

## LT285 Literature and the Border

Seminar Leader: Catherine Toal  
Email: C.Toal@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: 1-2pm Monday or by appointment

Borders are a fact of geopolitics, possessing greater or lesser degrees of permeability. At the extreme, they are closed, contested, provisional or collapsing, creating new and strange worlds inside their lines or in the event of their disappearance. Even when apparently stable, a border is usually the product of struggle and force. Demarcations characteristic of the modern nation state have been imposed on territories for which this kind of definition is alien. Partitions established to contain the ethnic and religious divisions provoked by imperial or colonial dominance have often perpetuated the conflicts they were supposed to settle. The literary text always creates its own world but frequently has to deal, especially in highly charged political circumstances, with the violence of a border, the experience of life on one or either side of it, and the means of finding an aesthetic expression for these realities. Contemporary literature is preoccupied with the catastrophes surrounding borders to an unprecedented extent, as is clear across genres: fiction in recognizable present-day settings, historical novels, poetry, journalistic studies by novelists, and archival collections already considered literary classics. We read a selection of these compelling works by, among others, Yuri Herrera, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chinua Achebe, David Grossman, Susan Abulhawa, Jenny Erpenbeck, Svetlana Alexievich, Colm Tóibín. Addressing the background and the controversies of the situations of crisis they address, we examine their unique language and form, as well as drawing on theories of sovereignty, identity, space, and power relevant to both literary and political invention.

### Primary Texts

These texts must be purchased in advance of the course. All other readings will be provided.

Susan Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin*  
Chinua Achebe, *There Was A Country*  
Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time: the Last of the Soviets*  
Jenny Erpenbeck, *Visitation*  
David Grossman, *The Smile of the Lamb*  
Yuri Herrera *Signs Preceding the End of the World*  
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*  
Colm Tóibín, *Bad Blood: A Walk Along the Irish Border*

### Requirements

Assignments are two papers, each of 3500, due at mid (Friday 18 March) and end (Friday 20 May) of term, short responses to a question circulated at the beginning of each class, and two short in-class presentations (10 minutes).

### Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one

absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2022:** Students must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. In such cases, classwork can be completed by means of a written assignment.

#### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

#### Grade Breakdown

Participation: 30%, First Paper: 20%, In-class questions: 10% Presentations: 10%, Final Paper: 30%

#### Schedule

Monday January 31

Étienne Balibar, "World Borders, Political Borders"

Wednesday February 2

Yuri Herrera, *Signs Preceding the End of the World* (to p. 50)

Aviva Chomsky, "Killing Hope"

Monday February 7

Yuri Herrera, *Signs Preceding the End of the World* (to p. 100)

Carlos Dada, "At the Mexican Border"

Wednesday February 9

Yuri Herrera, *Signs Preceding the End of the World* (to p. 100)

Madeleine Schwartz, "Inside the Deportation Courts"

Monday February 14

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (p. 100)

from Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*

Wednesday February 16

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (p. 150)

from Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country*

Monday February 21

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (p. 250)  
from Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died*

Wednesday February 23

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (p. 300)  
Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, “Colonizing Bodies and Minds”

Monday February 28

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (p. 400)

Wednesday March 2

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*  
Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*

Monday March 7

David Grossman, *The Smile of the Lamb* (p. 100)  
from Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*

Wednesday March 9

David Grossman, *The Smile of the Lamb* (p.170)

Monday March 14

David Grossman, *The Smile of the Lamb* (p. 280)  
from Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion*

Wednesday March 16

David Grossman, *The Smile of the Lamb*

**Mid-term essay due Friday March 18**

Monday March 21

Susan Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin* (to p.100)  
from Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*

Wednesday March 23

Susan Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin* (to p.150)

Monday March 28

Susan Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin* (to p.250)  
from Ali Abunimah, *One Country*

Wednesday March 30

Susan Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin*

Monday April 4

Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time: the Last of the Soviets* (to p.150)  
Dmitri Furman, “Imitation Democracies: The Post-Soviet Penumbra”

Wednesday April 6

Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time: the Last of the Soviets* (to p. 200)

from David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway: Russia and the Communist Past*

**Monday April 11 to Tuesday April 19 Spring Break**

Wednesday April 20

Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time: the Last of the Soviets*  
from Vladislav Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union*

Monday April 25

Jenny Erpenbeck, *Visitation* p.50  
from A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History*

Wednesday April 27

Jenny Erpenbeck, *Visitation* p.100

Monday May 2

Jenny Erpenbeck, *Visitation* p.150  
Richard Evans, “German Reunification in Historical Perspective”

Wednesday May 4

Jenny Erpenbeck, *Visitation*  
Jenny Erpenbeck, “Blind Spot”

Monday May 9

Colm Tóibín, *Bad Blood: A Walk Along the Irish Border* (to p. 100)  
from David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*

Wednesday May 11

Colm Tóibín, *Bad Blood: A Walk Along the Irish Border*

**Final Essay due Friday May 20**