%)
Exam III: Summative Response, Close Reading & Analysis (25%)
Participation (15%) & Attendance (10%) (See above)

**Class Schedule**

Class 1 (8/27): INTRODUCTION

Class 2 (8/29): Wordsworth/Hagiwara

Class 3 (9/3): Pound/Kitagawa

Class 4 (9/5): Wordsworth/Pound/Hagiwara/Kitagawa

Class 5 (9/10): Adichie

Class 6 (9/12): Adichie

Class 7 (9/17): Smith

Class 8 (9/19): Smith

DISTRIBUTE MIDTERM 1
Class 9 (9/24): MIDTERM 1 – City & Country/Home & Away

Class 10 (9/26): Kafka

Class 11 (10/1): Kafka

Class 12 (10/3): Kafka

Class 13 (10/8): Tolstoy

Class 14 (10/10): Tolstoy

Class 15 (10/15): Tolstoy

Class 16 (10/17): Tolstoy

DISTRIBUTE MIDTERM 2

10/22 & 10/24: No class – instructor at conference

Class 17 (10/29): MIDTERM 2 – HUMANITY, SELF & ALIENATION

Class 18 (10/31): Chekhov

Class 19 (11/5): Chekhov

Class 20 (11/7): Chekhov

Class 21 (11/12): Joyce

Class 22 (11/14): Joyce

Class 23 (11/19): Joyce

Class 24 (11/21): Joyce

NO CLASS WEEK OF THANKSGIVING

Class 25 (12/3): REVIEW & EVALUATION; DISTRIBUTION OF FINAL EXAM

Class 26 (12/5): FINAL EXAM - SUMMATIVE