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### ENG 3808-001: Modern British Literature

Christopher Wixson

*Eastern Illinois University*

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# Eng 3808: Modern British Literature

fall 2019 / Section 001 / 3.00 Credits

Dr. Chris Wixson

## syllabus

“The starting point of Modernism is the crisis of belief that pervades twentieth-century western culture: loss of faith, experience of fragmentation and disintegration, and the shattering of cultural symbols and norms.”

-Susan Friedman

“How can we combine the old words in new orders so that they survive, so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth? -Virginia Woolf

## course philosophy

The experience of modernity was characterized by spatial, temporal, psychological, political, and existential dislocations; the “task of the [Modernist] artist” is, in Samuel Beckett’s words, “to find a form that accommodates the mess.” This course will explore this crisis of representation by reading and discussing a series of relatively short novels threaded by a handful of short plays and stories. We will encounter writing produced not only by the “usual suspects” among British modernist authors (such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett) but by equally engaging though less well-known figures such as Barbara Comyns, Elizabeth Bowen, Sylvia Townsend-Warner, Helen Zenna Smith, Rebecca West, Jean Rhys, and Daphne Du Maurier. We will read closely and meaningfully, exploring the texts in relation to Modernist architecture of time, space, genre, consciousness, and narrative as well as issues of identity, class, gender, nationality, race, and sexuality. Because of its size, the course will be run as a seminar. There will be discussion, informal lecture, research, and writing of various kinds, and, for all to succeed, your questions, responses, and opinions are essential. Remember this is not MY class but ours.

## Learning Outcomes

1. To provide strategies for reading, analyzing, and appreciating the works of modern British writers for the insight they provide about their culture and our own time.
2. To allow each member of the class to engage the significant issues and questions raised by the texts through writing, research, and class discussion.
3. To assist in the development of skills of critical reading, analytical thinking, and argumentative writing.

## course texts

*Play and Come and Go*, Samuel Beckett

*The House in Paris*, Elizabeth Bowen

*Party Going*, Henry Green

*Voyage in the Dark*, Jean Rhys

*Not So Quiet. . . StepDaughters of War*, Helen Zenna Smith

*The Vet’s Daughter*, Barbara Comyns

*Lolly Willowes*, Sylvia Townsend Warner

*The Return of the Soldier*, Rebecca West

*To The Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf

*They Shall Not Grow Old*, Peter Jackson

Short Stories by Daphne Du Maurier, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Saki, and Virginia Woolf

## contact information

Dr. Chris Wixson

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Coleman Hall 3771/ DFAC 1351

Office Hours: TR 8:30–10:30, W 12-1, and by appointment

## final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Four Short Writing Assignments / *Lighthouse* quote explications /

*House in Paris* Chapter Assignments 40%

Active Participation / In-class Writings 10%

Critical Paper 30%

Oral Final Examination 20%

## writing assignments

This course requires writing of different kinds. The latest research and thinking in Humanities pedagogy is that committed, regular writing is essential to meaningful exchange and insight in courses in literature, especially at advanced levels. As such, we will regularly be writing as well as sharing *in* writing in order to deepen engagement with these texts. Doing so will enable you to move forward from the experience of this course a better reader and writer, more confident and proficient in organizing and constructing strong interpretive arguments.

## final exam

Your final in this course will be a **group oral exam**. We will discuss this format as we get closer to the conclusion of the term. **HOWEVER**, the only times this exam doesn't go well is when people haven't kept up with the reading, kept a good written record of their engagement with the material, or have tried to cram for it during finals week. The secret to success on this exam (which can even be a very enjoyable experience) is all about the preparation.

## Policies

### attendance

Mandatory.

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate in the day's tasks. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each class session – you are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After which, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by half a letter. **More than six unexcused absences will result in a "0" for participation. More than ten unexcused absences will result in a grade of no credit for the course. Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful.** Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do **not** get in touch asking "for the assignment" or a "rundown of what you missed." My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class. **Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation.** Any unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

## class participation

Mandatory.

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations and activities; You should come to class *prepared to talk* about the reading for that day; active participation is expected (talking productively in class). Participation in a college-level seminar means careful, full preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, risk-taking in writing and thinking. You should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to make yourself a presence in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials. Class participation means that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually AND that you work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and success. In addition to your required short and long papers, **please bring to every class session BOTH specific passages and questions you feel are key as the basis for formulating broader discussion topics and producing insight about the text. You will be asked to produce them at the beginning of each class, often in conjunction with writing.**

Coming to class and saying you are “frustrated” with the reading and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. The language and experience of these texts are demanding but rewarding; while there will be frustration with their complexity at times, this course understands the complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester.

## late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late long papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a “O.”** In-class writing (including occasional assigned short papers) **cannot be made up** since their primary purpose is for discussion. Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

## cell phone and computer use

You may bring your computer/phone to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. In other words, it is expected that you will *only* have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** social media (including Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat), surf the web, text or Tweet, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with your computer/phone. **Turn phones off when you come in to class.** If you have an emergency for which you have to be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. **Under no conditions are you allowed to** take pictures or video (illegal in class). The nature of our scholarly endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

## academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author--that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

## special needs and situations

If you wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) with proper documentation as soon as possible.

# Eng 3808: Modern British Literature

Dr. Chris Wixson

## course calendar

\*\*Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you have access to it during every class session so as to make the appropriate revisions. Bringing notetaking materials/technology to class is equally essential.

\*\*These writers extend to their readers unique and often profound experiences that will be **seriously** undermined by introductory essays, book cover blurbs, Wikipedia entries, Google searches, and Sparknote resources. Consider this statement a formal Spoiler Alert.

August	20	Course Introduction / "Definitions of Modernism" [D2L] In-class: Beckett's "Breath" (1969) / Cangiallo's "Detonation Synthesis" (1915)
	22	Saki's "Tobermory" (1911) / "Reading and Responding to Modernist Texts" [D2L]
	27	Joyce's "The Dead" (1914) / "Modernism and Enlightenment Thought" [D2L] In-class screening of Peter Jackson's <i>They Shall Not Grow Old</i> (2018)
	29	Conclusion of Peter Jackson's <i>They Shall Not Grow Old</i> (2018)
September	3	West's <i>Return of the Soldier</i> (1918) pp. 1-42 (Chapters 1-3)
	5	<i>Return of the Soldier</i> pp. 43-90 (Chapters 4-6)
	10	Smith's <i>Not So Quiet. . . StepDaughters of War</i> (1930) (Chapters 1-7)
	12	<i>Not So Quiet. . .</i> (Chapters 8-12) / <b>Short Paper Due by Friday at 5</b>

**Prompt:** Reflect upon your reading experience with *Not So Quiet* and the ways in which it converges and diverges from your experience with *Return of the Soldier*. How are your experiences with both texts connected to the ways in which the authors play with the reader's assumptions about genre? That is to say, both *Not So Quiet* and (in retrospect) *Return of the Soldier* in their form run counter to the structure of the nineteenth-century novel. Write a 3-4 page essay in which you answer the following question: To what extent do *Return of the Soldier* and *Not So Quiet* problematize the notion of genre (the novel) itself and why?

17 Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926) Part One

19 *Lolly Willowes* Part Two

- 24 *Lolly Willowes* Part Three
- 26 Mansfield's "Bliss" (1918) [D2L]
- October 1 Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark* (1911 and 1934) / Chapters 1-5
- 3 *Voyage* / The rest of Part One and Part Two
- 8 *Voyage* / Part Three and Part Four (original and revised)
- 10 Woolf's "Blue and Green," "The Mark on the Wall," and "Kew Gardens"

**Short Paper AND Critical Paper Topic Due by Friday at 5**

**Prompt:** One of the central female characters in Elizabeth Bowen's *To the North* (1932) says at one point: "Perhaps between friends the surface was meant to be rough. One has to try to speak: words twist everything; what one agrees about can't be spoken. To talk is always to quarrel a little, or misunderstand. But real peace, no points of view could ever disturb" (241). Write a 3-4 page essay in which you answer the following question: To what extent does one of the three novels we have read thus far agree with this idea?

- 15 Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927) Part One, Chapters I-X

**\*Quote Explications Due by 2:00 PM**

- 17 *To The Lighthouse* Part One, Chapters XI-XX

**\*Quote Explications Due by 2:00 PM**

- 22 *To The Lighthouse* Part Two

- 24 *To The Lighthouse* / Part Three / **Short Paper due by Friday at 5**

**Prompt:** Like many Modernists, Woolf writes in a way that teaches the reader how to read their work. Write a full three page reflection (uniformly double-spaced, Times 12 font, one-inch margins all around) in which you discuss your reading process of *To The Lighthouse*, articulating how Woolf teaches her reader how to read the novel and how you made meaning.

- 29 Bowen's *House in Paris* (1935) Part One

- 31 *House in Paris* Part Two, Chapters 1-6 **\*Chapter Assignments Due by 2:00 PM\***

- November 5 *House in Paris* Part Two, Chapters 7-12 **\*Chapter Assignments Due by 2:00 PM\***

- 7 *House in Paris* Part Three

12 Excerpt from Green's *Party Going* (1939)

14 Du Maurier's *The Birds* (1952)

**Short Paper due by Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 PM**

**Prompt:** Write like a modernist — choose one of the authors we have read that you feel has a distinctive style or idiom and write a three page piece in their style. Demonstrate your deep understanding of that style/idiom by emulating it; show, don't tell.

19 Beckett's *Play* (1962) and *Come and Go* (1965)

21 Course Evaluation / Final Exam Guidelines

**Critical Paper due by Friday at 11:59 PM (D2L)**

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!! (PLEASE READ BARBARA COMYNS'S *THE VET'S DAUGHTER* OVER BREAK!!)**

December 3 Comyns' *The Vet's Daughter* (1945/1959) / Exam Group Meeting #1

5 Exam Group Meeting #2

\*\*Final (oral) exam date: Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2:45-4:45

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