

## More Recent Fiction

We will read engaging, and literary 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century novels by award-winning British, Irish, and Commonwealth writers. We'll discuss the subjects and structure of their work, their principal characters, their points of view and the times in which the novels took place. Common themes are: unusual women, coping with family life and violent change, the nature of fiction, and war. The writers and their works are: Angus Wilson: *The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot*; Rachel Cusk: *Outline*; Muriel Spark: *Robinson*; JM Coetzee: *Foe*; William Trevor: *Reading Turgenev*; and Anthony Powell: *The Soldier's Art*. It would be best if you could read all of the books before the course begins. But if you can't, try at least to read *The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot* (Angus Wilson) ahead of time. We will spend one session on each book. The course order will be as follows:

**Week 1: September 27<sup>th</sup>.** Angus Wilson: *The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot*: Published 1958. (Available used from Abebooks and Amazon.) In an upper middle class milieu in the 1950s, Mrs Eliot has to cope with a massive change in her circumstances.

**Week 2: October 4<sup>th</sup>.** Rachel Cusk, *Outline*: Published 2014. (Available used from Abebooks or new.) *Outline* follows a young, recently divorced, English writer to Athens where she is teaching a writing class. We learn about her mostly through other people's narratives. A sometimes comic contemplation on writing fiction, family life, and reasons for divorce.

**Week 3: October 11<sup>th</sup>.** Muriel Spark: *Robinson*: Published 1958. (Available from Abebooks used or new.) A young writer is marooned on an island called Robinson when her plane crashes. A mystery, a spiritual journey, a rescue, with comic and threatening scenes. Again, a contemplation on writing fiction.

**Week 4: October 18<sup>th</sup>.** NO CLASS

**Week 5: October 25<sup>th</sup>.** J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*: Published 1986. (Available used from Abebooks.) Susan Barton is a castaway on the island where Robinson Crusoe and Friday are living. This is her story of the island, the rescue, and the man called Foe who is a writer. Another contemplation on writing fiction.

**Week 6: November 1<sup>st</sup>.** William Trevor: *Reading Turgenev*: Published 1991 (in *Two Lives*). (Available new or used from Abebooks.) Mary Louise Dallon, a young protestant woman in rural Ireland, marries the local draper in 1955. In 1991 she is sent back to live with him after confinement in an institution that was her refuge for many years. Turgenev was the revered author of a cousin for whom she had a secret passion. Among other things, this is a story of Mary Louise's endurance, the omissions of her family, and the petty wickedness of her sisters-in-law.

**Week 7: November 8<sup>th</sup>.** Anthony Powell: *The Soldier's Art*: Published 1966. (Available new or used from Abebooks.) *The Soldier's Art* is the eighth novel in Anthony Powell's twelve-volume *Dance to the Music of Time*. Nicholas is marooned in the army during the Second World War. Family life is virtually nonexistent. Powell writes comically about army life.

**Leader:** Judith Wooldridge is a life-long and enthusiastic reader of novels and short stories in English; she has led four previous Evergreen Courses.

**Fridays:** 10:00 a.m. to 12 noon, 6 weeks: September 27 through November 8 (no class on 10/18)

**Location:** Witherspoon Hall Municipal Building, Maximum 13 seats