

## Gritty 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fiction

We'll read engaging, often witty, and literary 20<sup>th</sup> Century novels and short stories about gritty issues: dystopias, mental illness, death, and the consequences of war. We'll discuss each writer's themes, language, and characters, allegorical features and the structure of the work. The writers and books are: Pat Barker, *Regeneration*; J. G. Farrell, *Troubles*; Beryl Bainbridge, *The Bottle Factory Outing*; short stories by Will Self and Helen Simpson; and Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*.

It would be best if you could read all the books before the course begins. But if you can't, try at least to read *Regeneration* (Pat Barker) ahead of time. The schedule will be as follows:

### **Week 1: October 5<sup>th</sup>**

Pat Barker *Regeneration*: Published 1991. (Used from Abebooks from \$3.48 or new for about \$10--published by Plume books). *Regeneration* is set in a hospital for shell-shocked officers (some historical, some fictional) during the First World War. Dr. Rivers' approach to returning the men to action is rather different from Dr Yealand's. Themes: class, gender, violence, and breakdown.

### **Week 2: October 12<sup>th</sup>**

J. G. Farrell, *Troubles*: Published 1970. (Used from Abebooks for \$3.98 + or new for about \$13--published by New York Review Books). The first of Farrell's "Empire Trilogy." Set in Ireland at the time of the Troubles, just after the First World War. After Major Brendan Archer leaves the hospital where he was treated for shell shock, he goes to Ireland to meet Angela, who seems to be his fiancée. He arrives in 1919 and aside from for six months in London when his aunt is ill, stays until 1921 as the troubles mount. The Major's love life is as doomed as the future of the British in Ireland.

### **Week 3: October 19<sup>th</sup>**

Beryl Bainbridge, *The Bottle Factory Outing*: Published 1974. (Used from Abebooks for \$4.37 + or as an e book for about \$11). Two young women go to work at a wine bottling factory in London in the early 1970's. A macabre but realistic story told concisely and comically. Themes: class, love, gender, loyalty.

### **Week 4: October 26<sup>th</sup> NO CLASS**

### **Week 5: November 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Short stories by Will Self and Helen Simpson. Two stories from Will Self's *Grey Area*, published 1994. (Used from Abebooks for \$3.48+ or new for about \$10): Stories: "Chest" and "Inclusion." Two stories from Helen Simpson's *In-Flight Entertainment*, published 2010

(Used from Abebooks for 3.48 + or new for about \$10.): Stories: “In-Flight Entertainment” and “Diary of an Interesting Year.” Ironical stories about mental illness, climate change and future dystopias.

**Week 6: November 9**

Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*: Published 1980. (Used from Abebooks for \$3.48+ or new for about \$14--published by Gollancz). Several thousand years have passed. Riddley Walker, a buoyant, questioning adolescent and natural story teller, lives near a vanished Canterbury in a rigidly structured, primitive world with puzzling traces of a past civilization. After his father is killed, he breaks away from his village and sets in motion social and political changes.

**Leader:** Judith Wooldridge is a life-long and enthusiastic reader of novels and short stories in English.

**Thursdays:** 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., 5 weeks: October 5 through November 9 (no class on 10/26).

**Location:** Princeton Public Library