

**ANG 6638 Later 20th-Century British Literature:
“Dystopian British Fiction, 1949 to Present Day”
Fall Term, 2011**

Professor Elisabeth Oliver
Meeting Time: Wednesdays, 4-7pm
Location: TBA
Office: C-8117
Office Hours: TBA
Email: TBA

Course Description

Beginning with Orwell’s *1984* and moving through to Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, this course considers the development of British dystopian fiction from 1949 to the present day. Dystopian fiction tends to present a nightmare vision of an imagined society in which negative social and political developments dominate the cultural landscape. These are cautionary tales that portray a world that, if not actively prevented, might grow out of current circumstances. This literary genre is often read as a satirical and/or prophetic mode that mirrors contemporary cultural concerns. Between 1949 and the present day these include: the threat of totalitarianism, developments in science and technology, gender politics, rampant consumerism and a growing sense of environmental crisis. But we can also read dystopian fiction as a mode of reckoning with the historical or imaginary past—with primitive origins, nostalgic longing, class oppression, colonial enterprise and the violence of the two world wars. In addition to reading contemporary British dystopias in social and historical context, we will engage in the practice of close reading as a strategy for understanding how the novelist manipulates certain formal and stylistic elements such as point of view, setting, chronology, intertextuality and language to better articulate his dystopian vision.

Writers and critics often use the term ‘dystopia’ (Greek for *bad place*) synonymously with the terms ‘anti-utopia’ or ‘negative utopia’ and in contrast to ‘utopia’ (*no place*) and ‘eutopia’ (*good place*). By grounding our analyses in the context of contemporary utopian studies, we will develop a nuanced understanding of these distinct yet interrelated terms. So too will we gain an awareness of how the dystopian mode is amenable to the blurring of genre, incorporating within it elements of comedy and tragedy, glimpses of paradise and visions of hell.

Required Texts

* Students are required to read (or re-read) Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) before the first lecture. This novel provides important context for and is an ur-text of the novels that follow. It is widely available in libraries and bookstores, or can be downloaded for free online.

The texts below may be purchased at the university bookstore:

George Orwell, *1984* (1949)
 Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)
 J.G. Ballard, *Highrise* (1974)
 Russell Hoban, *Ridley Walker* (1980)
 P.D. James, *Children of Men* (1992)
 David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (2004)
 Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

Secondary readings: TBA

Assignments and Grading

Distribution of Marks

Seminar Presentation #1 25%
 Seminar Presentation #2 25%
 Term Paper 40%
 Participation 10%

Seminar Presentations

Students will prepare and present **two** seminar papers on the text assigned for that week's reading. Presentations should be 20-25 minutes in length (no longer), i.e. the length of an academic conference paper. This amounts to about 8- 10 pages double-spaced pages that you will submit to the professor the day of the presentation. A handout that summarizes your paper's salient details, raises questions for discussion, and offers useful bibliographical references *must accompany your presentation*. The purpose of the handout is to help your classmates both attend to the content of your argument and pursue further research.

Term Paper

Due Wednesday, December 14th 2011

Students will choose one of their seminar papers to develop into a 15-20 page research paper. This essay should develop your argument and engage in the critical discourse surrounding the author, text and topic that you have chosen. I encourage students to see this as an opportunity to develop a piece of writing that might be revised further into a scholarly article. With this as the tentative goal, students are asked to consider how their work might add to the current criticism in the specific area of inquiry. I will say more about this in class.

Late Policy

Term papers and written assignments will incur a penalty of two percent (2%) for each day late in all cases except certified emergencies. Weekends count as two days. **Essays and assignments handed in more than a week late will not be accepted.**

Plagiarism

To put it simply: don't even think about it. Be advised that the instructor has an especially low view of such behaviour. Plagiarism may result in a grade of zero for the assignment or the course.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1 (September 7) Introduction to the course

Week 2 (September 14) George Orwell, *1984*

Week 3 (September 21) George Orwell, *1984*

Week 4 (September 28) Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

Week 5 (October 5) Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*
- Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film adaptation

Week 6 (October 12) Russell Hoban, *Ridley Walker*

Week 7 (October 19) Russell Hoban, *Ridley Walker*

Week 8 (Reading Week: no class will be held)

Week 9 (November 2) J.G. Ballard, *Highrise*

Week 10 (November 9) P.D. James *Children of Men*

Week 11 (November 16) P.D. James *Children of Men*
- Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 film adaptation of *Children of Men*

Week 12 (November 23) David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*

Week 13 (November 30) David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*

Week 14 (December 7) Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*