



**Boston University Study Abroad
London**

**Boston University Study Abroad London
Contemporary British Literature
CAS EN 388 (*Elective B*)
Spring 2013**

Instructor Information

A. Name Julie Charalambides

Course Objectives

Through the intensive study of several recent literary texts students will learn more about the British psyche, culture and history that generated them. They will hopefully be confronted with some of the most important aspects of the human condition, both in a sense of that condition as peculiarly British and as a generality.

There are no prerequisites for the course beyond a love of reading and a total commitment to reading every one of the primary works in full; and, most importantly, an open mind.

Course Overview

The course constitutes a consideration of various significant texts from the late 20th Century and into the 21st by living writers. Many of the authors are well known to the British public but we will not necessarily be reading their most acclaimed or most recent work. Rather, the texts have been selected for their engagement with some of the major problems and contentious issues within contemporary British society, and their ability to provoke debate as to accepted definitions of literature and our expectations of such. We will be looking at the social and historical contexts of the texts and their authors, and dealing with the major themes of much late 20th century literature, including the impact of two world wars on the literary imagination, notions of Utopia/Dystopia, storytelling and sexuality. The course will incorporate writers working in various narrative forms, and includes a visit to a London theatre we will watch new material by young British playwrights.

Course Methodology

This course will run over 9 four-hour sessions. Some of the classes will incorporate a field trip and I will be using various media for presentation purposes, but the discussion group will form the basis of classes and will centre on the primary texts, which must be read in advance of the relevant class. Classes will begin with lectures on the background to the texts followed by discussion on the assigned reading.

Assessment

1. Long Essay (2000 words minimum), on a topic given in Session 4. The deadline for the essay will be Session 6. (35%)

2. A brief Creative Writing Assignment (max. 500 words) based on our experience of walking around Spitalfields, due Session 9. (15%)
3. Review of Play (500 words) to be handed in the week following the theatre visit. (10%)
4. Final Exam (40%)

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 authorised 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.

Lateness

Students arriving more than 15 minutes after the posted class start time will be marked as late. Any student with irregular class attendance (more than two late arrivals to class) will require a meeting with the Assistant Director of Academic Affairs and if the lateness continues, may have his/her final grade penalised.

Course Chronology

Friday 1st March

Session 1: A Small Island

Introduction to the course, and to the idea of a post-colonial Britain that gave rise to our current understanding of the multicultural environment in which Andrea Levy and I grew up.

Reading: *Small Island*, by Andrea Levy

Friday 8th March

Session 2: The British Library and surroundings

At the British Library the class will meet to discuss the contents of the library and its role in illustrating a history of literature. The class will continue with a walking tour of the Bloomsbury area with a particular focus on its literary connections.

Reading: **Students are reminded that the reading load is heavy – they should always be one book ahead!**

Friday 15th March

Session 3: Britain at War

Sessions 3 and 4 will be given over to an examination of the effects of the First and Second World Wars on the psyche of the late 20th century writer through a reading of two of highly acclaimed novels. The first is part one of what has become known as The Regeneration Trilogy, which introduces us to two of the best known writers associated with The Great War, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.

Reading: *Regeneration*, by Pat Barker

Friday 22nd March

Session 4: Undone in Time

The second 'war' novel is Martin Amis' remarkable *Time's Arrow* which takes a very different approach to the Second World War and forces us to consider the morality of writing Holocaust fiction.

Reading: *Time's Arrow*, by Martin Amis

NB Long Essay topic will be given this session, essay to be handed in Session 6

Friday 29th March – No Class (Good Friday)

Friday 5th April

Session 5: Brave New Worlds

Examining ideas of Englishness, of Utopia and Dystopia through the work of one of the most paradoxically 'English' contemporary authors.

Reading: *Never Let Me Go*, by Kazuo Ishiguro

AND

Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley

Friday 12th April

Session 6: Facilitating Evil

‘Africa,’ according to a former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, ‘is a scar on the conscience of the West.’ How have writers in a post colonial Britain dealt with this legacy of guilt? We will be discussing the book and the film of *The Last King of Scotland*, looking at significant scenes in the film and considering the reasons for the changes.

Reading: *The Last King of Scotland*, by Giles Fodden

NB Long essay must be handed in at the end of this session when I will hand out reading material for Session 7.

Thursday 18th April

Session 7: New Writing

Reading: Short stories by new writers – to be given by tutor. See above.

Walking Tour of Spitalfields and brief writing assignment completed *in situ* and due in Session 9.

Friday 19th April

Session 8: Walking on the Wild Side – from Jerusalem to Greek Street

London has always had a reputation as a city of sin, ‘as the cesspit of Europe’ – is it justified?

Reading: *Venus as a Boy*, by Luke Sutherland

Visit to the National Portrait Gallery for an illustrated history of English literature given by the lecturer.

Tuesday 23rd April

Session 9: Love Stories I: Enduring Love

Ian McEwan is one of the best-known British authors writing today and held in both affection and esteem by academics and the public. This novel is remarkable for its wealth of subject matter and its narrative structure.

Love Stories II: Death and the Maiden

Having burst onto the literary scene in 1985 with her autobiographical *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, Jeanette Winterson has continued to delight, offend and outrage in equal measure. This novella is innovative in structure and content, allowing for both a feminine and sapphic aesthetic.

Reading: *Enduring Love*, by Ian McEwan

Written on the Body, by Jeanette Winterson

FINAL EXAM Thursday 25th April. Exam times and locations will be posted on the BU London website and in the Student Newsletter two weeks before exam dates.

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. All texts will be available in the BU London library.

Primary Texts

Small Island, by Andrea Levy

Regeneration, by Pat Barker

Time's Arrow, by Martin Amis

The Last King of Scotland, by Giles Foden

Never Let Me Go, by Kazuo Ishiguro

Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley,

Enduring Love, by Ian McEwan

Written on the Body, by Jeanette Winterson

Venus as a Boy, by Luke Sutherland, 2005

Supplementary and Secondary Reading:

The following texts will be referred to in the course of discussion of the primary texts.

Strange Meeting, Susan Hill, 1971

War Horse, Michael Murpurgo, 1982

The Foreshadowing, Marcus Sedgwick, 2005

The Eye in the Door, Pat Barker, 1993

The Ghost Road, Pat Barker, 1995

The Remains of the Day, Kazuo Ishiguro, 1989

Nineteen Eighty Four, George Orwell, 1949

Additional readings may be posted on the course webpage: <https://lms.bu.edu>
(you must be logged in to view materials).