

English 421

20th Century British Literature

Texts: Kermode & Hollander, Modern British Literature  
John Synge, Playboy of the Western World

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Bibliography: See Modern British Literature pages 695-705.

English 421  
Modern British  
Literature

J. James - Instructor

2 - 3:30 TTh

I. Goals: This course is an introduction to major 20th century British writers. Taught chronologically, it emphasizes: (a) the writer & his world; (b) developments in thought & culture; and (c) the various types of literature written: drama, short stories or novellas, & poetry. In general, English 421 will be taught as a discussion course, supplemented with mini-lectures, handouts of various sorts & some readings and/or dramatizations.

II. General Objectives of Literature: Literature holds many values for the student. Concerned with such realities as life, death, love, the problem of good & evil, literature enriches & clarifies life by contributing to an understanding of man's relationship to society, to his physical environment, to his inner self & to God.

Other studies seek similar ends but in other ways. Perhaps the area peculiar to literature is most accurately conveyed by the concept of the "concrete universal". Philosophy & science abstract truth from experience literature seizes truth in experience.

A good reader is one who both selects judiciously & reads discriminately. Most students are certain to invest substantial portions of their lives in reading literature as well as in attention to the related arts of the theater, film, & others. This means that one of the most important acquirements possible for a college student is a growing habit of active personal judgment in the selection & appraisal of what he reads & views. He can best initiate himself into a habit of valid & effective judgment by systematic, extensive practice in the critical reading of works of various kinds. The course in literature will provide this practice designed to help the student become a judicious reader of literary form.

How This Course Is Related to General Objectives of University:

- To develop in the student approaches to the creative & analytical understanding & appreciation of literature, specifically through the study of representative 20th century British writers.
- To open to the student the wealth of man's cultural heritage both artistic & intellectual.
- To encourage a search for truth through literature & to assist the student in forming a value system or a philosophy of life.

III. Tentative Schedule:

Week 1-2      Synge  
Week 3-4      Shaw  
Week 5-6      Conrad or Lawrence  
Week 7        Joyce

Week 8        Simon Gray  
Week 9-15     Selected poems of  
Hardy, Housman, Auden,  
Dylan Thomas, Larkin,  
Owen or Rosenberg,  
early Yeats or Eliot.

IV. Major Assignments: Classes will consist normally of a threefold combination: (1) presentation of key points in literary works & indepth supplements by the instructor; (2) class discussions of these points & the assigned portions of literary works; (3) student presentations on special topics or themes approved by the instructor both to encourage student research & to afford an opportunity to the student for effective oral communication. Student involvement will be emphasized in all aspects of the learning experience.

You can expect:      --Three exams (Roughly at the end of weeks 5, 10, & 15).  
                         --One research report/class presentation on an individual author or approved topic. \*\*

\*\* For nonmajors, another type of assignment can be substituted: (1) Background/context/theme introduction and dramatic reading of a key part of a play or fiction work or some poems. This can be done on video. (2) Some other artistic or creative project approved by the instructor (such as a poster & commentary display in Sullivan Library of a modern British writer).

V. Grading:

20% - Test #1  
20% - Test #2  
20% - Test #3

20% - Research Report or Special Project

20% - Attendance & participation/Inclass responses & journal entries.

\*\*Parts of tests #2 & #3 may involve short take-home essays and/or some journal entries.

\*\*Class attendance will be taken. Inbetween two grades, good attendance will raise the final grade.

Research Report Assignment: Starting in about ten weeks, each student will be called upon to present a 30-40 minute report on a 20th century British author or poet (or on some specific topic approved by the instructor).

The research report should include the following:

1. A review of the biographical details that may be helpful in understanding the writer's works.
  2. A brief commentary on the writer's artistic & philosophical views which are reflected in his works.
  3. Explication of the poet's more important works or analysis of a specific play, novella, or short story if you choose to work on a dramatist or fiction writer.
  4. The student's appreciation & evaluation of the writer & his works.
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- \*\* Each report should be limited to 30-40 minutes. The student should limit his material beforehand so that he can adequately cover it in the time allotted.
  - \*\* The student should type up & xerox an outline of his report for the other members of the class.
  - \*\* The student who is giving the presentation should be able to answer any questions raised by the other members of the class.