ENG 5006-001: The Gender of Politics/The Politics of Gender

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The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it—it does not approach the object from the sidelines.

--Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" (1934-5).

"If the 1920s were a decade when writers tended to turn away in fatigue, boredom, and disgust from everyday problems of social living and political choice, the 1930s forced the writer's attention back on the intractable public world around him."

--G. S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and his World (1953)

"Mass production, advertising, the divorce between mental and manual labour, magazine stories, the abuse of leisure, all these are symptoms of an invalid society, and can only be finally cured by attending to the cause." --W. H. Auden, Rev. of three books on education (1933).

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night."

--Auden, "September 1, 1939"

Goals:
In histories of British literature, the decade of the 1930s is generally seen as a retreat from the modernist experimentalism of the 1920s. Faced with choices between fascism and communism, capitalism and socialism, nationalism and internationalism, writers responded to a series of political and economic crises: the depression in 1929, Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, the Spanish Civil War in 1936, and Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. The fiction that resulted tended to avoid complexity in favor of overtly political and/or satirical stances and it was written, according to traditional accounts (Malcolm Muggeridge, The Thirties: 1930-1940 in Great Britain, Samuel Hynes, The Auden Generation; Valentine Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties), mainly by men.

Our job is to challenge and complicate these traditional accounts:
--by talking about gender in books by men. As unemployment brought pressure on women to return to
pre-World War I domesticity, Winfred Holtby wrote in her 1934 *Women and a Changing Civilization*, “bitterness began which has lasted ever since.” “No age,” according to Woolf in her 1929 *A Room of One’s Own*, “can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own.” How do 1930s writers position themselves in relation to the discussion of women’s proper roles?
--by talking about politics in books by women. Recently Nicola Humble, in *The Feminine Middlebrow*, and Alison Light, in *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, have described the period in terms of women’s writing, looking beyond the canon to popular and “middlebrow” fiction. Both books are needed correctives to traditional accounts of the 1930s, but tend to read women’s writing in relation part from men’s and in relation to private rather than public life. To what extent did women writers respond to men’s books and ideas? How did they position themselves in relation to national and international politics?
--by questioning oversimplified binaries. I’m hoping we can challenge some of the standard dichotomies between modernist and realist fiction, conservative and progressive stances, feminist and misogynistic texts.
--by placing the fiction we read in relation to 1930s accounts of the relationship between politics and literature, gender and literature, and gender and politics.

**Texts:**
Christie, *Peril at End House; Death in the Clouds*; *The ABC Murders*  
Orwell, *The Clergyman’s Daughter, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, Coming Up for Air*  
Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark; Good Morning Midnight*  
Waugh, *Vile Bodies; A Handful of Dust*  
Woolf, *The Waves* (provided); *The Years, Between the Acts*  
*not currently on syllabus*

Additional assignments will be available via e-reserve.

**Requirements**

*Participation and preparation* (20): Plan on coming to every class prepared with specific comments and questions based on careful reading of the assigned texts. When someone is presenting on an article, you, too, should read the article (available on e-reserve or via Jstor) and come prepared to talk about it. (Either print out or bring extensive notes from any assigned e-reserve essay.) If an emergency arises that prevents you from coming to class, please let me know.

*WebCT* (20): After you do the assigned reading, post a paragraph or so of comment: focus on a single point and develop, including a direct quotation from the text in the course of your response. If you are not the first to post that week, begin by responding to at least one earlier poster. For the most part I will not evaluate or respond to postings week by week, but I will look at the end of the semester and evaluate your postings’ thoughtfulness, precision, usefulness to your classmates, timeliness, and frequency. Also use WebCT to let us know about useful links or other discoveries you make, and I will do the same. Check WEBLINKS regularly for useful sites, DISCUSSIONS for classmates’ comments, and ANNOUNCEMENTS for . . . announcements.

*Presentations* (20): Each student will be expected to give two 10-minute presentations: one on an assigned article and one on your final paper. When you present on an article, supply the following information:
Context: Where, when was it published? In response to what ongoing conversation? Does it set up a viewpoint with which it then disagrees?
Thesis: what overall point does the essay make? What are some major supporting ideas?
How does it illuminate (or fail to illuminate) the novel under discussion? What problems or questions did it leave you with?

NOTE: I suggest the presenter come see me in the week preceding to discuss any questions s/he might have about the article. To access: from library website, click e-reserve, then use rh5006 as password.

I may also make impromptu assignments week by week, asking individual students to focus on a particular issue in the assigned reading.

Essays:
I'll ask each of you to select a different writer and text to read on your own. Your first paper (15) should discuss what you find most interesting in your selected text. For your final paper I'll expect you to place the same self-selected text in the context of the decade, focusing on some aspect of the period that interests you (25). Required components include an annotated bibliography and a draft (which we'll discuss in conference). No paper will be accepted without these. The attached list provides possible texts; speak to me before choosing a writer or text that's not on the list.

Grades: Paper grades will be based on “Guidelines for Evaluating Writing Assignments in EIU’s English Department.” I plan to use number rather than letter grades; this will convert into your final grade as follows: 91-100=A; 81-90=B; 70-80=C. 65-69=D

English Department statement on plagiarism: 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 a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of NC for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

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.

Tentative Syllabus
Recommended: Orwell, section II from “Inside the Whale” (1940) and Woolf, “The Leaning Tower” (1940) [both on e-reserve]; Eliot, “The Waste Land” (Web link on WebCT)

Wed Sept 1: Waugh, Vile Bodies (1930)
Presentation 1: excerpt from Huyssen, After the Great Divide [e-reserve]

Wed Sept 8: Woolf, The Waves (1931)
Presentation 2: Gorsky, “‘The Central Shadow’ Characterization in The Waves”
Recommended: Richardson, “Foreword to Pilgrimage” (1938)

Wed 15: Woolf, Waves
Presentation 3: Marcus, “Britannia Rules the Waves”
Presentation 4: McGee, "The Politics of Modernist Form, or Who Rules the Waves"

Presentation 5: Karl Radek, speech at the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress
http://www.marxists.org/archive/radek/1934/sovietwritercongress.htm
Presentation 6: excerpt from Herbert Read, "What is Revolutionary Art?" (1935)

Wed 29: Christie, *Peril at End House* (1932)
Presentation 7: Alison Light, chapter on Christie in *Forever England.*
Recommended: Makinin, "Preliminary Proceedings"

Wed. Oct. 6: Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934)
Recommended: excerpt from Mitchison, *The Home and a Changing Civilization* (1934)


Presentation 10: Benjamin, excerpt from "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936)


Wed Nov 3: Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936)

Presentation 12: Squier, "The Politics of City Space in The Years"
Recommended: Woolf, excerpts from *Three Guineas* (pp. 3-7; 102-14; 142-4) (1938).

Wed 17: Woolf, *The Years*
Presentation 13: essays from *Scrutiny* on *The Years* and *Three Guineas*
Draft due in conferences held throughout this week.

Wed. Dec 1: Rhys, *Good Morning Midnight* (1939)
Presentation 14: Gardiner, "Good Morning Midnight, Good Night, Modernism"

Wed. Dec 8: Presentations on papers

An incomplete list of 1930s British fiction:
Ambler, Eric. The Mask of Demetrios (1939)
Beckett, Samuel. Murphy (1938)
Blake, Nicholas (Cecil Day Lewis). A Question of Proof (1935)
Bottome, Phyllis. Mortal Storm (1938)
Bowen, Elizabeth. The House in Paris (1935), The Death of the Heart (1938)
Butts, Mary. Death of Felicity Taverner (1932), Last Stories (1938)
Christie, Agatha. Murder at the Vicarage (1930), Murder in the Clouds (1935), And Then There Were None (1939), Murder in Mesopotamia (1936), Death on the Nile (1937)
Cunard, Nancy. Negro: An Anthology (1934)
Du Maurier, Daphne. Rebecca (1938)
Gibbons, Stella. Cold Comfort Farm (1932)
Green, Henry. Party Going (1939)
Greene, Graham. England Made Me (1935), Brighton Rock (1938), The Confidential Agent (1939)
Greenwood, Walter. Love on the Dole (1933)
Haldane, Charlotte. I Bring Not Peace (1932)
Hamilton, Patrick. Impromptu in Moribundia (1939)
Hilton, James. Lost Horizons (1933), Goodbye Mr Chips (1934)
Holty, Winifred. South Riding (1936)
Huxley, Aldous. Brave New World (1932), Eyeless in Gaza (1936), After Many a Summer Dies the Swan (1939)
Isherwood, Christopher. Goodbye to Berlin (1939)
Jameson, Storm. Voyage Home (1930), That Was Yesterday (1932), Women against Men (1933)
Jesse, F. Tennyson. A Pin to See the Peepshow (1934)
Lehmann, John. Evil Was Abroad (1938)
Lehmann, Rosamund. Invitation to the Waltz (1932), The Weather in the Street (1936)
Lewis, C. S. Out of the Silent Planet (1938)
Llewellyn, Richard. How Green Was My Valley (1939)
Lowry, Malcom. Ultramarine (1933)
Macaulay, Rose. Going Abroad: A Novel (1934)
Mitchison, Naomi. We Have Been Warned (1935)
Orwell, George. Coming up for Air (1939)
Powell, Anthony. Afternoon Men (1931), Venusberg (1932)
Rhys, Jean. After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie (1930)
Rohmer, Sax. The Bride of Fu Manchu (1933)
Sayers, Dorothy. Murder Must Advertise (1933); Gaudy Night (1936), Busman’s Honeymoon (1937)
Smith, Stevie. Novel on Yellow Paper (1936)
Struther, Jan. Mrs Miniver (1937; 1939)
Tolkien, J. R. R. The Hobbit (1937)
Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Summer Will Show (1936)
Waugh, Evelyn. Black Mischief (1932), Scoop (1938)
Wodehouse, P. G. The Code of the Woosters (1938)
Woolf, Virginia. Flush (1933), Between the Acts (1941)