

This course is a complete indulgence for me, and if it is to succeed, it needs to be that for you too. Odd, difficult books, by out of the way people, many of them; and if not, then still not the expected product (not *The Duino Elegies*, not *Wide Sargasso Sea*). Things I've mostly read and re-read over many years (well over 40 in the case of *Under the Volcano* and *Malte*, almost as many with the William Gass and the Hofmannsthal). All prose, and prose of all kinds. My old belief that the best writing is unexpected or unclassifiable. My dream of a 20th C. humanities course that will play to poets and fiction writers alike.

May I say to you, very earnestly, that if you don't fancy it, or it doesn't really interest you, or frightens you, or isn't useful to you, or you don't have proper time to give to it, then please let me know early. There are other forms courses down the pike in poetry, Padgett Powell is teaching one in prose, next semester Sidney Wade teaches her last-ever translation forms in poetry. There may be more helpful classes for you elsewhere beyond that (including maybe even others from me). I won't be upset. Or put it this way, I'll be much more upset if you stick with this, don't enjoy it, learn nothing from it, and fall behind with your other work.

The one concession I've tried to make is to keep the reading relatively short. Only two long – or full-sized – novels, and they get 2 weeks apiece: Lowry and *Malte*. Those two are spaced apart. In between I've scheduled other books or parts of books, all shortish, around 100 pages or so. I've tried to keep things in order and rough balance. Progress is pretty chronological, almost decade by decade. 6 writers in English – including one Dominican-English writer, one Scotsman, one Anglo-Canadian, a couple of Americans – and 5 in translation, including 3 from German (2 are Austrians), a Czech and a Russian. 3 women from 11, maybe a fourth to come (I've done worse).

And the premise? Or the rationale? Or the pedagogy? That these are outstanding, odd, delicate things that nobody much has read or reads; that it will do you good – maybe, one day – to have read them; that a look over the fence anytime is a wonderful thing. It may inspire you – I hope it does inspire you – to write a novel, or a memoir, or even just a short story. If you do, during these months, and bring copies for everyone, these will be workshopped. There is time, or I will make time. I will also ask you to present an author, or a book, or half a book, a week.

1 September Hofmannsthal: *The Lord Chandos Letter* (1902) – beginning of a problematic century (clue: not the 17th)

8 September Jean Rhys: *Good Morning, Midnight* – the autobiographical novel, pain in prose

15 September (1) Rilke: *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) – pain in prose, continued

22 September (2) Rilke: *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) – and more

29 September Osip Mandelstam: *The Noise of Time* – Armenia: exhilaration/ relief in prose

6 October Djuna Barnes: *Nightwood* – the eccentric jeweler’s art

13 October (1) Malcolm Lowry: *Under the Volcano* (1947) – the book of books

20 October (2) Malcolm Lowry: *Under the Volcano* (1947) – and more

27 October Wolfgang Koeppen: *Youth* – a memoir, I love it, even if no one else reads it

3 November William H. Gass: *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* – prose as prism and discipline

10 November James Buchan: *Slide* – a novel in ten linked stories

17 November Bohumil Hrabal: *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* – look, no periods

24 November (1) Penelope Fitzgerald: *The Blue Flower* – the best book ever written about a poet?

1 December (2) Penelope Fitzgerald: *The Blue Flower* – or, your call, maybe something from Lydia Davis, say?

8 December Conclusions, recap, wheel.

Hofmannsthal: *Lord Chandos Letter*, electronically provided by me

Rhys: *Good Morning, Midnight* (though I was tempted by *Voyage in the Dark* and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* as well, or any of the early novels)

Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (the Burton Pike translation, from Dalkey Archive)

Mandelstam: *The Noise of Time*, ed. and tr. Clarence Brown

Djuna Barnes: *Nightwood*

Lowry: *Under the Volcano* (and be sure to read the “Cape letter”)

Koeppen: *Youth* (Dalkey)

Gass: “In the Heart of the Heart of the Country” (from the NYRB Classics volume of that name)

Buchan: *Slide* (hard to get hold of, but not impossible)

Hrabal: *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* (NYRB Classics, though I was severely tempted by *In-House Weddings* and the outstanding *Too Loud a Solitude* as well)

Fitzgerald: *The Blue Flower*

M.H.