

**Twentieth-Century English Novel**  
**English 4374/5374**  
**Fall Semester, 2009**

**Course Syllabus**

The twentieth century saw the flowering of what has come to be called the “art novel,” by which is usually meant a kind of novel that manifests a great deal of self-consciousness about the nature, possibilities, and limitations of language and narrative. The “art novel” is usually contrasted with the nineteenth-century “realistic” novel which, in the minds of the writers of the early twentieth century, was a bit too concerned with entertaining mass audiences and not sufficiently concerned with artistic exploration and integrity. Naturally, this view of things is slanted in favor of the early Modernists who were struggling to free themselves from the imposing shadows of writers like Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, and Trollope. Still, even when “the anxiety of influence” is factored in, there was a change in the way the novel came to be regarded by its practitioners. Following the lead of writers such as Gustav Flaubert, who aspired to make the novel as carefully made as a poem, the novelists of the twentieth century saw the novel not just as a way to tell an interesting story but also as a way to express and, in some ways, dramatize the decline, disintegration, and fragmentation that was widely felt to be plaguing Western culture and even the individual human psyche. Experiments with tone, point of view, the treatment of time, the many and sometimes conflicting sides of individual personality, the interplay of conscious and unconscious forces all found their way into the novels of the Modernists. Instead of seeking wide audiences the way a Dickens or a Thackeray had, the Modernists eschewed popularity for the sake of artistic exploration and risk. Novelists no longer saw themselves as primarily moral guides or agents of social change, as did the Victorians. Instead, they saw themselves as isolated “culture heroes” trying to give shape to their vision against a hostile or indifferent world.

(It is also worth noting that some people who think about these things believe that the twentieth-century novel is really a return of the novel to its playful, skeptical, and disreputable origins. After all, they argue, *Don Quixote*, the novel widely regarded as the first modern novel, is about its character’s bizarre attempts to “read” his world as a chivalric romance and Cervantes even has characters in the second part of the novel recognize Don Quixote from their reading of the first part. These thinkers believe that just as the epic form expresses the fullness and coherence of a culture’s values and tragedy expresses divisions and irreconcilable conflicts in those values, the novel expresses doubt about whether there are any authoritative values at all. As a result, the novel is more flexible than any other form and is given to playing with ideas about what can be known, what counts as real, and whether language and literature are lenses or independent realities.)

Much of this course will concentrate on some of the great works of some of the most influential of these twentieth-century novelists. We will begin by reading works by the great Modernists-- Joseph Conrad, the great Polish-born writer who looked at the moral crises of his time, James Joyce, the great Irish writer who turned personal memory into

myth and myth into low comedy, Virginia Woolf, who tried to capture in exquisite detail the dynamic and sometimes painful shifts and changes of everyday experience, and E. M. Forester, who wrote about friendship in the midst of colonialism's destructive blundering. Next, we will read a couple of works from the generation of novelists who followed the Modernists—Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*, a novel about a tramp seeking both silence and his mother, and Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, a crazy novel about life, death, and literary obsessions. To finish things off, we will read Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, a controversial novel about holy books, iron fists, and identities that just won't stop changing.

**Reading List:**

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*  
James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*  
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*  
E. M. Forester, *A Passage to India*  
Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*  
Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*  
Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses*

**Reading and Exam Schedule (tentative):**

*Heart of Darkness*: 3 classes

**Exam**

*Portrait*: 6 classes

*To the Lighthouse*: 6 classes

**Exam**

*A Passage to India* 6 classes

*Molloy*: 4 classes

**Exam**

*The Third Policeman*: 3 classes

*Satanic Verses*: 9 classes

**Final Exam**

There will be **four** essay exams in all. Needless to say, these exams will test your ability to analyze and interpret the novels we will be reading. Your grade will be based on the clarity and substance of your essays. Your final grade for the class will be based primarily on these exams, though class attendance and participation can figure in as well. Graduate students will also have to write an additional paper and endure some kind of tutorial. I suppose this means that these poor souls will have to meet with me every so often to make sure they are getting a graduate level educational experience and not the shabby undergraduate one.

Since this is an upper division course, I will forego my usual list of rules and rants and threats. I expect that you will attend class regularly. If you don't, I will notice and this

might affect your final grade. I expect you to do your own work and not plagiarize, even if you are fan of hip-hop “sampling” or Hollywood “homage.” Be nice to each other. You never know when you might need each other. Be nice to me, I control your future. Check out the Student Handbook for all relevant stuff about academics (starting on page 25) and sexual harassment (on page 93).

The University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need accommodation under this act due to a disability, contact the Office of Disability Support Services at 450-3135.

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