

illuminating Recent Fiction

We will read engaging, literary, and often witty late 20th and 21st century novels by award-winning British, Irish and Commonwealth writers. We'll discuss the subjects and structure of their work, their principal characters, and the times the novels took place in. Common themes are death, endurance, evil, and the nature of the spiritual life. The writers and their works are: Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori*; Peter Carey, *The Tax Inspector*; Robertson Davies, *Fifth Business*; Graham Swift, *Last Orders*; J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*; and Sebastian Barry, *The Secret Scripture*. It would be best if you could read all of the books before the course begins. But if not, try at least to read *Memento Mori* (Muriel Spark) ahead of time. We will aim to spend one session on each book. The syllabus will be as follows:

Week 1: September 27th. Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori*: Published 1959. (Available used from Abebooks from \$3.49 or new for about \$10). *Memento Mori* is set in an upper middle class milieu in and around London and the Home Counties in the 1950s. Elderly people are told by a voice on the telephone to remember they must die.

Week 2: October 4th. Peter Carey, *The Tax Inspector*: Published 1991. (Available used from Abebooks for \$3.49 + or new for \$4 +). The young, pregnant tax inspector is committed to the Australian Tax Office's fight against criminal tax avoidance. She considers that her assignment to examine a failing car dealership is a misuse of her time.

Week 3: October 11th. Robertson Davies, *Fifth Business*: Published 1970. (Available from Abebooks used for \$3.49 + or new for \$8+). Dunstan Ramsay, a retired, distinguished Canadian schoolmaster tells his story from age 10 to his retirement from a Jungian point of view. His life was illuminated by saints and enriched by the devil.

Week 4: October 18th. NO CLASS

Week 5: October 25th. Graham Swift, *Last Orders*: Published 1995. (Available used from Abebooks from \$3.48.) A group of friends drive from the East End of London to Margate to scatter the ashes of one of their oldest friends. Their relationships and varying attitudes to death are told from the points of view of each character.

Week 6: November 1st. J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*: Published 2003. (Available new or used from Abebooks for \$3.48+.) A fiction in 8 lessons (not chapters) about "the novel" and Elizabeth Costello's moral positions and her concern for the status of her soul. Themes include death, the nature of evil and whether touching pitch defiles.

Week 7: November 8th. Sebastian Barry, *The Secret Scripture*: Published 2008. (Available new or used from Abebooks. \$3.49+ used and \$10+ new.) Roseanne McNulty was committed to an Irish mental hospital in the 1940s, perhaps because of her social transgressions. The crumbling

hospital is to be demolished and the chief psychiatrist must decide Roseanne's future. Roseanne is secretly writing the story of her life.

Note: This course is 6 classes over 7 weeks, starting September 27, 2018 ending November 8, 2018 (no class on October 18, 2018).

Leader: Judith Wooldridge

Thursdays: 9:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m., 6 weeks: September 27 through November 9 (no class on 10/18)

Location: Monument Hall