

PENELOPE FITZGERALD'S FICTION

This course will focus on the English writer Penelope Fitzgerald. We shall read and discuss five of her novels as well as reading selections from her letters and dipping into Hermione Lee's biography *Penelope Fitzgerald: A Life*. The novels will be *The Bookshop*, *Offshore*, *The Beginning of Spring*, *The Gate of Angels*, and *The Blue Flower*. We'll discuss how she transforms the autobiographical and historical sources of her material, her themes, how she structures her work and how her principal characters' personalities are revealed. Each week we will discuss one novel. (These books are all available used from Abebooks.)

Week 1: September 24. *The Bookshop*: Published 1978. Her second novel, it draws on her stay in Southwold, Suffolk where she worked in a bookshop. The fictional bookshop fails because of the social forces arrayed against the owner.

Week 2: October 1. *Offshore*: Published 1979. (Winner of the 1979 Booker prize.) This, her third novel, draws on her experiences living on an old barge on the River Thames in the early 1960s. It is both funny and tragic. She creates entrancing portraits of the Thames, the boat owners, and her children.

Week 3: October 8. *The Beginning of Spring*: Published 1988. (Shortlisted for the Booker prize.) Her seventh novel. Set shortly before the first world war in Russia, it portrays an English tradesman and his family resident in Moscow during the period when his wife has unexpectedly left him, and revolutionaries are undermining the Czarist regime.

Week 4: October 15. NO CLASS

Week 5: October 22. *Gate of Angels*: Published 1991. (Shortlisted for the Booker prize.) A love story set in Cambridge in 1912. A perfect novel, funny and sad, which alludes to the current ideas and theories about the physical sciences as well as the social constraints facing women, especially working women.

Week 6: October 29. *The Blue Flower*: Published 1995. (It won the National Book Critics award when it was published in the US in 1997.) This was her ninth novel and last book. It tells the story of the early life of the Romantic poet Novalis in 18th century Germany. He is mysteriously attracted to Sophie, a young girl he wants to marry as soon as he can and the blue flower.

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

Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. to noon, 5 weeks: September 24 through October 22 (no class on October 15)

Maximum: 13