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ENG 3809-001: Contemporary British literature

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ENGLISH 3809: CONTEMPORARY BRITISH LITERATURE

Spring 2008
Tuesdays, 1830-2100
Office: CH3556; 581-6977

COURSE CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES

As the people of Britain have come to terms with political and social landscapes reshaped by war and its aftermath, their writers have continued to evoke an ever-changing present as well as to examine the past in texts that look back to both world wars and to empire and its ending. Whereas Realist and Modernist allegiances have persisted, writers who have come to prominence from the 1980s on have introduced post-modern techniques and themes into poetry, drama, and fiction. Significantly also, British writers—resident and expatriate, immigrant and native-born—are producing work shaped by interaction with language and literature from all over the world.

This (new) course focuses on British literature published from 1950 until (almost) the present day. We will read and experience major works of poetry, fiction, and drama written during the second half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. Together, we will examine literary technique as well as theme, and "locate" works in a context of literary, social, and political history. Engaging a variety of genres and texts, we will analyze connections between literary technique and the expression of diverse political, aesthetic, and philosophical attitudes and ideas.

English 3809 will offer opportunities to practice and improve skills in critical reading and thinking, as well as in oral and written communication. It is a writing-intensive course, and therefore a substantial percentage of the evaluation of student work is based on written assignments (papers, exams, in-class writing). Class participation is also important; regular attendance and conscientious preparation are required. (Please note that texts assigned for this course may contain "adult" themes and/or language.)

TEXTS

Pat Barker, Regeneration; Julian Barnes, England, England;
Anthony Burgess, A Clockwork Orange; Angela Carter, The Bloody Chamber;
Caryl Churchill, Plays One; Lawrence Durrell, Mountolive;
Graham Greene, The Quiet American; Harold Pinter, The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter;
Zadie Smith, White Teeth; Tom Stoppard, Arcadia; Jeanette Winterson, Sexing the Cherry.

On Reserve at Booth Library: Paterson and Simic, eds.: New British Poetry;
Keith Tuma, ed.: Anthology of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry.

DR. Z's OFFICE HOURS

Tuesdays, 0945-1045; Thursdays, 0945-1045 & 1315-1515; By Appointment
E-Office Hours: Normally, I will reply to email messages on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons. (To ensure a reply before the weekend, messages should arrive by 3:00 p.m. on Thursdays.)

CLASS PROCEDURES

Class members are expected to complete the assigned reading punctually, to keep a class journal, to be prepared for in-class writing and exams, to contribute actively and constructively to discussion, and to submit out-of-class assignments punctually. (In a once-a-week class, regular attendance is absolutely essential.)
## CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JANUARY 8</td>
<td>Introductions (course, class, assignments)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introductions (Graham Greene, End of Empire, and <em>The Quiet American</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>JANUARY 15</td>
<td>Graham Greene, <em>The Quiet American</em> (Read and prepare to discuss the novel.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>JANUARY 22</td>
<td>Lawrence Durrell, <em>Mountolive</em> (Read and prepare to discuss the novel.)</td>
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<td>JANUARY 29</td>
<td>Conclude <em>Mountolive</em></td>
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<td>Introduction to the Angry Decades: Film</td>
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<td>FEBRUARY 5</td>
<td>Harold Pinter, <em>The Caretaker</em> and <em>The Dumb Waiter</em>. Read and prepare to discuss both plays. Prepare to read aloud a part in <em>The Dumb Waiter</em> and selected speeches in <em>The Caretaker.</em></td>
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<td>FEBRUARY 12</td>
<td>Poetry by Phillip Larkin and Thom Gunn</td>
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<td>Read and prepare to discuss the poems of Larkin and Gunn included in the <em>Anthology of Twentieth Century British and Irish Poetry</em> (ed. Tuma) on reserve in Booth Library.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In accordance with the copyright laws, you may photocopy the poems for your personal use. Having read and thought about all the poems, choose one or two by each of the two poets for your particular attention; be prepared to read those poems aloud to the class and to comment on theme and technique.</td>
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<td><strong>Paper I due in class on this date;</strong> be prepared to share your paper with the class.</td>
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<td>FEBRUARY 19</td>
<td><strong>Mid-Term Exam in Class</strong> (6:30—7:30) (Bring Test Booklets to class.)</td>
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<td>(Poems by Hughes will not be included on the Mid-Term exam.)</td>
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<td>Poetry by Ted Hughes (7:50-9:00) Read and prepare to discuss the poems of Hughes that are included in the <em>Anthology of Twentieth Century British and Irish Poetry</em> (ed. Tuma) on reserve in Booth Library. Photocopy and the poems for your own use, and read and study them carefully. Choose one or two for particular attention; be prepared to read those poems aloud to the class and to comment on theme and technique.</td>
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<td>Assignment of Paper II due on 22 April; Schedule conferences as needed.</td>
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<td>FEBRUARY 26</td>
<td>Anthony Burgess, <em>A Clockwork Orange</em>. (Read and prepare to discuss the novel for this evening's class.)</td>
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<td>MARCH 4</td>
<td>Caryl Churchill, <em>Cloud Nine</em>. (Read and prepare to discuss the play; choose speeches you find significant to read aloud and comment upon.)</td>
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<td>Poetry by Craig Raine: Read and prepare to read aloud and discuss &quot;An Enquiry into Two Inches of Ivory&quot; and A Martian Sends a Postcard Home,&quot; on pages 702-03 of the <em>Anthology of Twentieth Century British and Irish Poetry</em> (ed. Tuma) on reserve at Booth Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARCH 11</td>
<td>No class meeting—Spring Recess.</td>
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</table>
MARCH 18: Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber*. (Read the book and prepare to discuss the stories for this evening's class; choose a favorite.)

MARCH 25: Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*. (Read and prepare to discuss the novel.) Topic for Paper II should be tentatively selected by this date; Schedule conferences as needed.

APRIL 1: Pat Barker, *Regeneration*. (Read and prepare to discuss the novel.)

**Prospectus for Seminar Research Paper due on this date.**
(Schedule conferences as needed.)

APRIL 8: Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*. (Read and prepare to discuss the play; choose key speeches and prepare to read them aloud and comment on their significance.)

Poetry: Choose a poem published in 1990 or after in either of the anthologies on reserve in Booth Library (*New British Poetry* or *Anthology of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry*) that particularly appeals to you. Be prepared to read it aloud in class and explain your choice.


FINAL EXAM (CUMULATIVE): __________

**GRADE CALCULATION:** Paper I--10%; Mid-Term Exam--10%
Paper II (including prospectus)--25%; Final Exam--20%
Class Preparation & Participation--35%

**ENGLISH 3809: CONTEMPORARY BRITISH LITERATURE ASSIGNMENTS**

**JOURNAL:** Keep a separate notebook or journal in which you write your initial and considered responses to reading assignments and class discussion, and in which you keep notes of your "outside" reading in history, theory, and criticism. From time to time, you will be asked to write responses in class, and you should add them into your journal when they are returned. Journals are very useful in reviewing for exams and in planning your formal papers and oral presentations. I will not collect or grade journals.

**PAPER I** (4-6 typed double-spaced pages) is an analysis of some specific aspect of theme or cultural or historical references as presented in one (or more if desired) of the literary texts assigned for the course. In your paper, you may refer to other works by the author you are discussing, historical background works, and works of literary theory or criticism. Be sure to make connections between elements of technique and/or style and the thematic emphases you identify in the text discussed. **Paper I is due on 12 February**
Course Assignments (continued):

Be sure to quote accurately, indicate all quotes and paraphrases, and document accurately and fully (use the most recent MLA system). (Note guidelines on the submission of papers in the Course Policies.) Please discuss your paper topics with me.

PAPER II, due in class on 22 April (or by noon on 24 April), is a researched critical study (10 to 15 "typed" double-spaced pages) analyzing the treatment of a philosophical, social or political theme in two (or three) works of British* literature published since 1950.

One or both/all works may have been assigned for this course, but you are free also to choose other works of modern or contemporary British drama, poetry, or fiction that you have read or wish to read. If you decide to write on "outside" texts, you may wish to begin with lists that I pass out that you discover on the internet or in reference books, and/or by consulting reviews in issues of Granta, Times Literary Supplement, London Review of Books, New York Review of Books, The New Yorker, etc. You will undoubtedly check out library and bookstore holdings electronically, and you will probably also undertake expeditions to bookstores. Try to find recent work(s) of literature that will be interesting to all of us.

Your paper should make a connection between narrative, dramatic, or poetic technique and/or style and the thematic emphasis of the texts studied. The specific focus of the paper and the outside sources (primary and secondary) read in preparing it will be determined by each student in consultation with me. Topics should be identified by 25 March; a formal Prospectus is due by 1 April.

FOR BOTH PAPERS: Be sure that your papers are built upon a solid "thesis"—an argumentative assertion supported with evidence. Please consult with me as you choose texts and topics and as you formulate your thesis. Be sure to follow the directions on the Course Policies sheet.

* For our purposes, authors can be considered "British" who hold United Kingdom passports, were born in Britain or/and have lived substantial parts of their lives in the U.K., and write in English. ("Immigrant" writers such as Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul would be considered, for our purposes, British, whereas a writer who resided in England only to attend university, for instance, would not. South Africans, Australians, New Zealanders, and Canadians are not "British."

English 3809: COURSE POLICIES

ATTENDANCE, punctuality, preparation, and participation are expected and required. Students are responsible for all material covered in class and all announcements or assignments made in class as well as for all assignments on the syllabus. It is essential that all students attend every class meeting and participate in the discussion; it is impossible to "make up" a missed class. Assignments are to have been completed by class time on the date for which they appear on the syllabus. The books in which the day's assignments are contained should be brought to class.

Remember that "class participation" counts towards the course grade, and that presence in class is necessary for "participation." Absence will result in a 0 for the day's participation as well as on any graded work due or done in class. There will be no opportunities to make up a missed exam or oral report other than in cases of documented medical emergency; (signing in at Health Service does not constitute documentation of a medical emergency). Unannounced quizzes on assigned material or in-class writing assignments may be given at any time. There will be no opportunities to "make up" missed quizzes.
Course Policies (continued):
The mid-term and final exams should be written on test booklets, available at the Union Book Store. Please write tests in ink and on the appropriate booklets.

ALL PAPERS AND OTHER WRITTEN WORK must be handed in on the date due.
1. Work turned in late without advance clearance will not be accepted.
2. Clearance does not constitute an "excuse." Work turned in late with clearance will be penalized, usually at the rate of 5 points per day of lateness.
3. Any lateness may delay the grading and return of the paper, perhaps until the end of the semester.

BE SURE TO KEEP A COPY OF EVERY PAPER YOU HAND IN. IN THE CASE OF A MISSING PAPER, THE STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUPPLYING A COPY.

A NOTE ON THE PRESENTATION OF PAPERS: Papers must be computer-printed (or typed) (12-point type; double spaced) on heavy or medium-weight white 9 x 11 paper. Leave adequate margins. Each paper must have a separate title sheet which includes the title of the paper, course title, instructor's name, student's name, and date of submission. Repeat the title at the top of the first page of text. Pages must be numbered, and papers stapled or clipped.

Be sure that your papers are letter quality copies printed by laser or ink jet; no pale or blurred print copies will be accepted. Also be sure that pages are separated, numbered, and clipped together in correct order. Only papers that are in correct form can be accepted.

DOCUMENTATION: Use the most recently revised MLA system to cite both primary and secondary sources used in your papers. The system is fully explained and illustrated in the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Each student should have access to a copy.

Inform yourself about documentation conventions for electronic media information and materials. All such materials must be documented; citation forms are illustrated in recent handbooks; go to the Writing Center for assistance. Electronic-media materials must be evaluated for quality at least as scrupulously as print materials. Please remember that you must absorb and process all materials: downloading is not research.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: All written work (papers, exams, tests, quizzes) must be original and independent. Please make sure that you understand the meaning of plagiarism and the policy of the English Department:

*Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism--"the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)--has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of the grade of F for the course.*

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: "If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible."