

CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION
ITHACA COLLEGE LONDON CENTRE - Spring 2007

LECTURER: LEE WHITE

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course aims to examine recent trends and developments in British Fiction by focussing on key novels that have been published during the period 1990 - 2003. The course will consider the relationship between the writer and society, exploring how novelists have used fictional literature and its different forms to engage with and reflect the issues and ideas that have been influential and significant in shaping contemporary Britain. In addressing how contemporary fiction reflects the concerns of it's era the course will consider the significant changes in Britain's political, social and cultural landscape.

Issues covered on the course include the analysis of genre (children's literature, crime fiction), different audiences (generational, male/female), the novel as a cultural object and commodified product, changing relationship to Britain's past in light of the present, the novel as a voice of dissent, contemporary novelists interest in the more marginalised areas of contemporary British life, the remaking of British identity in relation to multiculturalism, what constitutes British literature in the wake of devolution and the increased presence of Irish and Scottish literary voices, how the British novel charts the political legacy of 1970's radicalism, the impact of Thatcherism and the emergence of New Labour.

TEACHING METHODS

The teaching methods employed for this course will be primarily discussion based. These discussions will be based upon aesthetic ideas in texts and critical theory within the field of literary studies. It is important to keep up with the required reading. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have purchased or obtained copies of the key texts, all of which are available through any of the main bookshops in London. All relevant supplementary reading materials will be provided.

READING AND CLASS CONTRIBUTION

The quality and content of the seminars are largely dependent on the amount of preparation that you do and the contribution you make to class discussions. You are expected to do a significant amount of independent thinking and researching as preparation for each class. Specific research assignments will be set for each class and you will be encouraged to bring this material to the texts and issues we cover. Research should be done alongside the reading of the set texts and you are expected to find and make available resources to the rest of the class.

The discussions will be based primarily on your responses to and understanding of the novels and the issues and ideas they raise. Please be aware of your responsibilities in making the sessions an interesting and productive learning experience.

To enable students to contribute and demonstrate their independent thinking and researching and preparation for each class, you will have an opportunity to influence the teaching agenda for each class. Each student is required to set three questions for each class. These questions should be submitted to me via e-mail by 6.00pm on the Sunday before each class.

Use the following guidelines to help

- The questions can cover any aspect of the novel; themes, character, style, issues. As well as setting the questions, you will also need to ensure that you can initiate and lead the class discussion. Therefore you will need to ensure that you are sufficiently prepared to develop ideas and points that emerge in response to set questions. You should be able to steer the conversation towards specific points that you feel need to be made. Help in preparing this session you might the following points useful to consider.
- Avoid setting closed questions which can only lead to very limited response. Set questions that are sufficiently open to allow a range of responses or conflicting points of view.
- Avoid setting very easy questions. Your questions should challenge us to think about a particular aspect of the book critically and intellectually. Be prepared to push your colleagues in their responses so that we achieve an *analysis* of the novel rather than merely expressing an *opinion*.
- Try to engage with the complexity of the novel in all of its different aspects. Be prepared to direct us towards specific references in the text, give us relevant information and context to help us think through the question.
- Avoid setting three questions about the same character or theme. Similarly don't set three questions about the beginning of the novel. Your three questions should reflect different aspects of the novel (i.e. one question on character, one on theme, one on historical or political issues; one on the beginning and two on the end).
- When setting the questions, focus on what you found interesting about the novel. Remember that you will be talking through your own responses to the questions that you set, so be prepared to articulate your own ideas and understandings.
- A range of questions are available on most of the set texts at <http://www.readinggroupguides.com/findaguide/index.asp>. Alternatively you could consult the Readers Guides which have been published by Continuum Contemporaries. These contain discussion questions as well a detailed analysis of the novel and a comprehensive booklist.
- Submit the questions to me in order of preference. The questions you really want the class to discuss should be listed first. I'll structure them in to some cohesive order and will edit if there's an overlap.
- Email your questions to me at la.white@roehampton.ac.uk and at leewhite2302@yahoo.co.uk by 6.00pm on the Sunday before each class.

Assessment

Evaluation will be based on four key areas of assessment

Assignment 1. First Essay	20%
Assignment 2. Second Essay	30%
Assignment 3. Research and Class Contribution	50%

Assignment Timetable

Assignment 1. First Essay (Word Count: 2000)
Due in Week Seven on **Thursday 1st March**

The first assignment is a detailed analysis of one of the novels encountered in the first half of the course. You are expected to demonstrate a close reading and understanding of the novel. And also the issues and debates, which have been discussed in class. Each week, we will discuss potential essay questions which will be set in response to specific articles which you are expected to read alongside the novel.

Assignment 2. Single Author Study (Word Count: 3000)
Due in Week 15 on **Thursday 3rd May**

Single Author Study provides you with an opportunity to develop a detailed analysis of **one** of the authors encountered on the course. You will be expected to demonstrate a close and detailed analysis of 3 novels written by your chosen author. This should include the novel discussed as part of the course, plus any two others, which you feel appropriate and relevant to the areas of enquiry, you wish to examine.

You should agree your choice of author with me by Week 12. There will be tutorial time set aside during Weeks 13 & 14, during which you will be able to discuss your work..

ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR

Assignment No & Description	Due Date	Word Count	% /Total Grade
Assignment 1. First Essay	Week Seven on Thursday 1 st March.	2000 words	20%
Assignment 2. Single Author Study	Week Fifteen on Thursday 3 rd May.	3000 words	30%
Research and Class Contribution	Ongoing Throughout.		50%

GRADES

A Grades

Work that demonstrates a sophisticated and intellectual understanding of literary analysis in relation to relevant issues and ideas pertinent to the topic. Work that takes on and develops ideas and points covered in class and integrates this as part of your own independent thinking. Presentation of ideas and analysis that clearly demonstrates the deployment of original thinking and arguments, supported by a appropriate, informed and detailed use of research material.

B Grades

Work that demonstrates an awareness and understanding of literary analysis in relation to relevant issues and ideas pertinent to the topic. Work that shows some evidence of taking on and developing ideas and points made in class and demonstrates some independent thinking. Deployment of some original thinking and arguments. Presentation of ideas that clearly demonstrates the deployment of some original thinking and arguments supported by research which gives some weight to the points being made

C Grades

Work that shows little independent thinking and critical analysis. Over reliance on repeating ideas and points that have already been made in class. Insufficient research and failure to integrate research as support to independent thinking.

ESSENTIAL TEXTS

Jake Arnott The Long Firm (Sceptre)

Ian Banks Complicity

Pat Barker Regeneration (Penguin)

Angela Carter Nights At The Circus (Vintage)

Mark Haddon The Curious Incident of the Dog at Night Time (Vintage)

Hanif Kureishi The Buddha Of Suburbia (Faber and Faber)

Ian McEwan Atonement (Vintage)

Philip Pullman Northern Lights (Scholastic)

Zadie Smith White Teeth (Random House)

Rupert Thomson Divided Kingdom (Bloomsbury)

Irvine Welsh Trainspotting (Minerva)

WEEKLY PROGRAMME

The weekly programme provided is a guide for students to help them with advance planning. However there may be changes to allow for discussion and development of issues that emerge from our discussions.

Week One Introduction

Thursday 18th January

Week Two Children's Literature And Pottermania

Thursday 25th January

'My name is Christopher John Francis Boone. I know all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,057.'

Set Text: The Curious Incident of the Dog at Night Time by Mark Haddon

Week Three Realism and Fantasy

Thursday 1st February

'Tell them stories'

Set Text: Northern Light by Philip Pullman

Week Four Tall Tales and Narrative Invention

Thursday 8th February

'Is she fact or is she fiction'

Set Text: Nights At The Circus by Angela Carter

Week Five Literature And The First World War

Thursday 15th February

'Is it the right *kind* of love?'

Set Text: Regeneration by Pat Barker

Week Six

Thursday 22nd February

'Her wish for a harmonious, organised world denied her the reckless possibilities of wrongdoing. Mayhem and destruction were too chaotic for her tastes, and she did not have it in her to be cruel.'

Set Text: Atonement by Ian McEwan

Week Seven Scene Of Crime – Gangsters and the Swinging Sixties

Thursday 1st March

"You know the song, don't you? "There's *no* business like *show* business". 'Well what if there was a business like show business. *Like* show business. You know?"

Set Text: The Long Firm by Jake Arnott

Assignment 1 to be submitted on Thursday 1st March

Mid Term Break

Week Eight Looking For A New England - Racial Identity and Cultural Difference

Thursday 15th March

'never let the ex-colonialists see you on your knees.'

Set Text: The Buddha Of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi

Week Nine England's Melting Pot – Multiculturalism and Integration

Thursday 22nd March

'What is past is prologue'.

Set Text: White Teeth by Zadie Smith

Week Ten The Ecstasy and The Agony - Brutalist Fiction

Thursday 29th March

'Well, ah choose no tae choose life. If they cannae handle that, it's thair problem.'

Set Text: Trainspotting by Irvine Welsh

Week Eleven

Thursday 5th April

'Cover the story'

Set Text: Complicity by Ian Banks

Week Twelve

Thursday 12th April

'And then the night when my life began again ... A strange beginning. Soldiers, bright lights. The cold. And me being lifted, as if by surgeons, into a new world...'

Set Text: Divided Kingdom by Rupert Thomson

Week Thirteen Research Project Presentations

Thursday 19th April

Week Fourteen Consultation Week

Thursday 26th April

Week Fifteen Exam Week

Thursday 3rd May

Assignment 2 to be submitted on Thursday 3rd May

Americans with Disabilities Act: Syllabus Insert for Faculty

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities on a case by case basis. Students must register with the Office of Academic Support Services and provide appropriate documentation to the college before any academic adjustment will be provided.