

Literature post-1900: Expanding your NEA library (October 2020)

Here at OCR, our A Level English Literature NEA is designed to give students and teachers scope to explore contemporary literature written in English. In discussions with our teachers, we're offering these twice yearly bulletins highlighting a range of texts for your consideration.

In this edition, we're widening our scope and offering a range of texts that refashion, reimagine, or repurpose familiar narratives, as well as those that highlight lesser told stories. Here we have texts that explore the self and identity; retell and adapt classic stories from Cupid and Psyche, to *Howard's End*, to *Exodus* in the Bible; examine Native American lives in Oakland, California and life in 90s Zimbabwe. All the texts listed have been published within the last 6 years with 5 from 2020 alone so, we hope you find something new and something inspiring in the list below.

List of texts:

Poetry:

- *Magnolia*, 木蘭 by Nina Mingya Powles
- *House of Lords and Commons* by Ishion Hutchinson
- *If They Come For Us* by Fatimah Asghar
- *Prelude to Bruise* by Saeed Jones
- *My Darling from the Lions* by Rachel Long

Drama:

- *The Inheritance* by Matthew Lopez
- *Pass Over* by Antoinette Nwandu
- *Forgotten* 遗忘 by Daniel York Loh
- *Summer in London* by Rikki Beadle-Blair
- *Upper Cut* by Juliet Gilkes Romero

Prose:

- *Love in Colour* by Bolu Babalola
- *Trust Exercise* by Susan Choi
- *This Mournable Body* by Tsitsi Dangarembga
- *There There* by Tommy Orange
- *That Reminds Me* by Derek Owusu

Poetry texts

1. *Magnolia*, 木蘭 by Nina Mingya Powles (2020, Nine Arches Press)

Nominated for this year's best First Collection at the 2020 Forward Prizes, *Magnolia* is an exciting and playful experiment with form. Examining ideas of selfhood and dislocation, Powles offers a collection packed with sensory details, exploring growing up with mixed Malaysian-Chinese heritage in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Themes: identity, dislocation, language, growing up, family, selfhood

2. *House of Lords and Commons* by Ishion Hutchinson (2016, Faber & Faber)

In Hutchinson's second collection, he expands on experiences from his Jamaican childhood while blurring historical timelines and exploring silences created by colonial history. Blending contemporary and classical references, he gives voice to landscapes and figures from the Caribbean, offering them up with formal and linguistic invention.

Themes: history, landscape, colonial legacy, childhood, family, inequality

3. *If They Come For Us* by Fatima Asghar (2018, Corsair)

Asghar's collection navigates sexuality, religion, family and loss with a keen eye on formal innovation. Partition is a motif here, both exploring the historical Partition of India and Pakistan as well as the allegorical and personal kinds. Asghar's command of language to discuss grief and uncertainty, building a home and a self, is truly impressive.

Themes: identity, violence, rejection, family, home, defiance

4. *Prelude to Bruise* by Saeed Jones (2014, Coffee House Press)

Recurring throughout this collection is the voice and experiences of 'Boy', a young, queer Black person trying to negotiate desire, danger and gender. Jones' imagery is dense and baroque, discussing violence and abuse with as much ease as promiscuity and drag, filled with formal exploration and an attention to rhythm.

Themes: LGBT+, race, identity, family, gender, desire

5. *My Darling from the Lions* by Rachel Long (2020, Picador)

Also nominated for best First Collection in the 2020 Forward Prizes, Long's debut uses voice powerfully to explore topics with wit and precision. Whether exploring sexual awakening, dating, or loneliness, this collection explores the pressures women, especially Black women, are under while also maintaining verve and energy with her use of form.

Themes: identity, love, growth, religion, abuse, sexuality

Drama texts

1. *The Inheritance* by Matthew Lopez (2018, Faber & Faber)

Loosely based on *Howard's End*, the two part epic follows the social circle of Eric Glass. After Eric's boyfriend, Toby, leaves for a Broadway adaptation of his novel, Eric meets Walter, the partner of Henry Wilcox. Lopez details the impact of the AIDS epidemic, the rise of Trump, and what we owe to one another. Moving, funny and E.M Forster narrates.

Themes: LGBT+, politics, loss, love, legacy, identity

2. *Pass Over* by Antoinette Nwandu (2017, Faber & Faber)

Drawing from *Waiting for Godot*, and *Exodus*, *Pass Over* follows two Black men, Moses and Kitch, often alone, waiting day after day - for escape, for joy, to be seen. When strangers wander onto their corner, we watch as the cycle derails and resets. Nwandu's play is clever and funny, packed with allusion but never loses sight of Moses and Kitch's reality.

Themes: tragedy, race, existentialism, the Bible, freedom, oppression

3. *Forgotten* 遗忘 by Daniel York Loh (2018, Oberon Books)

Forgotten 遗忘 provides a different perspective on WWI from the usual Tommys in trenches. Inspired by the contributions of the Chinese Labour Corp, some 140,000 Chinese men who worked for Britain and her allies during the war, Loh examines the war through the eyes of a Chinese amateur theatre troupe and their journey to Europe.

Themes: war, colonialism, remembrance, tradition, oppression, theatre

4. *Summer in London* by Rikki Beadle-Blair (2017, Team Angelica)

It's coming to the end of a sweltering summer and Ryoko, Hamza, Jack and Mosey are lingering in Olympic Park. A rom-com about homeless, trans youth looking for love, understanding, and the perfect date in the capital; this offers a wry and positive look at these young people, and the ways love and identity are sometimes more complex than it seems.

Themes: love, identity, romance, comedy, LGBT+, friendship

5. *Upper Cut* by Juliet Wilkes Romero (2015, Oberon Books)

Focused on Karen, a Black activist and Labour member, Romero cannily uses linear time in reverse to take us through 25 years or so of Labour party history. Exploring underrepresentation and how political machines both welcome and manipulate activism, the play takes us back to 1987 and through changing political goals and changing relationships.

Themes: politics, love, race, optimism, careerism, representation

Prose texts

1. *Love in Colour* by Bolu Babalola (2020, Headline)

This short story collection transforms myths, legends and folk tales from around the world into modern day romances. With a careful eye on power and tenderness, Babalola reformulates the stories of Osun, Scherezade, Thisbe, Siya and others to explore the complexities of romantic love.

Themes: love, power, identity, compassion, control, femininity

2. *Trust Exercise* by Susan Choi (2019, Serpent's Tail)

Following teenagers Sarah and David at a 1980s high school in suburban America, their charismatic and manipulative teacher Mr Kingsley, and their classmates, Choi explores power dynamics and sticky, uncomfortable truths. *Trust Exercise* explores the ways in which we craft our own stories and how damage can be done before it is realised by the victim.

Themes: love, youth, abuse, memory, power, storytelling

3. *This Mournable Body* by Tsitsi Dangarembga (2020, Faber & Faber)

The third in a trilogy starting with 1988's *Nervous Conditions*, we return to Tambu and Zimbabwe, this time in the late 90s, where corruption and tension is beginning to mount. Dangarembga's work is sharp and precise, employing second person to immense effect, examining the ways in which conflict, poverty and oppression create detachment.

Themes: identity, conflict, isolation, neo-colonialism, violence, betrayal

4. *There There* by Tommy Orange (2018, Vintage)

Focusing on a cast of 12 Native Americans living in Oakland, California, *There There* shows how for them, colonial oppression and violence has never ended. Orange, who is Cheyenne and Arapaho, uses a range of narrative approaches to represent his characters' multifaceted struggles and their experiences in a world that often negates their existence.

Themes: colonialism, identity, love, abuse, addiction, resilience

5. *That Reminds Me* by Derek Owusu (2020, Merky Books)

Owusu chronicles the life of a boy called K in five fractured sections, each started with a declaration to Anansi. This careful and fragmented narrative explores how K is born to Ghanaian parents in London, put into care, then returned to his birth family in Tottenham. Filled with tenderness and pain, this novel examines how to become your own person.

Themes: growing up, identity, class, race, self-harm, family