

Dr Adrian Chapman
London

ENGL 2000

Texts and Contexts: Modern & Contemporary British Literature

The introductory core course in English literature, which may include literature in translation, will teach the arts of literary interpretation by developing techniques of close reading, an appreciation of the relations among literary works and the contexts in which they are written and read, and an ability to write critically about the interplay between text and context. The sections of this course will offer students choices among thematic and topical foci, which will be specified in each section title and spelled out in the section's description. All sections will be offered in the [*eloquentia perfecta*](#) format, which emphasizes writing and presentation.

Required Texts

Any editions, including electronic ones (e.g. Kindle) are acceptable.

Barnes, Julian. *A Sense of an Ending*.

Edgar, David. *Mary Barnes*.

Filer, Nathan. *The Shock of the Fall*.

Winterson, Jeanette. *The Passion*.

Laing, R. D. *Knots*.

Lessing, Doris. 'The Eye of God in Paradise.' In *The Habit of Loving*.

Taylor, Barbara. *The Last Asylum: A Memoir of Madness in Our Time*.

Plus poetry by Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes - all available on Blackboard.

In addition to the required texts, shorter contextual readings will be posted on Blackboard: extracts from literary texts; literary criticism from books and journals; book reviews; historically contextualising materials; and examples of student writing (papers written by previous students of mine on texts studied on this course). These texts are indicated in the class and reading schedule below. I am happy to advise on further readings for students who want to follow their particular interests.

Overview of Assignments

There will be opportunities in class for group and individual discussion during the planning and preparation stages of assignment writing. Early drafts count as good participation, and I will make time to read them (in class, not by e-mail). All written work should follow MLA conventions and be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font and double spaced.

1. Mid-term paper: 6-8 pages (30%). Submit in Week VIII

2. Plan and initial thoughts / questions re final paper: 2-4 pages (10%). Submit in Week XII.
3. Final paper: 10-12 pages (50%). Submit in Week XIV.

You must submit at least 20 pages in all.

Class attendance and participation: 10 per cent. At the start of the semester I shall discuss what I understand to be good participation.

Class and Reading Schedule

Week I

I shall introduce the course and talk about requirements and responsibilities. We shall also discuss essay writing, grading, and course participation. You should have begun reading *The Last Asylum* prior to class - we shall begin the study of the text this week.

Week II

We continue with *The Last Asylum*, focusing particularly on genre and the author's combining of her personal story with the writing of a wider history. Prior to class, you should have completed the reading the text and read the reviews of it on Blackboard. We shall discuss the ways in which reviews differ from academic writing.

Week III

Group presentation on Doris Lessing's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, which you should read on Blackboard prior to class.

The primary focus this week will be on the Doris Lessing short story 'The Eye of God in Paradise' - read it before class - but if needs be we can devote some time still to *The Last Asylum*. We shall examine some criticism on Lessing (read it on Blackboard) and think about what you can take from it to aid your own writing.

Week IV

Group presentation on Doris Lessing and Englishness.

We shall broaden our thinking about the Lessing short story by comparing it to her evocation of post-war England and Englishness in *Walking in The Shade*, and her treatment of madness in *The Four-Gated City*. Extracts from *The Four-Gated City* and *Walking in The Shade* are on Blackboard and should be read before class.

Week V

Group Presentation on students' choice of poem from *Knots* - initial responses.

We shall the focus on a group of poems from the volume, which is brief and you should read it all before class. We shall listen to musical responses to the text and view some other artistic responses to it. I have written something on *Knots* and will show it to you and tell you how I went about my research and planned and wrote the article. We can speak about how best to approach writing and what counts (and does not count) as literary criticism.

Week VI

Group presentation on David Edgar - find out what you can about him and his work.

David Edgar's *Mary Barnes* (which you should read before class) is based on actual events, and either I shall give you a brief lecture about these events or invite a speaker to class. Read (before class) the extract from *Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness*, the book Mary wrote with her therapist, and also read the preface that Edgar wrote to that book (both texts on Blackboard). We shall also watch some video of Mary Barnes speaking and/or people speaking about her.

Week VII Mid-Semester Break

Read *The Passion* by Jeanette Winterson - a brief and very readable novel. Also try to get a start on at least one other text to be studied in class in the second half of the semester. The more you can read during the mid-term break, the better.

Week VIII (Submit mid-term paper)

Group presentation on *The Passion* - students to determine the precise topic.

This will be followed by questions and discussion which will steer further study of the novel.

Week IX

Group presentation responding to a student paper on *The Passion* (on Blackboard, to be read prior to class) - how good do you think the essay is and why?

We continue our focus on *The Passion*, and devote time to ways of writing about the text and continue our focus on what makes for good literary criticism. We shall also watch and respond to some video of the author, a very engaging speaker.

Week X

Group presentation responding to a student paper (on Blackboard - read before class) on *A Sense of an Ending* - what grade would you give the essay and why?

A Sense of an Ending is a short book, and you should have it read before class. There will be several links (and contrasts) we can make with texts studied earlier in the semester.

Week XI

Group presentation on *A Sense of an Ending* - why might Philip Larkin be the narrator's favourite poet?

We continue with *A Sense of an Ending* and bring in the study of verse by Ted Hughes and Philip Larkin (on Blackboard - read before class), both poets mentioned in the novel. We shall also discuss a review of the Barnes text (on Blackboard again) from *The London Review of Books*.

Week XII (Submit your plan and initial thoughts / questions re final paper: 2-4 pages)

Group presentation on *The Shock of The Fall* - what did you find interesting or surprising and why?

We turn to our final text, *The Shock of The Fall* by Nathan Filer. Read at least two-thirds of it before class - and also read prior to class the extract from Mark Haddon's *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* that is on Blackboard and read the couple of pages by the critic Alison Gibbons on multimodality (also on Blackboard). As well as attending to themes of loss and madness in Filer's novel, we shall think about genre and compare how Filer and Haddon make use of graphical elements in their texts.

Week XIII

Group presentation responding to two student papers on *The Shock of The Fall* - what grades do you think they got and why?

Further discussion of the novel, which should have been entirely read by now. We shall focus on specific passages. Prior to class, you should have read (on Blackboard) my writing that places the novel in specific British contemporary contexts.

Week XIV (Submit final paper)

Our final week, and we shall review the course and visit a nearby museum.