

ENGL 345U: MODERN BRITISH LITERATURE (FALL 2014)

Prof. Josh Epstein (jepstein@pdx.edu)

Class Sessions: MW 4:40-6:30 p.m., Cramer Hall 221

Office Hours: Monday 11-12, Tuesday, 2-3, *or by appointment*, Neuberger M402

Phone (email works better!): 503.725.9747

Course Description

This course will study the experiments of twentieth-century literature as they contest different notions of "British" identity. We shall examine British colonial conflicts with Africa, Asia, Ireland, and the Caribbean; World War I poetry; the experiments of modernism; challenges to modernism during and after World War II; postmodern and absurdist theater; and postcolonial efforts to rethink the boundaries of nation and language. We'll also discuss methods of literary criticism (e.g. "New Criticism," postcolonialism) that emerged from these same cultural and intellectual contexts.

Quick Email Notes: (1) Email is a wonderful thing for quick administrative questions. Longer conversations (e.g. discussing grades, drafts, etc.) are better handled in person. (2) Please give me 48 hours to respond to an email—possibly longer over weekends. Plan ahead: you are responsible for meeting course expectations whether or not I see your email in time. (3) If you are absent, you do not need to email me to explain why. Please contact a classmate and copy his/her notes.

Course Materials

Joseph Black, et al. (ed.), *Broadview Anthology of British Literature*, vol. 6 (ISBN 9781551116143).

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Broadview; ISBN 9781551113074).

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Harcourt; ISBN 9780156030472).

Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine*. (Samuel French; ISBN 9780573618741)

Regular access to Desire2Learn (<https://d2l.pdx.edu>) and to your PDX email address.

Coursework

MIDTERM ESSAY (25%): A thesis-based paper of at least 1500 words. The best papers will feature complex and original arguments, *rigorous textual analysis*, and clear, well-organized writing. I will distribute prompts, but you are welcome to develop your own topic if you clear it with me first.

FINAL ESSAY (35%): 1700-2000 words, comparing a pre-WWII text and a post-WWII text. The same high expectations for argument, analysis, and writing apply. Research is neither encouraged nor discouraged, but may be used (with documentation) to contextualize the literary materials.

Feel free to meet with me *at least a few days in advance of the deadline* to discuss either paper. Again, I do not review drafts over email, but I'm happy to do so in person.

Format: Papers must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman or Garamond, and submitted via D2L as a Word or RTF document. You are required to follow MLA style for quotations, citations, and general format (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>). Papers that fail to follow these guidelines will be penalized.

Late Papers: Unexcused late papers will be docked half a letter grade per calendar day late (including weekends). Technology problems, computer crashes, etc. do not excuse late papers.

Extensions: I will consider reasonable extension requests made, in writing, at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline. Write me an email naming me a date by which you can have the paper done. *Please don't assume that your request has been granted unless and until I explicitly tell you so.*

FORUM POSTINGS (20% total): Five responses (700-800 words each) posted to a forum on D2L. You may use the topics on the schedule or create your own. There are ten postings possible, of which you must complete five (if you do more, your best five will count). *No extensions will be granted for forum postings, and no late/make-up postings will be accepted.* Once a posting opportunity is gone, it's gone. Please plan ahead. While forum postings may be written less formally than (say) a research paper, I do expect advanced critical thinking, clear organization of ideas, and good command of written English. Postings will be graded +, √+ (check-plus), √, √-, -, 0. I will look at overall trends before assigning letter grades to these, but in general you can think of a √ as roughly a low B. *You are encouraged to use writing from your postings in the final paper.*

PARTICIPATION (15%): Classes will combine lecture, discussion, group work, and in-class writing, supplemented with homework and/or reading quizzes (announced or unannounced). You are to come to class having done the reading and ready to contribute questions and ideas. *If you miss more than three classes, excused or unexcused, you cannot earn better than a C for your overall participation. If you miss more than five classes, excused or unexcused, you will earn a final participation grade of zero.*

Course Policies

OFFICE HOURS: You are cordially invited to office hours to discuss any course-related matter. If my office hours do not work for you, please email to make an appointment. *During office hours only*, I can be reached via Skype at the username **jepsteinpdx**.

ATTENDANCE: No apologies necessary, no excuses accepted. I am not going to arbitrate which absences are "excused" and which ones aren't; as in the workforce, either you're here or you're not. There are only three exceptions: (1) severe medical or family emergencies, (2) official PSU activities (documented *in advance*), or (3) religious observances (cleared *in advance*).

Be on time. Late arrival to class, or early departure, will be considered an absence. If for some reason you need to leave early, I would appreciate your letting me know before class begins.

CELL PHONES: rhymes with "Hell, no." Almost. Turn off your phone.

ACCOMMODATIONS: If you have a physical or cognitive condition that necessitates accommodation, please document it with the Disability Resource Center (<http://www.pdx.edu/drc>), and please speak with me *in advance* of when the accommodation is needed.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Please read the English Department's statement on academic integrity (www.english.pdx.edu/pdf/AcademicIntegrity.pdf). Any incident of plagiarism or cheating, no matter how minor, will result in a grade of zero on the assignment and will be reported to the Student Conduct Office. You must cite any use of outside source materials, whether paraphrased or quoted directly. *If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please ask me prior to submitting the assignment.* Uncertainty about the rules is not an excuse for violating them.

Grading

Grades will be determined holistically based on the above assignments and weights. Grades are determined *solely on the basis of assigned coursework*—no exceptions. If your final grade is on the cusp, the tiebreakers will be your final paper and the consistency of your participation throughout the term. If you have concerns about a grade, please take 48 hours to review my comments, then feel free to visit office hours or set an appointment (again, I do not discuss grades over email).

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Readings are due *before class* on the days indicated. *B* = *Broadview*; (x) = posted to Desire2Learn. Online readings should be printed out and brought to class.

- M., Sept. 29 Introductions. Hardy, "The Darkling Thrush" (3).
 W., Oct. 1 *B*, pp. xxxv-xlix. Kipling, "White Man's Burden," "Mark of the Beast," "England and the English" (x). **Posting #1 due before class.** Topics: What does Kipling mean by "simple speech and plain" in "White Man's Burden"? What is the purpose of such speech? What forms does "beastliness" take in "Mark of the Beast"? What genre of story is "Mark," and so what? Analyze Kipling's attitudes toward Britain in "England and the English."
- M., Oct. 6 *Heart of Darkness* (67-158).
 W., Oct. 8 *Heart of Darkness* cont.; read Conrad, "Outpost of Progress" (*B* 50-61); "In Context" (88-92); Achebe, "An Image of Africa" (809-13). **Posting #2 due before class.** Topics: How can we read "Outpost" as a companion piece to *Heart of Darkness*? Do the two works differ on the effects of imperialism? What aspects of the novel might challenge/complicate Achebe's argument?
- M., Oct. 13 Review *B* xl-xliii; read Hardy, "Channel Firing" (*B* 5-6); Sassoon, bio, "They" (102); Owen, bio, "Dulce et Decorum Est," "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "Strange Meeting" (111-3); Paul Fussell excerpt (x).
- W., Oct. 15 Review *B* xliv-xlvii; read *B* 477-8; "Imagism and Vorticism" (482-5); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (444-7); Prufrock materials (489-93). **Posting #3 due before class.** Topics: What is novel about Pound's definition of the image? How does "Prufrock" use the dramatic monologue genre (see glossary)? Who is the "you" being addressed, or the "we"? Who gives a shit whether Prufrock "dare[s] to eat a peach"? What do the critical responses to "Prufrock" reflect about the *milieu* of modernist poetry?
- M., Oct. 20 Eliot, *The Waste Land* + editors' intro (*B* 450-61); Seldes, Richards, & LePan (493-8).
 W., Oct. 22 Eliot, *TWL* cont.; "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (*B* 465-9). **Posting #4 due before class.** Topics: What methods of criticism does Eliot propose in "Tradition"? Explain Eliot's positions toward "impersonality" and "emotion." What does he mean by saying that "only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things"? How might Eliot's arguments be applied to his own poetry?
- M., Oct. 27 Read *B* lv-lvii ("Ireland"); Yeats, "Lake Isle of Innisfree" (146), "Easter 1916" (148-9), "Leda and the Swan" (158), "Sailing to Byzantium" (160-1), "Under Ben Bulbin" (168ff). **Posting #5 due before class.** Topics: What continuities/changes do you observe in Yeats's poetry from early ("Lake Isle") to middle ("Easter 1916") to late (the rest)? So what? What does Yeats mean by "terrible beauty"? With whom does the speaker identify in "Leda"? What is he doing with the rhetorical questions? Characterize the speaker's journey in "Sailing": what is he escaping from/moving toward? What are his attitudes towards body and mind?
- W., Oct. 29 Joyce, "Araby" (319-322); "Nausicaa" (343-66); "In Context: Joyce's Dublin" (366-7).

- M., Nov. 3 Woolf; bio (B 213-5); "Modern Fiction" (B 227-31); "Woolf and Bloomsbury" (B 285-6); *To the Lighthouse*, through p.57
- W., Nov. 5 **No class. Paper due by 5 p.m., via D2L.**
- M., Nov. 10 *To the Lighthouse*, 57-136 (through Part II). **Posting #6 due before class.** Topics: What is the relation between Nature and humankind in "Time Passes"? How does Woolf use punctuation in this section? What is Augustus Carmichael's role in the development of this novel?
- W., Nov. 12 *To the Lighthouse*, finish.
- M., Nov. 17 B 617-33; Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" (580-1), "September 1 1939" (581-2); Larkin, "Church Going" (700-1). **Posting #7 due before class.** Topics: Why was Yeats "silly like us," or like Kipling? Why does "Poetry mak[e] nothing happen"; what is the "valley of its making"? Discuss the form of each section of the poem. How can we detect Yeats's influence in "September 1" as well as "In Memory"?
- W., Nov. 19 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape* (568-73). **Posting #8 due by beginning of class.** Topics: What are the differences/continuities among the three Krapps (youngest, elder, eldest)? How does Krapp relate to material objects? To language? How does Krapp remember what happened on the punt? How do sound and silence function in the play? Is Krapp a tragic figure, a clownish buffoon, or both? What is the significance of the repeated "Past midnight" line?
- M., Nov. 24 Thiong'o, "Decolonising the Mind" (B 852-8); Rushdie, "Is Nothing Sacred?" (982-9), Walcott, bio, "A Far Cry from Africa," "Ruins of a Great House" (814-7)
- W., Nov. 26 **No Class.** On your own, watch Gurinder Chadha's short documentary, *I'm British But...* (to be posted to D2L). **Posting #9 due by 5 p.m.** Topics: how do Chadha and her subjects see "British" identity changing/evolving in the late 20th century? Cite specific claims made during the documentary, and pull in other course readings, to reflect on specific changes in the cultural construct of "Britishness."
- M., Dec. 1 *Cloud Nine* (read whole thing). **Posting #10 due before class.** Topics: How do the issues of empire and sexuality intersect in this play? To what extent does Churchill see them as different versions of the same oppressive forces, or how does she disentangle them? How does Churchill treat childhood sexuality and sexual abuse—is this something she takes seriously? Trivializes? How/to what effect? What do you make of the characters' names?
- W., Dec. 3 *Cloud Nine*; wrap-ups.

Term Paper due via D2L by 7:30 p.m. on Monday, December 8 (the end of our scheduled final exam time). There is no final exam in this class.