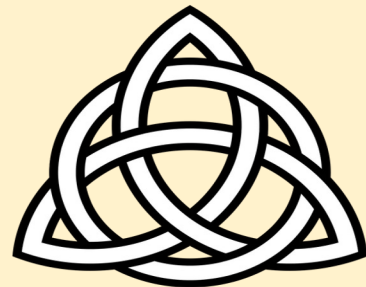
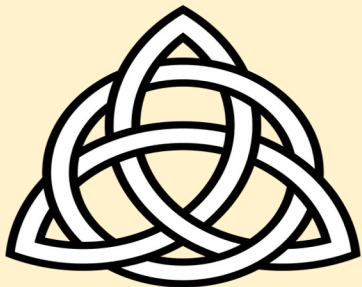




University of Edinburgh

Scottish Universities' International Summer School
July 25 - August 6 2022



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Part II: The Course: Background

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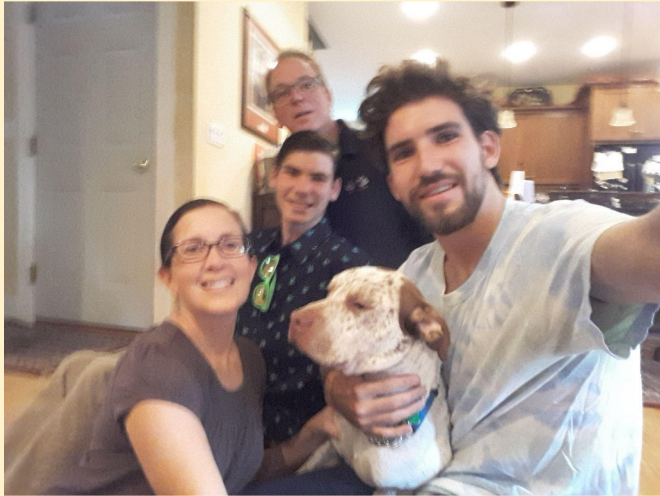
Part I: Back to School

Me: A Snapshot

- ❖ I entered the classroom as a full time teacher in 1992 at the Academy of St. Aloysius in Jersey City.
- ❖ In 1994, I began teaching at Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School, in Rumson, NJ. I am entering my 29th year.
- ❖ During my career in both high schools, I have taught all levels and a variety of courses
- ❖ I coached, mentored staff and students, ran various clubs, and currently run our school's Cooking Club.

Me: A Snapshot of a Family

My husband and I raised two adult boys that we adopted from Belarus in 2001.



Me: Snapshot continued

- ❖ I am a two-time cancer survivor.
- ❖ For years, my focus was on fighting my disease, raising two boys, and my career.
- ❖ Hence, my focus was NOT on me.
- ❖ Opportunity knocked!
- ❖ I heard about the English Speaking Union from a fellow teacher, and jumped at the chance to do something for me. Then Covid came, and delayed my trip.
- ❖ Finally, 2022 happened.

❖ **Scotland or bust!**

Part II: The Course - Contemporary Literature

- ❖ There were several courses offered by SUISS.
- ❖ Historically, my anchor texts I teach are classics: *Beowulf*, *The Odyssey*, works by Shakespeare, *Dracula*, as well as some seminal American authors.
- ❖ I chose Contemporary Literature because the texts and topic were out of my comfort zone and I was interested in learning more about the era, and the voices that comprised that era in the UK.

Part II: Contemporary Literature

What Is Contemporary Literature from an academic perspective?

- ❖ Wide swath - 1940-present day
- ❖ Micro look - post 1990 into the 21st century
- ❖ Contemporary literature, on the time line, arrives post feminism writings of the 20th century, post Modernism, and challenges the idea of literature over popular reading.
- ❖ Technology has affected the narrative form; thus mixed media is now apart of what comprises Contemporary Literature.
- ❖ Works from this genre tend to be non-linear in form, gender bending, contain multiple voices/narrators, address topics formally considered taboo, and take a more global look at life and humanity.

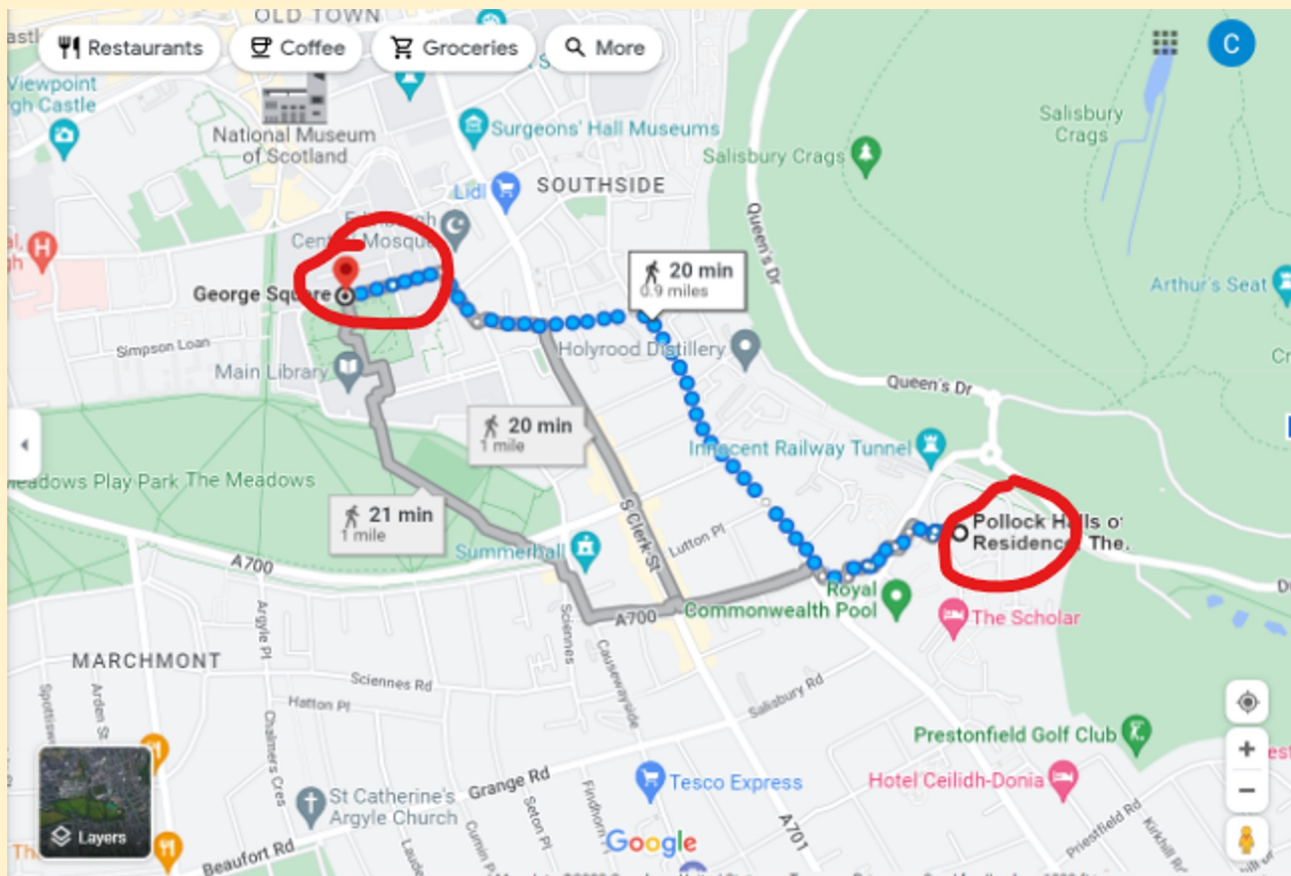
Part II: Contemporary Literature

How do you arrive at Contemporary Literature?

- ❖ Experimentation with form and content
- ❖ Character-driven rather than plot-focused
- ❖ Sense of fragmentation over cohesion. Things are NOT tied up in a neat bow at the end!
- ❖ Although the texts we studied can also be categorized into other traditional genres (i.e. poetry, play, short story, etc) often their construction sets them apart from works that came before.

Part II: Contemporary Literature - Daily Course Structure

- ❖ All students were given access to the University's online platform, MyEd. All coursework and materials were posted there.
- ❖ Instructor: Ms. Lauren Cooper, PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow
- ❖ Daily: Due to Covid, lectures were pre-recorded and posted on MyEd. We focused on one text per day. The day started with us watching the lectures on our own, then walking about 20 minutes to George's Square (part of the campus) to meet with our class for the seminar. There were 16 Contemporary Lit students total, broken into two groups of eight.
- ❖ Each of us were tasked with presenting to the class on a particular text. I chose a collection of poetry by Bhanu Kapil.



Part II: Contemporary Literature - Daily Course Structure

Afternoons contained junkets to local places of interest in and around Edinburgh.

Evenings often contained readings by authors and poets.

Our weekend was free for us to explore the city and surrounding areas. There were many opportunities to take day tours to the Highlands and the various lochs, as well as to further explore the city.

Edinburgh is a “walkable” city due to its size, but that walk will certainly challenge you! Many of the streets are steep, cobbled, and lots of stairs.

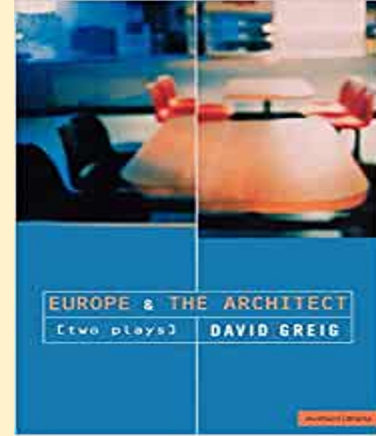


Part III: The Texts

The texts in the course were varied. Here they are in order of our study:

Europe by David Greig (1994) Dr. Julia Boll, Univ. of Hamburg

“David Greig takes an epic theme of shifting borders and changing identities and gives it convincing dramatic life in human terms. He uses the powerful symbols of an empty station and a thundering train to find dramatic effect, and fits in a unexpected love story. Europe shows characters on the move, physically and emotionally, some clinging painfully to the certainty of the past, and others reaching out for new destinations and experiences.”(National Library of Scotland)



Europe by David Greig

- ❖ Greig's play focused on the wars in the Balkans and the ever changing borders during those conflicts.
- ❖ Our seminar explored the concept of Europe as the ideal, or utopia for its citizens (not unlike the concept of the American Dream) against the sense of “other” or outsider that Southeastern refugees were experiencing.
- ❖ Greig explores the tension of transnationalism (movement and exchanges across borders) which is the essence of Europe vs. the notion of displaced refugees (those “others) and the originally defined community.
- ❖ Borders have always been redrawn in Europe, but Greig highlights the idea that people don't just cross borders, but ***borders cross people*** and what emotions spring from this change.
- ❖ Very interesting from an American perspective, and although set in Europe, we are dealing with similar questions and concerns.

A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing by Eimar McBride (2013) Dr. Carole Jones,
University of Edinburgh

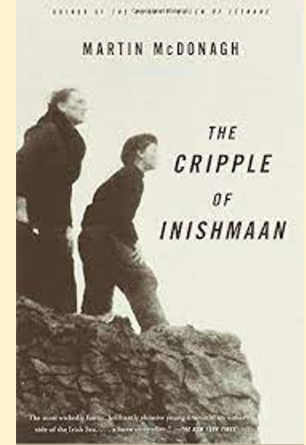
- ❖ “All the characters are unnamed, and they inhabit an Ireland shorn of dates and obvious historical specificity. Most strikingly, McBride’s novel is written in a dense, interrupted shattered language...The novel is narrated by the “half-formed” girl of the title and begins when she is two years old.”(Wood 2)
- ❖ In this novel, McBride tells the story of a young girl’s tragic adolescence growing up in a chaotic and toxic family of emotional and physical abuse. The painful story tracks this unrelenting trauma that impacts all aspects of her formation.
- ❖ This text was PAINFUL to read and navigate. Here is a sample of page one:

Eimar McBride sample of text and challenging language



The Cripple of Inishmaan by Martin McDonagh

1997 Dr. Hannah Tweed, University of Glasgow

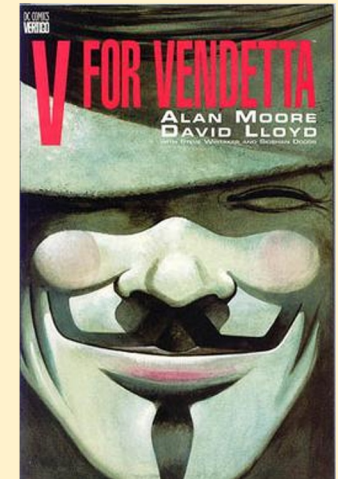
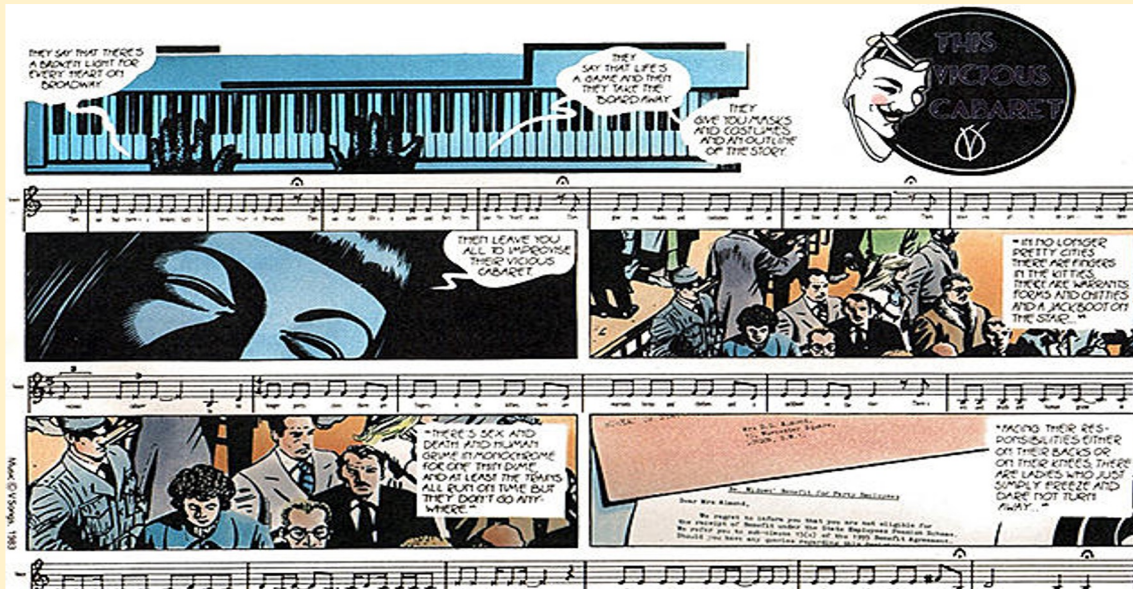


- ❖ Set on a remote island off the west coast of Ireland in 1934, this play is a darkly comic Irish tale. As word arrives on the island that a Hollywood director is coming to the neighboring island of Inishmore to film *Man of Aran*, the one person who wants to be in the film more than anybody else is young Cripple Billy, if only to break from the bitter tedium and dark questions of his daily and past life.
- ❖ This play, when released, garnered mixed reviews, and our seminar focused on whether or not McDonagh was “taking cheap shots” at those with disabilities by laughing at them, perpetuating stereotypes, or presenting a satiric look at those stereotypes. Cripple Billy suffers from physical disability, and has TB, yet is manipulative and no saint, like Dickens’ Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*.

V for Vendetta by Alan Moore and David Lloyd 1982

“Ideas are Bulletproof”

Professor Chris Murray, University of Dundee, via his lecture, led us through understanding panels in graphic novels.



V for Vendetta

Summary:

- ❖ This graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd crafts a loss of freedom and identity in a chillingly believable totalitarian world. Set in an imagined and dystopian future England, the story presents a fascist government that suffocates life for its citizens. Out of this fearful and corrupt police state arises a man who battles against it, showing the citizens the power of the human spirit.
- ❖ The culprits of this fascist government are certainly the leaders who manipulated, forced, and gas-lighted the citizens into believing their views. However, the real problem present in the text is the general population in allowing it to happen.

Drone by Harry Josephine Giles Dr. David Coates, University of Liverpool

Summary:

- ❖ First performed at the Fringe Festival in 2014, then published in 2019 *Drone* is a performance poem about a female part office worker, part weapons system. This cyborg is just like us - she has a brother who is a pizza delivery man, she adopts a cat, yet is also an unmanned aerial vehicle, the result of government technology used for surveillance with a lethal payload of bombs.
- ❖ Our seminar focused on the “accepted roles” of poets. Poets can be taken to task if their work gets labeled as “operating outside cultural norms.” This irony (since poetry and writing is about free expression) in the 21st century really plays to the work of women, people of color, and those of queer designations.

Drone clip from the Fringe Festival in 2019



Harry Josephine Giles

The poet came to do some readings from current and recently published works. They are from the island of Orkney, so some of their writing is in Orkney first, with a less prominent translation in English at the bottom.

Sample:

Orkney: The mor at fok meuv aroon, the mor fok at meuv aroon, the mor tungs we a spaek wi.

English: The more that folk move around, the more folk that move around, the more tongues we all speak with.

If All the World and Love Were Young Stephen Sexton (2019)

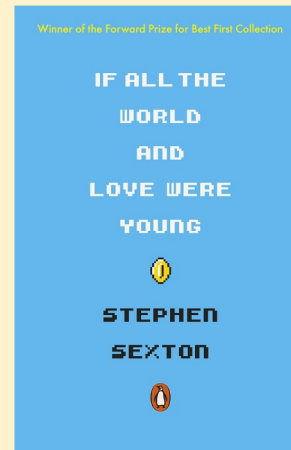
- ❖ In this collection, Sexton explores the death of his mother through the video game Super Mario Kart. Each level of Super Mario World brings us through new levels and understanding of loss.



- ❖ During our seminar on this collection of poems (ex Yoshi's House, Yellow Switch Palace, Yoshi's Island) we learned that play can be a platform where we struggle with our flaws through experimentation and exploration.

If All the World and Love Were Young

- ❖ In Super Mario Kart, the directions are simple, and failure is part of the game. Both video games and poems present a challenge, and through the course of both game and poem, that challenge must be overcome. Like the game, the poem ends with “You are a super reader!”



- ❖ Interesting pairing of video games and the poetic genre.

Written on the Body by Jeanette Winterson (1992)



Summary:

- ❖ The narrator embarks on a consuming affair with a confused and very complex unhappily married woman. Throughout the novel, Winterson never tells us the gender of the narrator. According to **Dr. Karen Sellberg from the University of Queensland**, Winterson is trying to rethink what it means to be alive, to be gendered, and to be loved.
- ❖ We explored the topic of gender identity as a role we play, as opposed to a set social construct. Identity is crafted over a long period of time, so is the concept of gender identity real? And why is it so important to us? Additionally, we explored the idea of love as a form of control in a relationship. Winterson admits in interviews that she has inserted herself into her narratives.

“Texts for the Day” and “True Short Story” short stories by Ali Smith (various publication dates)

- ❖ In “Texts for the Day” a character named Melissa has what her friends think is a break with reality when she decides her personal library serves a different purpose than collecting favorite works. She needs to consume the words, destroy the library, and set free all the thoughts from those various authors.
- ❖ In “True Short Story” the narrator overhears a funny and crass conversation at a cafe where two men are arguing over the novel being a “flabby old whore” or a “slim nymph.” The narrator calls her friend, who we learn is struggling with cancer and through their discussions, we see the conversation is really about love, friendship, literature, and cancer meds.

Ali Smith

- ❖ Smith's stories focus on the idea of transformation, and a respite from the expectations and tribulations of the world.
- ❖ Short stories are opportunities to invest in a thought without investing the time into a full novel, according to ***Dr. Jess Orr from University of St. Andrews.***

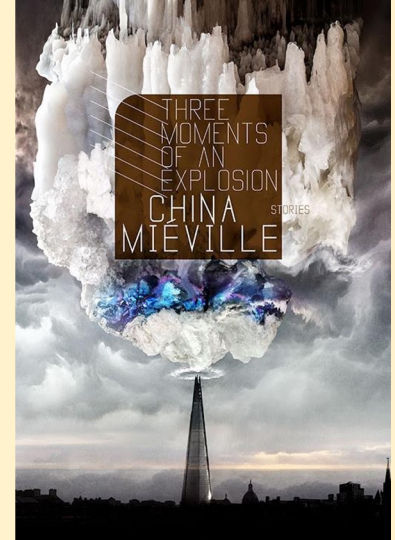
Selections from *Three Moments of an Explosion* by China Mieville (2015) Dr. Elsa Bouet, Edinburgh Napier University

Summary:

- ❖ In this collection of stories that fall under the sub category of Gothic called the New Weird, technology plays a dominant role. The stories explore the growing relationship between technology and humanity. The laws of nature are often defeated, with humans in these stories desiring an escape from their daily “prisons” of existence, only, at times, to find themselves in another type of prison.
- ❖ According to Mieville, there will always be part of our lives that is “unknowable,” a dark fantastic fiction that can also be categorized as science fiction.

China Mieville

- ❖ Mieville asserts that humanity has become desensitized to terror attacks, pandemics, and other horrors, and have become more focused on the “spectacle” created from these terrible moments. The danger comes when we the public enjoy the spectacle over questioning the real life, real world impact on the people.
- ❖ Mieville’s short stories are very much cautionary tales, but also glimpses of opportunities to use media/social media to deploy awareness and help establish empathy.



How to Wash a Heart by Bhanu Kapil (2020)

Summary:



- ❖ Bhanu Kapil, 2020 winner of the TS Eliot award for poetry, published this first full-length collection of poetry which drops the reader into the complex relations that emerge between an immigrant guest and a citizen host. Through this collection, Kapil explores the difficult questions about the limits of inclusion and caring and hospitality.
- ❖ These topics are extremely relevant today as the US grapples with difficult questions regarding immigration.

*the following is my short presentation on this collection

Social Environment and Identity
in

Bhanu Kapil's *How to Wash a Heart*

Form

- ❖ Examine the function of a social environment on one's identity, including the notion of a "safe" space
- ❖ Consider the notion of other

Environment and Identity

Identity Development

According to Stephen Valerio in his article “Social, Environmental, and other Life Factors (S.E.L.F.)” there are “four dimensionalities of self.” (Valerio 2) Most importantly for Kapil’s poems, let’s focus on two components:

1. Social factors
2. Environmental factors

Influences

- ❖ Social Factors - all the people that surround us that may affect our thoughts and actions
- ❖ Environmental Factors - “environmental structure and events” which may impact growth in persons. (Valerio 1)
- ❖ In Kapil’s *How to Wash a Heart*, these two factors are very much intertwined. Not only is the speaker impacted by the host but also by the change in and foreign nature of the surroundings the speaker finds herself in.

Displacement

Lisa Vandemark, in her article “Promoting the Sense of Self, Place, and Belonging in Displaced Persons: The Example of Homelessness” examines the link between place and people.

When we lose our place in the world or our role in society, the basic sense of self and belonging is diminished. A diminished sense of self and belonging produces anxiety and depression (Choenarom et al., 2005, Fullilove, 1996, May, 1983, Ryan et al., 2006) and diminishes social and functional abilities necessary for a healthy and meaningful life (May, 1983, Robinson, 2003). Displaced persons include the homeless, refugees, immigrants, people fleeing domestic abuse, and those uprooted by war, conflict, and natural disasters. (Vandemark 1)

For Kapil's speaker, that sense of displacement is heightened by living with a host with questionable intentions.

*“It's exhausting to be a guest
In somebody else's house
Forever.
Even though the host invites
The guest to say
Whatever it is they want to say,
The guest knows that host logic
Is variable.
Prick me.
And I will cut off the energy
To your life.” (Kapil 4)*

In this passage the speaker is acknowledging the limits in being an individual when that ability to establish a sense of self is predicated on the whims of another (host) or a perception of a dominant collective/society.

Tapping into the Self

Later in the collection, Kapil's speaker tries to exercise that sense of self, by speaking and trying to be heard. But the host's response is less than supportive. The alien view of the cabinet contents (or host's importance of wealth and status) further undermines the speaker from expressing self through words or actions.

“I do not enjoy eating too much.

It's so painful...

Oils, sugars, pearls, crushed diamonds, linen and songs

Populate your crappy cabinets.

Make a list of what you need

And I will get it, you ungrateful cow.” (Kapil 8)

**Good blood - Note on
the Title**

Lygia Pape's 2002 "Good Blood"

"..two people sit facing each other on chairs. Each one holds an ice cube made of red ink in their upturned palms."

"Whoever's ice cube melts first, that person is the "good blood."
(Kapil 48)

The interesting part of this performance is that the "good blood" is only established by being near the second person's blood, the strange and "other" blood. One cannot be defined without the other. The two are connected.

Hostile Environment? Hostile Host?

The guest desires that “good” blood, and a sense of acceptance from this cruel, alien environment.

*“I want to wake up
In the arms of the person
I love
And drink coffee with them
On a balcony...” (Kapil 43)*

However, the guest is stymied in that quest, being met by the ultimate betrayal (from host and community) for being other.

*“...You and the officer
From the Department
Of Repatriation.
And understand.
This is your revenge.” (Kapil 44)*

Dr. Alycia Pirmohamed

In her lecture, Dr. Pirmohamed said that she sought to read more works from South Asian female voices, which included Bhanu Kapil's collection.

As I was reading *How to Wash a Heart*, I was struck by the similarity in feel to the intent of Sandra Cisneros, an author who draws upon her unique experiences as an Hispanic woman growing up and living in a strange and alien culture in the US.

Ethnic Enclaves

Cisneros' character, Esperanza, spends her formative years in an ethnically homogenous community in Chicago.

She describes her loss of power and self when leaving her predominantly Hispanic neighborhood.

“All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes” (Cisneros 28)

Like Kapil's speaker, Esperanza too hides her identity when in an alien environment. But, unlike Kapil's speaker, Esperanza has a bit of a reprieve in her safe space

Points to consider

1. Even though the guest/speaker has to forge a new identity in this hostile and exclusive environment, can that “new” identity ever escape that notion of “strange” blood? To what extent does a guest have to reconfigure personal identity?
2. Does the lack of a familiar “safe” space aside from dreams and memories afford the guest the ability to craft self?
3. Can a host ever shed dynamics of power regarding a guest?

Sources

Cisneros, Sandra. "Those Who Don't." *The House on Mango Street*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2020.

Kapil, Bhanu. *How to Wash a Heart*. Liverpool University Press, 2020.

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Part IV: Turnkey

Accessibility:

- ❖ Most of the texts we studied are more suited for my English III junior class since many of the topics addressed mature issues. However, there are certain texts that I would not feel comfortable sharing with my students: most notably, *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* and *It's Written on the Body*.
- ❖ While both texts are compelling, well written, and written by authors who have won numerous awards, some of the topics would be deemed “inappropriate” for 16 and 17 year olds.
- ❖ However, many of the texts would work very well in my current curricula for English I and III

English I

Curricular Unit	Applications
The Classical Odyssey made Contemporary	Excerpts from V for Vendetta, How to Wash a Heart
Bias and Accountability	Excerpts from Europe, The Cripple of Inishmaan
War as Human Experience	Excerpts from Europe, China Mieville's short stories
Historical Context and its Influence	Excerpts from Europe, How to Wash a Heart, and short stories about Transformation by Ali Smith
Reflective Prose: Identity and Place	Poems by Stephen Sexton

English III

Curricular Units	Applications
Representations of Cultural Values	Excerpts from Europe, V for Vendetta, Selections from China Mieville
Fear of the “Other”	Excerpts from Europe, selections from China Mieville’s short stories
Representation of Diversity	The Cripple of Inishmaan, excerpts from How to Wash a Heart
Environment and Identity	Excerpts from It’s Written on the Body, China Mieville’s short stories, Ali Smith’s short stories
Dystopian Worlds	China Mieville selections

Part V: Exploration and Covid

As mentioned earlier on, part of the SUISS course was to offer students an opportunity to see Edinburgh and visit points of interest.

- ❖ Scottish National Portrait Gallery
- ❖ Climbing Arthur's Seat
- ❖ Poetry reading by Harry Josephine Giles/screening of Drone
- ❖ Scottish Poetry Library
- ❖ Edinburgh Zine Library (What is a zine?)



Part V: Exploration and Covid

The coursework is set up so there is time for exploration. Some of the activities that I experienced with the group and on my own:

Rosslyn Chapel (looking at you Dan Brown!)

The Palace of Holyrood House

The Royal Mile

Walking Tour of the Dark side of Auld Reekie

Grassmarket

New Town

Dean Village and the River Leith

Cannongate Kirk

Museum of Edinburgh

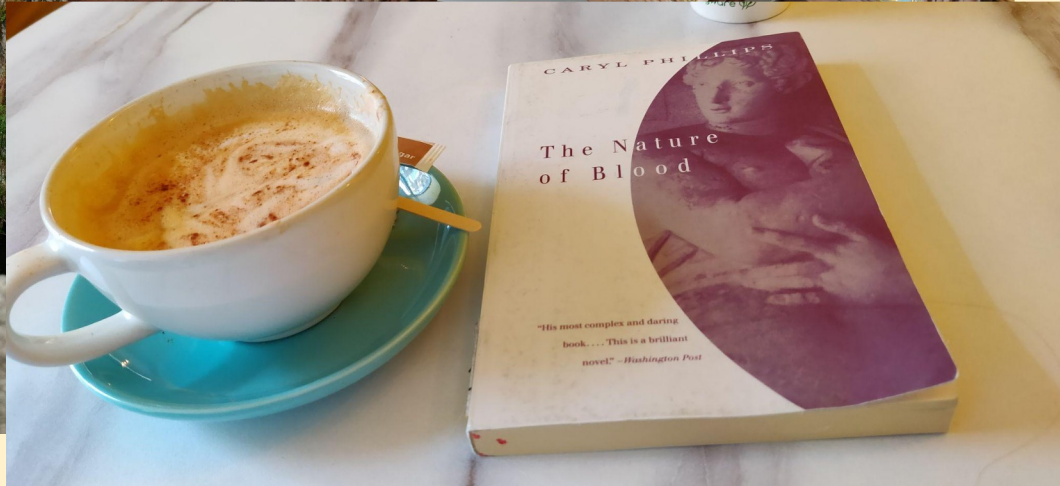
Greyfriar's Bobby

National Museum of Scotland

Edinburgh Castle

The Fringe Festival







Part V: Spectre of Covid

Covid

- ❖ Covid is still very much alive and well in the UK. Some of the functions originally scheduled three years ago were changed to accommodate smaller groups in more wide-open spaces. During my two weeks in Edinburgh, several of my peers contracted Covid and had to quarantine.
- ❖ However, the SUISS directors rallied together and replaced some of those offerings with very interesting cultural experiences. They were committed to ensuring our time there was stimulating, enjoyable, and creative.
- ❖ I did not miss a thing!

Part VI: Gratitude

- ❖ To finish, I want to thank the ESU in providing me this opportunity to challenge myself, to become acquainted with myself again, and to see beautiful Scotland.
- ❖ After the course was over, my husband flew over and we drove all over Scotland, traveling northwest through the Highlands to the Isle of Skye, through the Cairngorms National Park to Stirling Castle and the William Wallace Monument.
- ❖ Scotland is a beautiful, vibrant country (with amazing roadway signage.) Edinburgh is a wonderfully magical-looking city filled with creative and artsy people.
- ❖ I am so thankful I was given the opportunity to experience it in this manner.

Thank You!

