



Department of English & Modern Languages

Bowie State University
Department of English and Modern Languages

English 417 Contemporary Literature (3 credit hours) Spring 2002

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Office Hours:

MWF: 11 – 12, 1 – 2

MW 3 - 4

Course Description:

In this course, students will explore literature by women novelists, poets, and playwrights written in the last ten years. These diverse authors represent a world perspective and reflect both major literary prizes (including two Nobel Laureates and two Booker Prizes) and commercial success (including bestsellers and film adaptations). These works will be studied for their literary merit and stylistic concerns as well as historical context and political viewpoints. Through this study, students will become acquainted with major trends in contemporary writing, including experimental fiction, poetry, and drama.

Required Texts:

Atwood, Margaret. *The Blind Assassin*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001.
Boland, Eavan. *In a Time of Violence*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.
Chevalier, Tracy. *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*. New York: Plume, 2001.
Danticat, Edwidge. *the farming of bones*. New York: Penguin, 1999.
Dove, Rita. *On the Bus with Rose Parks*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.
Ensler, Eve. *The Vagina Monologues*. New York: Villard Books, 1998.
Gordimer, Nadine. *The House Gun*. New York: Penguin, 1999.
Fielding, Helen. *Bridget Jones' Diary*. New York: Penguin, 1999.
Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.
Szyborska, Wislawa. *View with a Grain of Sand*. New York: Harvest Books, 1995.

Student Outcomes:

Upon completion of English 417, students will be able to:

1. Read contemporary literature critically;
2. Appreciate experimental fiction, poetry, and drama;
3. Research and write a biocritical analysis of a contemporary writer;
4. Develop – plan, research, and write – a profile of a contemporary writer;
5. Identify and approach contemporary writers as the subject of primary research.

Teaching Modes

This course will be taught as a combination seminar and book group. Given the recent publication of this literature, no one is a true expert, so instructor and students will collaborate to examine the formal qualities and thematic concerns of the works.

Course Grade

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| • Critical Analysis #1 | 15% |
| • Critical Analysis #2 | 15% |
| • Independent Research Essay or Proposal | 20% |
| • Conversation with Contemporary Writer | 25% |
| • Class Participation | 25% |

The first two critical analysis essays (~1500 words each) will focus on a writer read for class. Each essay will involve pursuing the writer or a specific work by the writer further than the class analysis in terms of both additional reading and research.

Each student will focus her own **independent research essay or proposal**. For those who need more practice with conventional essay writing, a critical paper on an author not studied in class (but one who has written in the last ten years) is recommended. Others are strongly encouraged to develop a different kind of essay – such as a grant proposal (a real one from a real organization to do a real event!) or an essay targeted for a specific publication. Length will vary according to the nature of the writing. Each student's "essay" will be critiqued by two other students as part of the writing process.

The final writings will result in a class project – an online magazine entitled “Conversations with Contemporary Women Writers.” Each student will contribute **one written piece (minimum 2000 words), which may be a book review, critical analysis, profile, or extended interview with introduction.** As in the independent project, each piece will be critiqued by two other students.

Class participation plays a very large role in student performance in this course. Attendance and informed (i.e., informed by having read the assignments!) participation are key, but other specific elements contribute to the 25%. Students are expected to attend two literary events during the semester; these may be on or off campus, theatre counts, readings at museums or book stores work.... After each event, the student will write a brief (one-page) response to the event and report to the class. Finally, each student is responsible for introducing one of the writers we are studying with a formal presentation to the class.

Class attendance and participation	5%
Attendance at events	10%
Presentation	10%

There will be no exams in this class.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITER

Each student will present an introduction to one of the writers we will study in class. For Gordimer, Atwood, Danticat, Dove, and Boland, students can work in pairs. Each presentation, which should be between 20 and 30 minutes, will include the following:

- Biographical information
- General information about the writer’s major themes and critical reputation
- Bibliography of writer’s works
- Annotated bibliography of at least five secondary sources
- One critical essay about or interview with the writer
- Useful links to learn more about the writer

The presentation may be made orally and informally or with Power Point. Regardless, the student will provide a hard copy of the last four elements for everyone in the class. In addition, the bibliography of the writer’s works, secondary sources, and links will be presented on disk to be added to the course web site.