



**Boston University Study Abroad  
London**

**Boston University Study Abroad London  
Writing in Today's Britain: Meet the Writer  
CAS EN 387**

**Instructor Information**

A. Name                      Mary Condé

**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, memoirs, a collection of poems, and a play. 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 shall 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) 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 (impossible only in the case of Martina Evans), each class after the first will usually 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.

Preparation should be intelligently managed, which will often involve reading ahead.

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:**

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

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

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

- consideration of research
- consideration of historical truthfulness
- consideration of popularity with the reading public

Hand in at start of third session, Mon. 28<sup>th</sup> January. (10%)

### **Essay 1 (1,500 words):**

'To what extent do you think a writer should take market forces into consideration?'

Hand in at start of fifth session, Mon. 4<sup>th</sup> February. (15%)

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

### **Essay 2 (3,000 words):**

Students will be asked to produce a 3,000-word essay after consultation on the selection of a topic with the tutor. Selection of a topic will be confirmed with the tutor by Session 6. Students will need to draw on the sources listed in the bibliography at the end of this syllabus. Hand in at start of eighth session, Tues. 12<sup>th</sup> February. (35%)

## **Grading**

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria, attendance requirements and policies on plagiarism: <http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester>

## **Attendance Policy**

### **Classes**

All Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend each and every class session, tutorial, and field trip in order to fulfill the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

#### *Authorised Absence:*

Students who expect to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorized Absence Approval Form 10 working days in advance of the class date (except in the case of absence due to illness, for which students should submit the Authorised Absence Approval Form with the required doctor's note as soon as possible).

**Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Form does not guarantee an authorized absence**

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:

- Illness, supported by a local London doctor's note (submitted with Authorised Absence Approval Form).
- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor)
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

**The Directors will only in the most extreme cases (for example, death in close family) allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.**

#### *Unauthorised Absence:*

Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a **4% grade penalty** to their final grade for the course whose class was missed. This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a 'Fail' in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

## **Course Chronology**

### **Session 1: Monday 21<sup>st</sup> January**

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. Analysis of poems by Martina Evans.

**Reading:** 'Introducing the text' pp.1-13 in Peter Childs, *Reading Fiction: Opening the Text* (2001), Martina Evans, *Facing the Public* (2009)

**Session 2: Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January**

Discussion of a poetry collection by a contemporary Irish writer, with visit from Martina Evans. Each student will be assigned a specific poem to analyse.

**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 has just completed a long prose poem called *Petrol*, for which she has won an Arts Council award, and from which she will read extracts.

**Session 3: Monday 28<sup>th</sup> January**

**HAND IN SUMMARY**

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

Discussion of a psychological detective story, with visit from Sarah Waters. We shall try to determine the fictional place of the supernatural.

**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.

**Session 4: Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> January.**

**Summaries will be returned.**

Discussion of a family memoir by Phyllida Law narrated in a series of brief notes and letters, with visit from Phyllida Law. We shall try to establish a better term than 'family memoir'!

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

Phyllida Law is a distinguished actor. This is her first published work. She is about to publish a sequel about her mother.

**Session 5: Monday 4<sup>th</sup> February**

**HAND IN ESSAY 1**

Discussion of very controversial play, with visit from Stephen Brown.

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

Stephen Brown has just completed another very controversial play. He has been commissioned by the National Theatre.

**Session 6: Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> February. Essays will be returned.**

We shall work intensively on essay topics.

**Reading:** No reading required – but use the time to read ahead!

**\*\* Contingency Class Date: Friday 8<sup>th</sup> February.** Students are obligated to keep this date free to attend class should any class dates need to be rescheduled.

**Session 7: Monday 11th February**

Discussion of a memoir about the significance of cricket, with visit from Michael Simkins.

**Reading:** Michael Simkins, *The Last Flannelled Fool* (2011)

Michael Simkins is an actor, and the only reason he might not be able to visit is that he is currently filming for *EastEnders*, our premier television soap opera. He would be happy to talk about acting and travel journalism as well as his book.

**Session 8: Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> February**

**HAND IN 3,000 WORD ESSAY**

Discussion of a novel based on a real-life village in India where all the inhabitants are murderers, with visit from Nikita Lalwani.

**Reading:** Nikita Lalwani, *The Village* (2012)

Nikita Lalwani's first novel, *Gifted*, won the Desmond Elliot Prize for New Fiction. She was born in Rajasthan, but grew up in Cardiff.

**Session 9: Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February \*PLEASE NOTE THIS IS A FRIDAY\***

Discussion of a novel which will only just have been published, with visit from Robert Hudson. The book launch will have been the day before!

**Reading:** Robert Hudson, *The Dazzle* (2013)

This is Robert Hudson's second novel. His collection of the love letters between the horses of Napoleon and Wellington has been broadcast: it started life as one of the 'Tall Tales' he masterminds regularly at a pub in Kilburn.

**NO FINAL EXAM.**

### **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, and come with written notes on their own critical conclusions.

Stephen Brown, *Future Me* (2007)

Martina Evans, *Facing the Public* (2009)

Robert Hudson, *The Dazzle* (2013)

Nikita Lalwani, *The Village* (2012)

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

Michael Simkins, *The Last Flannelled Fool* (2011)

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: <https://lms.bu.edu>  
(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. 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.
- 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.
- 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.