

ENGL 273H: Contemporary Literature Honors
10:00 – 11:15 Tuesdays/Thursdays, 119 Armstrong Hall

Dr. Lisa Weihman

Office: 313 Colson Hall/304-293-9735

Email: Lisa.Weihman@mail.wvu.edu (please use this and no other for all correspondence)

Office Hours: By appointment and 11:30-12:30 Tuesdays/Thursdays and By Appointment

Exile on Main Street: Contemplations of Space, Place and Self in Contemporary Fiction

What is the relationship of the self to place? Why are so many contemporary novels and short stories obsessed with the ideas of exile, diaspora and the role of community in creating the self? We will consider these questions and many others in English 273, while reading a selection of some of the most intriguing and thought-provoking novels of the past decade. You'll read a lot, talk a lot and write a lot. Expect two major exams (a midterm and a final), two papers, an oral presentation and a variety of short but meaningful quizzes.

GEC Objectives: This course fulfills GEC Objectives 4 (Contemporary Society) and 5 (Artistic Expression).

Learning Outcomes:

- ◆ You will understand significantly more about the critical, formal and intellectual heritage of contemporary literature, and learn quite a bit of 20th and 21st century history
- ◆ You will practice the critical reading of both literary texts and academic writing about those texts
- ◆ You will learn to analyze literature within its historical context and to evaluate how literature reflects and effects social, political and economic forces
- ◆ You will learn more about the theoretical methodologies critics use when writing about literature
- ◆ You will improve your writing and editing skills
- ◆ You will learn the art of academic research in literary studies through the production of a short research project

Required Texts: (any edition will do)

White Noise, Don DeLillo

Room, Emma Donoghue

The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart, Glenn Taylor

Never Let Me Go, Kazuo Ishiguro

Cloud Atlas, David Mitchell

Assignments:

- ❖ Four Pop Quizzes @ 25 points each: 100 points total
- ❖ Discussion Leadership: 25 points
- ❖ Three Short Papers: 50 points each; 150 points total
- ❖ Annotated Bibliography: 25 points
- ❖ One Research Paper: 100 points

400 points total

Submission Requirements:

- 1) All written assignments must be TYPED, double-spaced, with 1" margins, in a standard font (Times, Courier, etc.).
- 2) MLA citation methodology is our default method in English, but you should use what is most common in your major. Consistency and accuracy are necessary.
- 3) **Papers must be submitted in hard copy** due to the utter failure of WVU to make email and attachment technology universally available to its student population.
- 4) Keep copies of all your work, both in progress and final.
- 5) The paper length is a suggestion, not a mandate, but you should hit the minimum page requirements for each assignment. Research is required for your final paper. Your work should reflect careful reading and thinking about your subject. Do not summarize the plot of a work, the biography of the author or rephrase your class notes in your paper.
- 6) Hand in work on time. Late submissions will lose 5 points per day. If you run into trouble, talk to me before the assignment is due.

Grading Criteria:

Note that while I indicate what it takes to reach a “plus” or “minus” grade, the letter grade alone is what factors into your GPA. The “plus” or “minus” is an indicator of your standing within the grade range. For example, you must achieve 80% of all possible points in order to earn the lowest possible B in the class (a B-). In order to earn a B, you must earn at least 83% of the points possible, or 332 points, and a B+ begins at 352 points. I give an A+ to the person who scores the most points in the class.

372 – 400: A
 360 – 371: A-
 352 – 359: B+
 332 – 351: B
 320 – 331: B-
 312 – 319: C+
 292 – 311: C
 280 – 291: C-
 272 – 279: D+
 252 – 271: D
 240 – 251: D-
 0 – 239: F

A – Excellent Work. The assignments for this course have been completed in a professional and timely manner. The written assignments are clearly organized, choose compelling evidence to substantiate analysis, and engage with the subject at hand in a thoughtful and thought-provoking manner. Final drafts of written work requires no substantive or stylistic revisions, whether it appears on an exam, quiz, or in an essay. Oral work is well-researched, and presented in an articulate, easy-to-follow manner, with clearly designed and relevant support materials.

B – Good Work. The assignments for the course have been completed in a professional and timely manner. The written assignments show substantial engagement with the subject at hand, but the analysis is either partially incomplete, invoking weak evidence, or manifests some difficulty with organization. Written work requires some substantive revisions, but few or no stylistic ones. Oral work is well-researched and presented in a reasonably organized, if not consistently articulate, fashion; the supporting materials are relevant, with minimal flaws in design.

C – Average Work. The assignments for this course have been completed, but not necessarily in a timely or professional manner. The written assignments show effort by the student, but the analysis is incomplete, evidence is inappropriate or there is a lack of evidence, or there is significant difficulty with organization. Written work, whether on a test, essay, or quiz, requires significant substantive or stylistic revisions. Oral work reflects some, but not thorough, research; the presentation is organized, but not presented in an articulate fashion; the supporting materials are relevant, but not complete.

D – Less than average work. The assignments for the course have not been completed in a professional or timely manner. The written assignments show a lack of effort on the part of the student, and a lack of engagement with the assignment. Written assignments lack analysis, evidence, and organization; extensive substantive and stylistic revisions are necessary. Oral work shows minimal effort at research, organization, and design, undermining the student’s ability to explain the subject of his/her presentation to the class.

F – Inadequate work. The assignments for the course have not been completed. Written assignments, when submitted, show a significant lack of effort on the part of the student, and a lack of engagement with the assignment and the subject matter of the course. Such work is marked by the absence of analysis, evidence, and organization; engagement with the course materials is necessary before extensive revisions are even possible. Oral work demonstrates a lack of effort by the student to pursue or to organize the research necessary for oral presentation.

Grades of Incomplete will ONLY be given if you have completed at least 75% of our class work, and only at my discretion; you must discuss your situation with me before grades are due and complete a work contract with me in advance of the end of the semester.

Suggestions for Success and General Notes:

- 1) You must read ahead for our class discussions. I want conversation in this class, not just lecture, so I depend on you to keep up with the reading and to come prepared with good discussion questions.
- 2) Get your MIX account up and running, or forward your MIX messages to another email address.
- 3) If you are absent it is your responsibility to get the day’s notes from a fellow classmate. Make friends, exchange emails and phone numbers, and take responsibility for coming to class whenever physically possible. I am very happy to meet with you, in person or electronically, to discuss assignments or your overall progress in the class, but I lose my patience with emails that

ask me to summarize a 75 minute class. Get the notes from a classmate if you are absent, and be a good citizen by sharing your notes with others. If you want to discuss what you missed in detail, make an appointment to meet with me.

- 4) If you are getting a D or an F in the class by midsemester, you will receive a midterm report. Drop the class while there is still time.
- 5) I check my email regularly but not obsessively, and I do not generally respond to emails over the weekend. If you write to say you are ill, I will only respond if you ask me to respond to a specific query. If you write and do not receive a reply within a day or two, please let me know at the next class. There have been issues with MIX, in particular, and sometimes emails go astray.
- 6) I have a mailbox in the English Department's main office in Colson Hall.

Attendance:

I care about the class being discussion-based and not simply a lecture, so your participation is necessary to our collective success. You are granted a maximum of two absences (one week) during the course of the semester without penalty. There is no such thing as an "excused" absence apart from university sanctioned events; these events are the only ones for which you will need formal excuse notes. You do not need to email or call if you are ill, but it is wise to do so if you are going to miss more than two classes in a row for any reason. If you miss more than 4 classes (two weeks) for any reason, I reserve the right to give you an "F" for the semester, but you should definitely contact me to discuss your particular situation. I am not legally entitled to ask why you are absent, but it is generally a good idea to clue me in if something is happening that will keep you from doing your best work in the class.

If you are going to miss a lot of class due to a family emergency, illness, or some other unforeseen personal crisis, please contact me and the Office of Student Life (304-293-5611). The Office of Student Life will contact all of your professors regarding your emergency, and will help you work through the impact of your crisis on your academic career. It is much better to contact Student Life right away than to disappear and then later attempt a retroactive withdrawal from your courses.

Assignment Descriptions

Discussion Leadership: (25 points) You should prepare at least three good questions and be prepared to lead the class in discussion.

Four Pop Quizzes: (25 points each; 100 points total) Pop quizzes will be given throughout the semester to test reading comprehension. You cannot make up a pop quiz if you are absent. Keep up with the reading – the quizzes are going to be relatively easy for those who have read, and impossible for those who have not.

Three Short Close Reading Papers (3+ pp; 50 points each; 150 points total)

Also called an "*explication de texte*," a close reading is a careful, sustained analysis of a brief passage from a literary work. For this assignment, chose a short passage from the work we have been reading to explicate in at least 5 well-crafted pages. Consider the following:

- **Thesis:** What is your argument about this section of the text?
- What sort of **figurative language** does the author employ? Does the author use any **symbolism**? What is significant about the author's **style**? What is the **tone** of the passage?
- **Literal content** – the plot, or the Who What Why Where When and How of the passage – what happens in this passage, and how does the passage you've chosen relate to the text as a whole?

Avoid plot summary and biographical filler about the author. Keep your attention riveted to the text itself. A close reading pays close attention to the author's language. How to begin? Pick a short, relevant passage that caught your attention, then read it line by line, word by word, and make notes on what you notice. I will expect you to cite lines from the text, but you are not expected to bring any outside sources into this paper. Keep your focus limited to the words the author has provided on the page. The literary critic Jacques Derrida wrote 80 pages (1984: "ULYSSES GRAMAPHONE: HEAR SAY YES IN JOYCE") on a single word from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Molly Bloom's final "YES"), so yes, you should be able to find 5 pp. in even a very small paragraph from any of these authors.

Annotated Bibliography: 25 points. This should be 2+ pages listing the full bibliographic information for each of your sources and a brief annotation of the source that examines what the source says and how useful the source is to your final project. You need a minimum of three citations for the research project, but you should also include in the Annotated Bibliography any sources you consulted but did not use.

The Research Paper: 6-8+ pp.; 100 points

You will write a thesis-driven, argumentative research paper on one of the texts we are studying this semester. This will involve citing *at least two peer-reviewed, academic sources of information on your author and/or the primary text*. This assignment will help you to develop your research skills and your ability to read and to cite academic prose thoughtfully. You will also learn how to propose an argumentative thesis about a literary work and to support this thesis through both secondary research and careful analysis of the

primary text. You may choose any of the works we have read during the semester, but if you choose to revise and extend one of your close reading papers, you must write a minimum of 8 pages.

West Virginia University Academic Integrity Statement

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code at <http://www.arc.wvu.edu/rightsa.html>

Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Student Evaluation of Instruction Statement

Effective teaching is a primary mission of West Virginia University. Student evaluation of instruction provides the university and the instructor with feedback about your experiences in the course for review and course improvement. Your participation in the evaluation of course instruction is both strongly encouraged and highly valued. Results are strictly confidential, anonymous, and not available to the instructor until after final grades are released by Admissions and Records. Information about how you can complete this evaluation will be provided later.

Social Justice Policy

WVU is committed to creating a learning environment where people of all races, religions, political affiliations and sexual orientations feel safe, respected and valued. I share this goal, and will work to insure that our classroom becomes such an environment. If you see anything I can do to further this goal, please let me know. You will be respected as a member of this class, and are expected to show your full respect for every other member of the class. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

COURSE SCHEDULE (Subject to change with reasonable notice)

WEEK	DATE		TOPIC FOR CLASS DISCUSSION	Discussion Leadership
1	TUES	1/15	Introductions	
	THUR	1/17	<i>White Noise</i> , Don DeLillo	
2	TUES	1/22	<i>White Noise</i> , Don DeLillo	
	THUR	1/24	<i>White Noise</i> , Don DeLillo	
3	TUES	1/29	<i>White Noise</i> , Don DeLillo	
	THUR	1/31	Linda Hutcheon: "Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern" http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html	
4	TUES	2/5	Paper #1 Due; Writing Workshop	
	THUR	2/7	<i>The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart</i> , Glenn Taylor	
5	TUES	2/12	<i>The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart</i> , Glenn Taylor	
	THUR	2/14	<i>The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart</i> , Glenn Taylor	
6	TUES	2/19	<i>The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart</i> , Glenn Taylor	
	THUR	2/21	<i>The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart</i> , Glenn Taylor	
7	TUES	2/26	Paper #2 Due; <i>Cloud Atlas</i>, "Pacific Journal..."; "Letters from..."	
	THUR	2/28	Library Workshop	
8	TUES	3/5	<i>Cloud Atlas</i> , David Mitchell "Half-Lives"; "Ghastly Ordeal"	
	THUR	3/7	<i>Cloud Atlas</i> , David Mitchell, "An Orison of Sonmi-451"	
9	TUES	3/12	<i>Cloud Atlas</i> , David Mitchell "Sloosha's Crossin'..."	
	THUR	3/14	<i>Cloud Atlas</i> , David Mitchell "An Orison of Sonmi-451"	
10	TUES	3/19	<i>Cloud Atlas</i> , David Mitchell "Ghastly Ordeal"; "Half-Lives"	
	THUR	3/21	<i>Cloud Atlas</i> , David Mitchell "Letters from..."; "Pacific Journal"	
11	TUES	3/26	SPRING BREAK	
	THUR	3/28		
12	TUES	4/2	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> , Kazuo Ishiguro	
	THUR	4/7	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> , Kazuo Ishiguro	
13	TUES	4/9	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> , Kazuo Ishiguro	
	THUR	4/11	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> , Kazuo Ishiguro	
14	TUES	4/16	Paper #3 due; <i>Room</i>, Emma Donoghue	
	THUR	4/18	<i>Room</i> , Emma Donoghue	
15	TUES	4/23	<i>Room</i> , Emma Donoghue	
	THUR	4/25	<i>Room</i> , Emma Donoghue	
16	TUES	4/30	Annotated Bibliography Due; Writing Workshop	
	THUR	5/2	<i>Last Class; Evaluations</i>	
17	TUES	Research Paper Due Tuesday, May 7 by 10:00 am		
	THUR			