

*WMS350/ENG385*  
*CONTEMPORARY WOMEN NOVELISTS OF THE AMERICAS*  
Spring 2005  
Wednesdays 4:00-6:45 p.m.

Dr. Donna M. Bickford  
dbi6066u@postoffice.uri.edu  
874-4620/874-5150  
Office Hours: Wednesday 2:00-3:00, Thursday 2:00-3:00, and by appointment  
Office Location: Roosevelt #315

This course is designed to broaden our understanding of "America" to include not only the United States but also Canada, the Caribbean, and Latin America. We will look at novels by women writers from the entire American continent as a way to explore the commonalities and differences that exist in this body of work. Topics we will consider might include the construction of the female body, sexuality and desire, motherhood, exile and immigration, women and work, women and creative production, women and social activism, and women and our relationship to nation-states.

We will begin by establishing a critical framework based on postcolonial feminist theory. This theoretical approach considers the politics of "doing" transnational comparative literary criticism. We will discuss issues of assimilation, appropriation, language, and global feminisms. These readings and discussions are intended to give us a common vocabulary and shared understanding of what is at stake in our work this semester.

This class requires a considerable amount of active and sustained participation and engagement. The majority of our class time will be spent in small learning groups and whole class discussion. My definition of class participation does not include merely showing up for class. It does include asking questions and making observations that demonstrate our reading assignments have been completed, sharing experiences, and thoughtfully responding to the ideas offered by your classmates, the authors we read, and/or me. It is important for us to take responsibility for our own learning, as well as teaching and learning from each other.

I strongly encourage you to visit the Writing Center (fourth floor, Roosevelt Hall) at any point in the semester. Call 874-4690 for an appointment. Experienced writing tutors will help you with any and all stages of your writing projects, including brainstorming paper topics, developing research strategies, organizing your thoughts, incorporating evidence from the text, and improving your usage of grammatical concepts. Please note that tutors will *not* edit or proofread your papers for you – rather, they will help you polish your own editing and proofreading skills. I expect you to produce college-level writing for this course; please be aware that my particular pet peeves are spelling errors and sentence fragments!

**TURN YOUR CELL PHONES OFF DURING CLASS TIME.** If you have an emergency situation that requires you to have your phone on, advise me in advance of class.

I encourage any student with a documented disability to contact me at the beginning of the semester so that we may work in conjunction with Disability Services for Students to support your success in this course. Disability Services for Students is located in the Office of Student Life, 330 Memorial Union, 874-2098.

\*\*\*Regular attendance is required. Please be on time: I find tardiness both rude and disruptive. Excessive absenteeism and excessive tardiness (more than two instances) will affect your grade. **If you miss four or more classes for any reason, you cannot earn a passing grade in this class.** Keep track of your own absences. You are responsible for any material covered and assignments due when you are not in class. I strongly recommend that you trade phone numbers and email addresses with several classmates so you have a resource in case you do miss class.\*\*\*

Our class meets for 2 hours and 45 minutes. We will take a short break about halfway through. Otherwise, please refrain from leaving the room during our class time unless you have an unexpected emergency.

All assignments are to be submitted **in class** on the dates specified below. I do not accept late papers/projects. **Do not** skip class and drop them off in my office. And, be aware that I **do not** consider computer or printer problems an appropriate reason for late submissions; they are simply an indication that you failed to plan properly. There is a significant amount of flexibility built in to your choice of assignments and submission deadlines. Thus, I am not inclined to make exceptions. However, if you have an extraordinary and serious personal trauma or medical emergency that you think warrants an extension, please see me privately.

If you need to submit an assignment via email for some *approved* reason, I must receive the assignment *in advance* of our class meeting time. **Do not** send me attachments.

All written assignments are to be word-processed (no handwritten submissions will be accepted), 10-12 pt. font, proofread, and spell-checked. **Use staples.** Avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is taking anyone else's words or ideas and presenting them as your own without quotation marks (if you are quoting directly from the text), or without giving credit to the author (if you are paraphrasing or summarizing), or without documenting your source. Plagiarism is a violation of University regulations, as well as unethical, and can lead to a failing grade in the course or dismissal from URI.

I encourage you to come see me during office hours to ask questions, talk about your interests or concerns, or just chat. Also, please feel free to email me.

Here are the **texts** we will use. Make sure you purchase all the texts before mid-semester as they may not be available in the bookstore after that time. We will read one novel per week, so plan accordingly.

Claribel Alegria, *Ashes of Izalco*  
 Isabel Allende, *Of Love and Shadows*  
 Julia Alvarez, *In The Time of the Butterflies*  
 Rosario Castellanos, *The Nine Guardians*  
 Rosario Ferré, *The House on the Lagoon*  
 Linda Hogan, *Power*  
 Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*  
 Kyoto Mori, *Stone Field, True Arrow*

Jane Rule, *Memory Board*  
 Lee Smith, *The Last Girls*  
 Alice Walker, *Meridian*

See **Course Assignments** and **Contract** for a discussion about how you will earn your grade.

READING/DISCUSSION SCHEDULE:

January 19:

Introduction  
 Ferre, “The Youngest Doll” (handout)

January 26:

Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others”  
 Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Scholarship through  
 Anticapitalist Struggles” (handouts)

**Indigenous Perspectives**

February 2:

Castellanos, *The Nine Guardians*  
 DUE: Signed Contract

February 9:

Hogan, *Power*

**Women’s Places**

February 16:

Smith, *The Last Girls*

February 23:

Walker, *Meridian*

Note: If you’ve chosen to take a mid-term, your proposed questions are due to me no later than February 27.

March 2:

Mori, *Stone Field, True Arrow*

March 9:

Rule, *The Memory Board*

March 16:

NO CLASS. Spring Break. Have fun, and please be safe.

**Coming-To-Consciousness**

March 23:

Allende, *Of Love and Shadows*

### Oppositional Histories

March 30:

Kogawa, *Obasan*

April 6:

Alegria, *Ashes of Izalco*

April 13:

Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*

April 20:

Ferre, *The House on the Lagoon*

April 27:

I've factored in a free class period in case of snow days or other problems. We'll readjust accordingly as required.

May 4:

Last Day of Class

Film: *Isabel Allende: The Woman's Voice in Latin American Literature*

DUE: Any assignments yet to be submitted. Remember that you can only submit one assignment per class period.

Note: University Manual 8.51.17 All work for courses, including term papers but excepting final examinations, shall be completed by the final class meeting.

### COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

In the spirit of responding to Paulo Freire's call to subvert authoritarianism in the educational process, and by invoking a practice sometimes referred to as "contract grading," I offer you the opportunity to participate in deciding how your work in our course will be assessed. Since--as Freire notes--reducing authoritarianism does not mean abdicating authority and pedagogical responsibility, I have designed the assignments that each of you will complete. **You** may decide what percentage of your grade will attach to each assignment. You will complete the Course Contract, sign it, and **return it to me no later than February 2**. I will sign it and return a copy to you during the following class meeting. I hope that this opportunity will encourage you to identify and capitalize on your individual strengths and interests. I also hope you will use it to challenge or motivate you to expand your comfort zone through these different modes of participation. Participation in our class discussions and activities will count for 10% of your grade.

Here are the only rules:

- Every student must complete at least three of the four possible assignments.
- You must assign a minimum percentage of 10% for each assignment; increments of 5% can be assigned thereafter.
- No more than one assignment can be submitted on any one day. This rule is designed to encourage you to space out your projects!!

### **Paper of Comparative Literary Analysis and Criticism:**

This is a 5-7 page paper of comparative literary analysis and criticism. It requires you to look at a minimum of two of the literary texts we read in a comparative way. You will need at least two outside sources; use MLA style for in-text citation and your works cited page. Your paper proposal, due at least two weeks prior to submission of your paper, should identify the texts you plan to use and give me some sense of your general approach or argument. Your dated and approved paper proposal must be attached to your completed paper.

### **Context Report:**

The context report consists of an oral presentation and a reflective essay. Context reports will be done in groups. Feel free to self-select your own group and advise me of its members; otherwise, I will place class members in a group. Early in the semester I will circulate a sign-up sheet where you can select the text on which your group would like to present. These presentations are intended to provide the social, cultural, and/or political context for the novel we will read. You are *not* asked to engage in literary analysis in your context report. Rather, imagine that the context report will give us some of the tools we need as a class to practice such analysis. I anticipate that the total presentations will take 15-20 minutes of our class time. The group will submit a written copy of the notes used for the presentation to me at the beginning of class. In addition, each group member will submit an individual reflective essay (1-2 page). This reflective essay is due the class period after your oral presentation. This essay will allow you to think about the learning process you've experienced in this assignment. You might think about whether anything you learned surprised you, how what you learned helped clarify the text, whether your research provided additional insight or a new angle or viewpoint from which to understand the text, etc. You might choose to tell me how your group divided up the work, and what, if anything, you achieved through the group process.

### **Activism Project:**

“It has become a common feeling, I believe, as we have watched our heroes falling over the years, that our own small stone of activism, which might not seem to measure up to the rugged boulders of heroism we have so admired, is a paltry offering towards the building of an edifice of hope. Many who believe this choose to withhold their offerings out of shame. This is the tragedy of our world. For we can do nothing substantial toward changing our course on the planet, a destructive one, without rousing ourselves, individual by individual, and bringing our small, imperfect stones to the pile.”

Alice Walker

“A raised consciousness that goes nowhere is painful to the possessor and not particularly useful to the future of womankind.”

Claudia Dreifus

The activism project consists of an act of dissent and a reflective essay. Many of the authors we will read describe their writing as an activist project. Many of the protagonists in the novels are themselves involved in acts of dissent, acts designed to achieve social change. This assignment is intended to allow you the opportunity to imagine and participate in the connection between literature and social change, to offer your own “small stone” to our world. I ask you to engage in an act of dissent that is *related in some way* to the literature we are reading this semester, and to reflect on it in a 2-3 page essay. You may choose to work individually or you may form a group with some of your classmates. You will submit a proposal describing your project to me at least two weeks before you plan to complete your act of dissent. This dated and approved proposal must be attached to your reflective essay, which is due within one week of the completion of your activism. This post-activism essay allows you the opportunity to reflect back on the experience. Was the act successful or not, in your opinion? What, if anything, did you learn from it? How did performing the act of dissent make you feel? How can reading literature inspire activism? What different questions does the performance of activism bring to our reading of texts, or how does it shape our approach to literature?

#### **Mid-Term Exam:**

You may choose to take a mid-term exam as one of your possible course assignments. This will be a take-home essay exam. You will submit three possible essay questions to me no later than February 27 (these may be submitted by email). I may choose to include your questions in the exam, or I may choose to write questions of my own. The mid-term exam will be provided to you at the end of class on March 2. Your completed exam (word-processed, proofread, stapled, etc.) is due to me at the beginning of class on March 9. You are still responsible for reading the novel we will discuss on March 9.

As you can see, these assignments require you to plan ahead in order to meet assignment requirements, but there is a considerable amount of flexibility. If you are having trouble figuring out how to accomplish any of the assignments, or how to schedule your time, feel free to come and see me so we can talk about it.

## **CONTRACT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the descriptions of the assignments in the **Course Assignments** provided to me, and I agree to have my work assessed according to the following percentages:

Paper of Comparative Literary Analysis and Criticism \_\_\_\_\_%

Context Report \_\_\_\_\_%

Activism Project \_\_\_\_\_%

Mid-Term Exam \_\_\_\_\_%

Participation in Class Discussion and Activities **10%**



Remember these rules:

- Every student must complete at least three of the four possible assignments; you may, of course, choose to complete all four.
- You must assign a minimum percentage of 10% for each assignment; increments of 5% can be assigned thereafter.
- No more than one assignment can be submitted on any one day. This rule is designed to encourage you to space out your projects!!



TOTAL MUST EQUAL 100%.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Instructor Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date