

Pittsburg State University
English 772: Periods in Literature
Contemporary British Literature
Summer 2012

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How have British writers since 1979 (beginning with Margaret Thatcher’s appointment as Prime Minister) responded to the end of empire, the Cold War, economic decline, and radical changes in racial and sexual politics? This face-to-face course offers an introduction to contemporary British literature in an era of profound political and economic change and social upheaval. We will explore novels, poetry, music, and film profoundly influenced by the shadow of war, by immigration from the former colonies, by dramatic shifts in gender relations and sexuality, by class conflict and deindustrialization, environmental catastrophe, and by the potential “break up” of Britain. Caught between an ambivalent “special relationship” with America and a technocratic European super-state, how has British culture adapted to its uneasy geopolitical position? How does a nation so obsessed with images of its past traditions remain at the cutting-edge of music and popular culture? What is Britain’s position in the global cultural economy? We will examine a range of avant-garde, postcolonial, and “popular” texts which challenge received notions of Britishness (and its relatives Englishness, Irishness, and Scottishness). We will pay particular attention to the interaction between literature and other cultural forms such as cinema, popular music, and sport.

Learning Objectives:

1. Narrate a history of British literature in the last thirty years.
2. Appreciate and understand the ways that race, ethnicity, religion, politics, class, and sex and gender have been represented in contemporary texts in Britain.
3. Identify structural elements of novels, poetry, drama, and film and analyze how those elements help create specific meanings and effects.
4. Compare works in terms of theme, structure, and use of literary and cinematic devices.
5. Write effective analyses defending arguable theses based on close reading of texts and incorporating relevant terms, concepts, and research.
6. Identify issues and questions raised by literary texts that might be addressed by literary analysis.
7. Develop a deeper appreciation for the reading and study of literature.

Required Texts and Materials:

Jonathan Coe, *The Winshaw Legacy: or, What a Carve Up!*, Vintage, 1996.

ISBN: 0679754059

Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, Vintage, 2001.

ISBN: 0375703861

Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*, Riverhead Trade, 2000.

ISBN: 1573227889

Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*, Methuen Drama, 2008.

ISBN: 1408106035

Mike Storry and Peter Childs, *British Cultural Identities*, Routledge, 2008.

ISBN: 0415424607

Outside materials available for download from Canvas, online, or on reserve in the library.

Grading Scale:

A = 93-100	B- = 80-82	D+ = 67-69
A- = 90-92	C+ = 77-79	D = 63-66
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76	D- = 60-62
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72	F = below 60

Assignments and Evaluations:

Participation and Discussion Questions: 50%

Website Contributions: 50%

You must fully complete all assignments for the course in order to receive a passing grade.

Presentation: This class depends upon actively engaged speakers, listeners, and writers. Your responsibility is to be an active participant. As a result, this class demands that all reading assignments are completed, **in full**, on the day they are due and that you **bring the assigned text to class**. In addition, all assignments are to be typewritten and done according to directions. I encourage you to think for yourself, challenge each other, and assume pride and ownership in every text you produce.

Late Work and Attendance Policy: I reserve the right to decrease the grade of late work by ONE FULL LETTER GRADE for every day it is late including the first. For example, if an essay is two days late and the original grade is a B+, the final penalized grade would be a D+. If you have a problem with an assignment, please see me or call me BEFORE the due date. Any student who accrues excessive absences (three or more) will most likely fail the course. If you do miss class for any reason, you are still accountable for the work given and due that day unless prior arrangements have been made. Finally, I also expect you to be on-time to class. Any student who is tardy more than three times will be marked absent according to my discretion. If you have a problem getting to class on time (i.e., you have class on the other side of campus), please let me know as soon as possible.

Discussion Questions: An important step in fostering academic discussions is learning how to ask good analytical questions that pose challenging ways to address the texts of a course. For each class meeting except Wednesdays, when we will watch a film, you should bring to class **at least two discussion questions (though you may do more that follow the criteria for writing good analytical questions (see attached sheet for criteria and samples))**. You will submit these questions to me at the class break as part of your participation grade. These should be questions that you write, not ones that you find on the Internet. You will receive no credit for questions pulled from websites or study guides (SparkNotes, etc.).

Plagiarism: Plagiarism includes the presentation, without proper attribution, of another's words or ideas from printed or electronic sources. It is also plagiarism to submit, without the instructor's consent, an assignment in one class previously submitted in another. I reward plagiarism with a zero. Further action by the university may also be taken. Please familiarize yourselves with the university policy on plagiarism. If you feel that you need extra help with your assignments, tutors are available in the Writing Center in Axe Library (235-4694). If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how to cite sources properly, do not hesitate to ask me for help. Please also consult PSU's Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy available online at

<http://www.pittstate.edu/audiences/current-students/policies/rights-and-responsibilities/academic-misconduct.dot>

Also, make sure to consult the Syllabus Supplement, which can be thought of as a "one-stop" place for students to access up-to-date information about campus resources, notifications, and expectations. It is available at

<http://www.pittstate.edu/dotAsset/d9144f66-0d30-4771-807b-6dd6dcbe4153.pdf>

A Word of Advice: All students are more than welcome to drop by during office hours or schedule an appointment to ask questions, continue discussion of issues from class, or to offer comments. This is especially true during the first week of class and especially true for students with disabilities who are registered with the Center for Student Accommodations (235-4309) and who may need individual arrangements. **Make use of your teachers!!** We are here to help you learn, and we do not expect you to be perfect (who is?). We regard intelligent questions in and out of class and an eagerness to improve one's abilities as evidence of an A student more than written work alone. There is no such thing as a stupid question!

Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments (ALL DATES AND ASSIGNMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE!):

WEEK ONE

July 2: Introduction to the Course and Assignments

July 3: Storry and Childs, "Introduction: Britain in the Modern World"

Dylan Thomas, "Fern Hill"
Philip Larkin, "Churchgoing"
Stevie Smith, "Not Waving But Drowning"
Derek Walcott, "A Far Cry from Africa"
Seamus Heaney, "Digging"

July 4: Holiday – No Class

July 5: Storry and Childs, "Chapter One: Places and Peoples: Nation and Region"
Angela Carter, Excerpt from *The Bloody Chamber*
Alan Sillitoe, "On Saturday Afternoon"
Anthony Burgess, Excerpt from *A Clockwork Orange*

July 6: Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright, "Introducing the Britishness Question" from *Britishness: Perspectives on the British Question*
Carol Ann Duffy, "Little Red-Cap"
Wendy Cope, "The Wasteland Limericks" and "Lonely Hearts"
Kathleen Jamie, "The Queen of Sheba"
Gwyneth Lewis, "Sea Virus"

WEEK TWO

July 9: Jonathan Coe, *The Winshaw Legacy*

July 10: Jonathan Coe, *The Winshaw Legacy*
Storry and Childs, "Chapter Five: Class and Politics"

July 11: Film Viewing: Phyllida Lloyd, *The Iron Lady*

July 12: Film Discussion
Irvine Welsh, "Across the Hall" and "A Soft Touch"

July 13: Storry and Childs, "Chapter Two: Education, Work and Leisure" and "Chapter Four: Youth Culture and Style"
Nick Hornby, Excerpts from *Fever Pitch* and *High Fidelity*
Music Selections TBA

WEEK THREE

July 16: Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

July 17: Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*
Storry and Childs, "Chapter Six: Ethnicity and Language"

July 18: Film TBA

July 19: Film Discussion
Hanif Kureishi, "Girl"

July 20: Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*
Storry and Childs, "Chapter Three: Gender, Sex and the Family"

WEEK FOUR

July 23: Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*

July 24: Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*
Storry and Childs, "Chapter Seven: Religion and Heritage"

July 25: Film TBA

July 26: Film Discussion

Hari Kunzru, "Magda Mandela"

Nick Hornby and Posy Simmonds, "J. Johnson."

July 27: Storry and Childs, "Conclusion: Britain towards the Future"

Readings TBA