

### Reading:

Nothing's changed: Reading is what we do in this class, plus talking about our reading, and the hits just keep on coming, all semester long, all year long. The reading assignments are again ambitious though not unreasonable, presuming you have done the Christmas break reading. With the *Brothers K* under your belt, you can start reading the magical realism novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as we discuss Dostoevsky and thus keep ahead of the law all semester long. There is a good chunk of reading scheduled for Spring/Easter Break--365 pages of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but this should prove fun reading. Once again, the schedule anticipates *daily* reading, not the every-other-day of the 2-4-6 schedule, and also counts weekends as reading days. Some selections are a little shorter, either because they're self-contained in a smaller package--Chekhov, the O'Connor stories--or because the philosophy and anthropology will be a little slower going.

### Group Elective Books:

In addition to the books all of us read in common, you'll each be required to choose a book that is not on the reading list for either semester. There's safety in numbers, so we'll make these choices together: 4-5 groups of about 3-4 students reading each book. The books should be moderate in length, and I'm willing to negotiate some deals, such as a selection of Chaucer's stories from *Canterbury Tales*, a couple of plays from one of our volumes, etc. Let's decide on these groups soon – by the second week of classes. Each group will spend about twenty minutes talking to the class about its book in early-April, a few weeks after Easter.

### Writing & Responding:

In addition to an 8-10 page essay near the end of the semester, each of you will write five shorter "essays," all for shared reading and response in a public folder. (We'll switch from our summer Google Group to the Moodle course system and hope that works for us.) I have divided the class into six groups for these essays:

Group A: Nicole, Dani, Zach

Group B: Bruce, David R, Caitlin

Group C: Kaelly, Alyssa, Mya, Doug

Group D: Sara, Dan, Andrew

Your sworn duty on days when your group's code letter appears on the schedule is to post to the Moodle Forum by 9 PM the night before class an "essay" addressing the book to be discussed the next day. Essays will be some 300-500 words, longer if you are inspired. By "essay" I mean still something more akin to the original French meaning of the word *essai* – a trial or attempt – than an academic exercise. An essay in this sense can be tentative and exploratory rather than a composition asserting a thesis. Your essay may propose a topic for discussion or it may respond to previous writing and/or discussion on this book, connecting this with the new reading or new ideas. While essays can be exploratory in character rather than locked-down defenses of a thesis, they should still be reflectively coherent and not stream-of-consciousness musings. They should evince careful thought and delight, inspire or provoke your classmates.

Each of us swears to read each classmate's essay before class. I also expect you to use the Moodle Forums to comment on either these essays or class discussion by posting brief responses from time to time. These can be more spur-of-the-moment (though voluntary brilliant disquisitions are not outlawed). Feel free to post comments you couldn't get in during class or any other worthy reflection, factoid, witty repartee or other *bon mot*. If some in *Decameron* reminds you of your Aunt Sally or your Uncle Harry is more cantankerous than anyone in the Buendía family, let us know. Let's say that a dozen or so of these random responses to the forums during the course of the semester will constitute a minimal expectation of good participation on this front. I will try to respond to the essays *tout ensemble* each day.

## Final Essay:

By the end of the term, you will have written a longer essay (2400-3500 words) that is polished, insightful, brilliant, perhaps profound, certainly literate, possibly creative – in short, a wowie-kazowie essay. This essay should treat at least one of the books we have read together during the semester. You are free to trace an idea or character-type, dilemma, theme or trope through several works or focus on one particular work. In late April (28-30) we will gather in groupings of 3-5 students (determined by schedules), plus me, at the Local Blend coffee shop for session to discuss each paper. It won't be snowing this time, although I'd better not guarantee that. You will email your essay to me and the others in your reading session by 6 PM on the day before we meet. We will all come to the coffeehouse with comments prepared on each paper. No class on April 29 to help with this scheduling. (I preferred the previous week, but it's "Scholarship & Creativity Day" and some of you may be involved with that). I'm also hoping all theses are long-done by April 28-30.

## Objectives:

Educational experts claim that no learning can ever take place unless clear objectives are established. Clarity of objectives is one of the five sacred *topoi* of the CSB/SJU course evaluation ritual. Even though these claims may be hoey, we will please the authorities and establish some objectives: to read some fifteen great books and have thirty-some equally great discussions about them. Our intended outcomes are intelligence, wit, humor and wisdom, as well as cultivating a vital and interactive acquaintance with the writers, thinkers, and artists who wrote these books, as well as with one another as readers of them.

## Method, Attendance and Other Expectations:

In philosophy classes, I start this section of the syllabus with a Nietzsche quote about “slow reading.” Not so here! For the reading you will have to stay on a regular schedule, keeping the habit of having a book beside your favorite chair, in your backpack, somewhere at hand. Class will not primarily be teacher-led, but be dominated by you in various modes of discussion: small and large group, perhaps with a gimmick here or there to shake us up. Good discussion doesn't just happen: you will have to work on it, and that means that from time to time we may talk about how to organize ourselves. I will not lecture – maybe a mini-commentary here or there on some particular topic. This is a special class and I will expect that discussions be more substantive and reach more profound levels than in other classes, even other honors classes. That does not mean that everything you say will be brilliant: many false steps and even patently obvious steps are needed for any steps eventually to find fruitful avenues of thought among the books we're tackling.

Here is the place for a reminder about the best approach to books. We will aim always to be *generous* readers, not just intelligent or critical readers. A generous reader – of the books as well as of one another's essays and comments – always assumes that the text in question has something of real value to convey. If a text doesn't click right away or seems boring or even repugnant, think to yourself, “But this author threw herself into this work with all her energy and passion.” Assume that the author considered an idea to be so important that he dedicated a significant portion of his life to getting it right in his novel or poem or play or essay. A generous reader realizes that he or she owes it to the author to try to unlock what's great in the work at hand. And that goes for our own writings and discussion comments: read one another with the generosity and respect with which you'd like to be read yourself. It will open up discussion and insight rather than close it down. And be generous to yourself as well: if you don't immediately “get” a particular book, respect your own intelligence and sensibility and assume that this author wanted you to be moved to think or feel in various ways and be patient enough with yourself to try to discover a way in – the class is designed to help one another here.

**Attendance:** As always, I have strict attendance policies: no free misses. None, zilch, nil, nada. All absences are to be cleared with me, preferably ahead of time. I consider only illnesses and family emergencies to be valid excuses – regular doctor appointments should be scheduled at times outside of class time. If in unusual circumstances, something else comes up – the sooner you can let me know about a conflict, the better. If you miss class without communicating or by neglect, your grade will suffer.

### Your Commitments:

- Attend every class meeting.
- Read faithfully all book assignments and electronic forum essays by the due date.
- Participate in every small-group and large-group discussions.
- Write very good public folder essays by the designated time and other responses as described.
- Write an A quality final essay, again in time to share it prior to your assigned session.
- Attend extracurricular class events (see below) insofar as possible.

**Grading:** You should all expect to receive A's in this class. Given that expectation and the ability and commitment you've already manifested, I am ready and willing to comply with your desires (referring only to grades here!) so long as you live up to your hype. Several previous Great Books teachers have warned me that it's very possible, even likely, for Great Books students to take on too much and let the class responsibilities slide a bit, including not only reading schedule but quality of essays and class participation. I don't want cultivate the usual "grade consciousness" but instead "grade unconsciousness" and focus instead on quality consciousness and idea consciousness. Thus, I won't grade individual essays, but will visit with you if your work – public folder essays, final essay, discussion participation – is below the expectations for A level work, and I won't be shy about this. For the final paper, if it's not A quality when we have our group meetings, I will expect you to revise it based on the group's critique (as well as mine), and re-submit it as an A paper. I'd like to give all A's and hope that I can. But I won't compromise standards.

### Extracurriculars:

All work and no play makes Jack and Jill dull children. I'd like to carry on the tradition of carrying on outside of class to the extent that this is possible. We may need to draft or elect a social commissar, but here are some starter suggestions:

- Let's make a real effort this semester to get together for some games of intellectual pretension like Trivial Pursuit, Pictionary, Balderdash, Catch-Phrase, Fact or Crap, Bananagrams. So, sometime soon, in some lounge or apartment or house???
- I've scheduled one movie for March 6, a Thursday, and I'm hoping we can arrange that. If we go movie and discussion, we can cancel class on Friday the 7th. And if something else decent comes to town, maybe we can make an excursion.
- If we're up for it, a play in the Cities. [Theater in the Round](#) is doing *Henry V*, with a heroic but hardened Prince Hal grown into King Henry V--maybe Sara will sell us on that. [The Guthrie](#) has a Wendy Wasserstein play, Shakespeare's *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream*, and August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* (this opens late in April). Or we could take advantage of [Theatre de la Jeune Lune's](#) new "Anytime Rush" that sells tickets to all shows to those under 25 for \$9 a show. They've only got one show, *Fish Tank*, and it will be a high-energy, multi-dimensional, commedia dell'arte show (music, dance, comic sketches, images, poetry...).

Great Book/Great Ideas, Spring Semester 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
January 14 <sup>1</sup>	15 <sup>2</sup> Dostoevsky: <i>Brothers Karamazov</i> , I	16 <sup>3</sup>	17 <sup>4A</sup> Dostoevsky: <i>Brothers Karamazov</i> , II	18 <sup>5</sup>
21 <sup>6B</sup> Dostoevsky: <i>Brothers Karamazov</i> , III	22 <sup>1</sup>	23 <sup>2C</sup> Dostoevsky: <i>Brothers Karamazov</i> , IV	24 <sup>3</sup>	25 <sup>4D</sup> García Márquez, <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> , 1-14
28 <sup>5</sup>	29 <sup>6A</sup> García Márquez, <i>100 Years of Solitude</i> , end	30 <sup>1</sup>	31 <sup>2B</sup> Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , I	February 1 <sup>3</sup>
4 <sup>4C</sup> Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , II-III	5 <sup>5</sup>	6 <sup>6D</sup> Austen, <i>Emma</i> , 1-18	7 <sup>1</sup>	8 <sup>2A</sup> Austen, <i>Emma</i> , 19-36
11 <sup>3</sup>	12 <sup>4B</sup> Austen, <i>Emma</i> , 36-55	13 <sup>5</sup>	14 <sup>6C</sup> Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> , I-II.6	15 <sup>1</sup>
18 <sup>2</sup> no class (Dennis in Mpls)	19 <sup>3</sup>	20 <sup>4D</sup> Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> , finish	21 <sup>Long Weekend</sup>	22 <sup>Long Weekend</sup>
25 <sup>5</sup>	26 <sup>6A</sup> Hardy, <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> , 1-24	27 <sup>1</sup>	28 <sup>2B</sup> Hardy, <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> , 25-39	29 <sup>3</sup>
March 3 <sup>4C</sup> Hardy, <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> , finish	4 <sup>5</sup>	5 <sup>6D</sup> Chekhov, <i>Uncle Vanya</i>	6 <sup>1</sup> film: <i>Vanya on 42nd Street</i>	7 <sup>2</sup> discussion of film
10 <sup>3</sup>	11 <sup>4A</sup> O'Connor, <i>Stories</i> (on syllabus)	12 <sup>5</sup>	13 <sup>6B</sup> O'Connor, <i>Stories</i> (on syllabus)	14 <sup>1</sup>
17 <sup>Easter Break</sup>	18 <sup>Easter Break</sup>	19 <sup>Easter Break</sup>	20 <sup>Easter Break</sup>	21 <sup>Easter Break</sup>
24 <sup>Easter Break</sup>	25 <sup>2</sup> Boccaccio, <i>Decameron</i> : Days 1-4	26 <sup>3</sup>	27 <sup>4C</sup> Boccaccio, <i>Decameron</i> : Days 5-6	28 <sup>5</sup>
31 <sup>6D</sup> Boccaccio, <i>Decameron</i> : Days 7-8	April 1 <sup>1</sup>	2 <sup>2A</sup> Boccaccio, <i>Decameron</i> : Days 9-10	3 <sup>3</sup>	4 <sup>4B</sup> Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , Essay I
7 <sup>5</sup>	8 <sup>6</sup> Group Books I	9 <sup>1</sup>	10 <sup>2</sup> Group Books II	11 <sup>3</sup>
14 <sup>4C</sup> Rousseau, <i>Discourse/Origin of Inequality</i> I	15 <sup>5</sup>	16 <sup>6D</sup> Rousseau, <i>Discourse/Origin of Inequality</i> II	17 <sup>1</sup>	18 <sup>2</sup> Levi-Strauss, <i>Tristes Tropiques</i> , 1-4
21 <sup>3</sup>	22 <sup>4</sup> Levi-Strauss, <i>Tristes Tropiques</i> , 5-6	23 <sup>Scholarship &amp; Creativity Day</sup>	24 <sup>5</sup>	25 <sup>6</sup> Levi-Strauss, <i>Tristes Tropiques</i> , 7-9
28 <sup>1</sup>	29 <sup>2</sup> No class: papers	30 <sup>3</sup>	May 1 <sup>4</sup> Mamet: <i>American Buffalo</i> (Drama book)	2 <sup>5</sup>
5 <sup>6</sup> Sophocles: <i>Philoctetes Greek Tragedies</i> , vol. 3	8 <sup>Study Day</sup>	9 <sup>Exams Day 1</sup>	10 <sup>Exams Day 2</sup>	11 <sup>Exams Day 3</sup>

**Great Books – Spring Semester 2008** (The letter of the group to post is listed for each day's reading)

**Family Matters**

1. January 15 (T<sup>2</sup>): Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Part I (1880, Russian).
2. January 17 (Th<sup>4</sup>): *The Brothers Karamazov* II, **Group A posts by 9 PM.**
3. January 21 (M<sup>6</sup>): *The Brothers Karamazov*, III, B.
4. January 23 (W<sup>2</sup>): *The Brothers Karamazov*, IV, C.
5. January 25 (F<sup>4</sup>): Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Colombian, 1967), chs. 1–14, D.
6. January 29 (T<sup>6</sup>): *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, finish, A.
7. January 31 (Th<sup>2</sup>): Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, “The Window” (British, 1927), B.
8. February 4 (M<sup>4</sup>): *To the Lighthouse*, finish, C.

**Women in Love and Trouble**

9. February 6 (W<sup>6</sup>): Jane Austen, *Emma*, Vol. I (chs. 1–18), (British, 1816), D.
10. February 8 (F<sup>2</sup>): *Emma*, Vol. II (chs. 19–36), A.
11. February 12 (T<sup>4</sup>): *Emma*, Vol. III (chs. 37–55), B.
12. February 14 (Th<sup>6</sup>): Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, I–II.6 (French, 1857), C.
13. February 18 (M<sup>2</sup>): No Class: I have a SJU Board Executive Committee meeting in Minneapolis
14. February 20 (W<sup>4</sup>): *Madame Bovary*, finish, D.
15. February 26 (T<sup>6</sup>): Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, (British, 1891), Phases 1–3 (I–XXIV), A.
16. February 28 (Th<sup>2</sup>): *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Phases 4–5A (chs. XXV–XXXIX), B.
17. March 3 (M<sup>4</sup>): *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Phases 5B–7 (chs. XL–LV), C.

**Knowing Laughter**

18. March 5 (W<sup>6</sup>): Anton Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya* (Russian, 1899), D.  
  
March 6: Movie, *Vanya on 42nd Street*
19. March 7 (F<sup>2</sup>): discussion of movie.

20. March 11 (T<sup>4</sup>): Flannery O'Connor, Short Stories: “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” “Greenleaf,” “Revelation” (American, 1953–1965), A.
21. March 13 (Th<sup>6</sup>): O'Connor, “A Temple of the Holy Ghost,” “Good Country People,” “The Enduring Chill,” “Parker's Back,” B.

**Easter Break: March 17–25**

22. March 25 (T<sup>2</sup>): Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, Days 1–4 (Italian, 1353).
23. March 27 (Th<sup>4</sup>): *Decameron*, Days 5–6, C.
24. March 31 (M<sup>6</sup>): *Decameron*, Days 7–8, D.
25. April 2 (W<sup>2</sup>): *Decameron*, Days 9–10, A.

**How Did We Get this Way?**

26. April 4 (F<sup>4</sup>): Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay I (German, 1887), B.
27. April 8 (T<sup>6</sup>): Group Books I
28. April 10 (Th<sup>2</sup>): Group Books II
29. April 14 (M<sup>4</sup>): Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Letter to Republic of Geneva, Preface & Part I (French, 1754), C.
30. April 16 (W<sup>6</sup>): *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Part II, D.
31. April 18 (F<sup>2</sup>): Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, Parts I–IV (French, 1955).
32. April 22 (T<sup>4</sup>): *Tristes Tropiques*, Parts V–VI.  
  
Scholarship and Creativity Day — April 23
33. April 25 (F<sup>6</sup>): *Tristes Tropiques*, Parts VII–IX.
34. April 29 (T<sup>2</sup>): No class (paper meetings)

**In and Out of Trouble**

35. May 1 (Th<sup>4</sup>): Mamet, *American Buffalo* (American, 1976).
36. May 5 (M<sup>6</sup>): Sophocles, *Philoctetes* (Greek, 409 BCE).