

TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITISH FICTION (The Audiobook Version)

English 65.001
Spring 2012

Tues and Thurs 10:30-12:00
Fisher Bennett Hall 244

Jim English
Office: Fisher-Bennett 311
Hours: Tues 2:00-3:00, Wed 2:00-3:00
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DESCRIPTION:

No Reading! This is a standard introductory survey of British fiction since 1900, but with one important difference. Instead of reading the novels in print form, we will listen to audiobook sound files. Our texts will all be major British novels, ranging from Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900) to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004). We will explore a number of important questions about the genre of the novel and the politics of literary form, the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, and the shifting dynamics of Englishness and Britishness. But we will also have occasion to consider the particular qualities of the audio format, which has been dramatically on the rise since the advent of the iPod. What are the advantages of listening rather than reading, and what are the limitations or losses inherent in a shift to the aural? To what extent are our responses to an audio novel shaped by the stylistic and interpretative decisions of the performer? How does the library of available audio titles differ from the library of print titles, and who decides what gets made into a sound recording and what doesn't?

The class is conceived as an experiment, the first all-audiobook class at Penn and possibly anywhere. We will purchase our texts with credits from Audible, and will use audio-capture tools to extract audio "quotations" for use in class and in written work (some of which will be submitted as sound recording rather than typescript). Our aims will be to learn something about modernist and contemporary British fiction, to help pioneer a new field of literary study (audiobook studies), and to enjoy a series of really great novels. Written work will include an essay of 4-5 pages, a longer essay of 8-10 pages, occasional brief projects and workshop assignments, and five short midterm exams; there will be no final.

Required Texts:

Conrad, Joseph. *Lord Jim*.
Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Never Let Me Go*.
Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.
Mitchell, David. *Cloud Atlas*.
Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*.
Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*.
Waugh, Evelyn. *Vile Bodies*.
Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Class attendance is required; notify me in advance if you need to miss a class. The reading/listening is not too heavy, averaging about an hour a day, but you will need to keep up with the schedule in order to perform well in discussion and on the unannounced midterm quizzes. There will be five of these, consisting mostly of multiple-choice and short-answer questions; your lowest score will be dropped and the others will each count 10% of the final grade. Written work will consist of a short essay of 3-4 pages, counting 20%, and a longer essay of 6-8 pages, counting 30%. The final 10% of your grade will be based on your attendance, participation, and performance on ad hoc assignments.

SCHEDULE

Jan 12 Introduction

Unit 1: Modernism and the Bildungsroman

Jan 17 / Jan 19 Conrad, *Lord Jim*

Jan 24 / Jan 26 Conrad, *Lord Jim*

Jan 31 Audio Tech workshop, Weigle Information Commons

Feb 2 Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Feb 7 / Feb 9 Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Unit 2: Modernism, Class, Satire

Feb 14 / Feb 16 Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*

Feb 21 / Feb 23 Waugh, *Vile Bodies*

Interlude: Reflections on the Audiobook Format

Feb 28 / Mar 1 Readings in Audiobook Studies

****Short Essays Due 3/2****

Mar 6 / Mar 8 [Spring Break]

**Unit 3: Black British Fiction and the Novel of
“Multicultural London”**

Mar 13 / Mar 15	Rushdie, <i>Satanic Verses</i>
Mar 20 / Mar 22	Rusdhe, <i>Satanic Verses</i> / Smith, <i>White Teeth</i>
Mar 27 / Mar 29	Smith, <i>White Teeth</i> / longer essays assigned
Apr 3	Smith, <i>White Teeth</i>

**Unit 5: Contemporary Historico-Science Fiction -- Writing
the Past as Future in the Present**

Apr 5	Ishiguro, <i>Never Let Me Go</i>
Apr 10 / Apr 12	Ishiguro, <i>Never Let Me Go</i> / Mitchell, <i>Cloud Atlas</i>
Apr 17 / Apr19	Mitchell, <i>Cloud Atlas</i>
Apr 24	Conclusions

Longer Essays Due 4/27