



**Boston University** International Programs  
London

**Boston University British Programmes**  
**Writing in Today's Britain: Meet the Writer**  
**CAS IP 406 (*Elective A*)**  
**Spring 2011**

**Instructor Information**

A. Name	Mary Condé
B. Day and Time	Monday and Tuesday (plus Friday 11 February), 1.15 – 5.15pm
C. Location	Cassels room, 43 Harrington Gardens, SW7 4JU
D. BU Telephone	020 7244 6255
E. Email	[REDACTED]
F. Webpage	<a href="http://www.bu-london.co.uk/academic/ip406">www.bu-london.co.uk/academic/ip406</a>
G. Office hours	By appointment

**Course Objectives**

The aim of this course is the intensive study of some very recent literary texts in conjunction with an investigation of the writing process and the life and career of the writer. It is hoped that all the writers will visit personally.

No prior knowledge is required, but the more widely students can read in contemporary literature in English (from any part of the world), the better prepared they will be, and the more they will enjoy the course.

**Course Overview**

The course consists of an examination of some recent texts in English including novels, a family memoir, a book of poems, and two plays. There are a variety of settings in time and place. Texts will be examined in the context of literary history, but also in terms of the marketplace. When the writers visit, and are interviewed by the students, we shall be able to track the process of publishing a book from the initial inspiration to the finished article to the publicity machine which lies beyond. We shall discuss such issues as: freedom of speech, the role of the literary agent, the role of the editor, writer's advances, and (last but not least) literary integrity. A major component of the course will be the comparison of writers in terms of literary merit, genre, and the working conditions for each individual.

It is hoped that students will find the experience of meeting the writers exciting in itself, but it should also enrich and inform the detailed analysis of their work in terms of social, national, ethnic and class contexts, and afford an opportunity to debate the relevance of a writer's intentions to the reader's response. We may also consider the arguments against meeting a writer.

## **Course Methodology**

This course will run over 9 four-hour sessions. Each class session will begin with a lecture placing the text in context and drawing on references to other works. Students will be expected to have read the entire assigned text in advance of the appropriate session. Students will contribute class presentations (one each per session) on some aspect of the text. There will be a general class discussion to which all students are expected to contribute. The writer will then visit the class and be interviewed by a chosen student or students (each of whom will participate in interviewing once per course). There will then be a general Q & A. Since it is courteous to end the class when the writer leaves, each class after the first will begin with feedback from the previous class. PLEASE NOTE that not all writers' visits can be guaranteed. When the writer does not visit, the class will work from supporting materials such as published interviews and personal communications.

Students are encouraged to make use of specialist academic libraries throughout London. Students will have a session about London libraries as part of their orientation week and will attend inductions to the specialist libraries for which they will receive memberships. Students will also receive information on visiting specialist libraries open to the public.

## **Assessment**

### **Essay (2,000 words):**

'What is the relationship between writers and their work? Make detailed reference to at least TWO writers from this course in your answer.' Hand in on final exam day. (30%)

**Class presentation** (to be assigned at first class) (20%) (notes to total roughly 500 words)

### **Summary writing assignment (500 word):**

'Problems inherent in writing a play' This summary should cover such points as:

- consideration of casting
- consideration of staging
- consideration of popularity with the theatre-going public

Hand in at start of third session (10%)

Interview of a visiting writer (questions to total roughly 500 words) (20%)

Attendance and participation (20%)

## **Grading**

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria, attendance requirements and policies on plagiarism:

<http://www.bu-london.co.uk/files/images/ACADEMICHANDBOOKSP11.pdf>

## **Course Chronology**

### **Mon 17 Jan**

**Session 1:** General introduction to course, explanation of the context of the authors and their texts, assignment of presentations/interviews, and discussion of how to conduct an interview.

**Reading:** 'Introducing the text' pp.1-13 in Peter Childs, *Reading Fiction: Opening the Text* (2001)

## **Tues 18 Jan**

**Session 2:** Discussion of a poetry collection by a contemporary Irish writer, with visit from Martina Evans.

**Reading:** Martina Evans, *Facing the Public* (2009)

Martina Evans' previous poetry collections include *All Alcoholics Are Charmers* and *Can Dentists Be Trusted?* Her novels are *Midnight Feast*, *The Glass Mountain*, and *No Drinking, No Dancing, No Doctors*. She is working on a long prose poem called *Petrol*, for which she has won an Arts Council award.

## **Mon 24 Jan**

**Session 3:** Discussion of a play set during the first world war about the intense and troubled relationship between D.H.Lawrence, his wife Frieda, John Middleton Murry, and Katherine Mansfield written by Amy Rosenthal, with visit from Amy Rosenthal.

**Reading:** Amy Rosenthal, *On the Rocks* (2008)

**Assignment to be handed in at this class:** 'Problems inherent in writing a play' (500 word summary).

Amy Rosenthal's play was commissioned by the Hampstead Theatre, where it was performed in 2008. She has written many plays for stage and radio, including *Sitting Pretty*, which played in New York and was taken on a national UK tour, and *Henna Night*, which won the Sunday Times Drama Award.

## **Tues 25 Jan**

**Session 4:** Discussion of a controversial play by a new playwright, with visit from Stephen Brown.

**Reading:** Stephen Brown, *Future Me* (2007)

Stephen Brown's work has toured the United Kingdom and been presented in New York. He is presently under commission to the National Theatre.

## **Mon 31 Jan**

**Session 5:** Discussion of a psychological detective story, with visit from Sarah Waters.

**Reading:** Sarah Waters, *The Little Stranger* (2009)

Sarah Waters has been shortlisted several times for our two major literary awards, the Orange Prize and the Booker Prize. Her first four novels have all been filmed.

## **Tues 1 Feb**

**Session 6:** Discussion of a family memoir by Phyllida Law narrated in a series of brief notes and letters, with visit from Phyllida Law.

**Reading:** Phyllida Law, *Notes to my Mother-in-Law* (2009)

Phyllida Law is a distinguished actor. This is her first published work.

## **Mon 7 Feb**

**Session 7:** Discussion of a genre-defying novel by Robert Hudson based on the fortunes of a football club, with visit from Robert Hudson.

**Reading:** Robert Hudson, *The Kilburn Social Club* (2009)

This is Robert Hudson's first novel. He is writing another novel which also defies genre.

## **Tues 8 Feb**

**Session 8:** Discussion of a complex novel which takes a wry view of terrorism, with visit from Pauline Melville.

**Reading:** Pauline Melville, *Eating Air*(2009)

Pauline Melville is an actor whose novels and short stories have won many literary awards.

## **Fri 11 Feb**

**Session 9:** Conclusions

**Tues 15 Feb FINAL EXAM.** Exam times and locations will be posted on the BU London website and in the Student Newsletter two weeks before exam dates.

**\*\* Contingency Class Date: Friday 4 February.** Students are obligated to keep this date free to attend class should any class dates need to be rescheduled.

## **Readings**

**Required reading** is noted above in the Course Chronology. It is essential that all students read and reflect upon the relevant reading *before each* class.

Stephen Brown, *Future Me* (2007)

Martina Evans, *Facing the Public* (20

Robert Hudson, *The Kilburn Social Club* (2009)

Phyllida Law, *Notes to my Mother-in-Law* (2009)

Pauline Melville, *Eating Air* (2009)

Amy Rosenthal, *On the Rocks* (2008)

Sarah Waters, *The Little Stranger* (2009)

**Supplementary and Secondary Reading:**

The following texts are useful for expanding upon the required reading, for researching seminar papers and for preparing for the final examination.

James Acheson and Sarah C.E.Ross (eds.), *The Contemporary British Novel* (2005)

Nick Bentley, *British Fiction of the 1990s* (2005)

Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History, 1950-1995* (1996)

James F.English, *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* (2006)

James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (2005)

Antony Easthope, *Contemporary Poetry Meets Modern Theory* (1991)

Andrzej Gasiorek, *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After* (1995)

Lizbeth Goodman, *Feminist Stages: Interviews with women in contemporary British theatre* (1996)

Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000* (2002)

Dominic Head, *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond* (2008)

Adam Kirsch, *The Modern Element: Essays on contemporary poetry* (2008)

Rod Mengham, *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English Since 1970* (1999)

Jago Morrison, *Contemporary Fiction* (2003)

Emma Parker, *Contemporary British Women Writers* (2004)

Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2007)

Duncan Wu, *Making Plays: Interviews with contemporary British dramatists and their directors* (2000)

Liz Yorke, *Impertinent Voices: Subversive strategies in contemporary women's poetry* (1991)

Additional readings may be posted on the course webpage:

<http://www.bu-london.co.uk/academic/ip406> (you must be logged in to view materials).

**Terms & Conditions**

Students are expected to attend punctually, to participate in class, and to hand written work in by the deadline. The only acceptable excuse for non-attendance is medical.

Failure to attend or failure to comply with the course requirements will result in failure of the course.

## Course Bibliography

- Acheson, J. and Ross, S. (eds.). *The Contemporary British Novel*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Bentley, Nick. *British Fiction of the 1990s*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Childs, Peter. *Reading Fiction: Opening the Text*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.
- Connor, Steven. *The English Novel in History, 1950-1995*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Easthope, Anthony. *Contemporary Poetry Meets Modern Theory*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991.
- English, James F. *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*. Maryland: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.
- English, James F. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Evans, Martina. *Facing the Public*. London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2009.
- Gasiorek, Andrzej. *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Goodman, Lizbeth. *Feminist Stages: Interviews with women in contemporary British theatre*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academics, 1996.
- Gupta, Rahila. *Enslaved*. London: Portobello Books Ltd., 2008.
- Head, Dominic. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Head, Dominic. *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.
- Hudson, Robert. *The Kilburn Social Club*. London: Random House Group Limited, 2009.
- Kirsch, Adam. *The Modern Element: Essays on contemporary poetry*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.
- Law, Phyllida. *Notes to my Mother-in-Law*. United Kingdom: Harper Collins Publisher, 2009.
- Melville, Pauline. *Eating Air*. London: Telegram, 2009.
- Mengham, Rod. *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English Since 1970*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999.
- Morrison, Jago. *Contemporary Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Parker, Emma. *Contemporary British Women Writers*. Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer Limited, 2004.

Rosenthal, Amy. *On the Rocks*. London: Oberon Books, 2008.

Tew, Phillip. *The Contemporary British Novel*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2007.

Waters, Sarah. *The Little Stranger*. London: Virago Press Ltd., 2009.

Wu, Duncan. *Making Plays: Interviews with contemporary British dramatists and their directors*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

Yorke, Liz. *Impertinent Voices: Subversive strategies in contemporary women's poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.