

English 624. Seminar in Modern Literature: Prize Winning Books

Instructor: Andrew Kincaid

Monday and Wednesdays, 11.00 AM – 12.15 PM

During the course of the semester, we will read five books that have won major literary prizes over the last two years, including

- the winner of the Booker Prize
- the best play of the year, as decided by the Pulitzer Committee for Drama
- the best young adult book, as awarded by the Newberry Prize Committee
- a book of poetry by the winner of the Nobel Prize for literature
- the five short stories that made the shortlist for the Caine Prize for African Writing

Our class has two primary goals. Our first goal is to read, contemplate, and enjoy contemporary literature. We will discuss the themes being raised by these prizewinning books, and we will analyze the stylistic maneuvers within them. We will also read about how the judges in the various competitions chose the books they did.

The second goal is to reflect on the sociology of literary prize giving. What is a prize? Can, and should, literature be evaluated and rewarded with awards? Who gets to judge who wins and loses? By thinking about literature as “prizeworthy”, my hope is that we will reflect on larger ethical questions, such as, how is worth measured, and what the effects of establishing a winning and losing mentality are when it comes to the arts?