

Summer 2018
ENGLISH 6710: 21st Century Literatures

Thematic Title: *Contemporary Fiction*

MTWTh 9:45-11:20 AM

Lalumiere Language Hall 222

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Office Hours: before and after class, or by appointment

Giorgio Agamben writes: “The poet—the contemporary—must firmly hold his gaze on his own time. But what does he who sees his time actually see? What is this demented grin on the face of his century? ... The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light but rather its darkness.” This course takes up major literary and mass-media works of the twenty-first century with an eye towards Agamben’s future-facing call “to perceive, in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot.” Major texts will include Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, Octavia E. Butler’s *Fledgling*, Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*, and Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One*, alongside short stories from David Foster Wallace and Ted Chiang. In lieu of a final seminar paper, major assignments will instead include pedagogical and professional preparation for entry into postgraduate professions, as well as the production of shorter “thinkpiece”-style articles on topics relevant to the class.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Investigate major concepts, methods, and theoretical movements that have shaped the practices of contemporary literary studies;
- Study and critically analyze major works of 21st century American literature;
- Explore the relationship between the concept of “the contemporary” and interrelated ideas of history, futurity, gender, race, ecology, utopia, and the nation;
- Produce cogent academic writing in a variety of modes and media forms;
- Hone pedagogical skills for teaching literature at the college level.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the Book Marq on 16th Street)

- Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*
- Octavia E. Butler’s *Fledgling*
- Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*
- Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*
- Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One*

Selected additional texts will be made available through D2L, as well as during class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation	25%
D2L	15%
Discussion Inaugurator	10%
Thinkpieces	10% each
Lesson Plan	10%
Sample Syllabus	10%
Book Review	10%

ASSIGNMENTS

I do not believe it would be realistic for you to produce a graduate-level seminar paper in six weeks alongside the regular reading schedule of the course. As such, I will ask you instead to produce a number of smaller assignments that link the themes of the course to your professionalization as an academic.

These assignments are organized around three primary goals:

1. developing significant knowledge of literary trends in global literatures of the 21st century;
2. developing your skills as a critic and interpreter of such texts;
3. developing your skills for teaching literature in the undergraduate classroom.

I will therefore ask you to produce the following over the course of the semester:

1. **Two “thinkpiece” length articles** (approximately 1000-2000 words) on a literature-related topic of your choosing, one devoted to each “half” of the course, appropriate to the model of digital publication employed at such outlets as *Slate*, *Salon*, *The New Inquiry*, *Jacobin*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, etc. (due at midterms and at finals);
2. A **book review** (approximately 2000 words) on a recent critical text regarding 21st century literature or literary scholarship more generally, appropriate for publication in an academic journal (due anytime by June 28);
3. A **lesson plan** for teaching some aspect of *The Buried Giant* (due Thursday, July 21);
4. A **sample syllabi** for a course appropriate for the teaching portfolio of an entry-level scholar, pitched at a level of your choosing, preferably with *some* relationship to the themes of this course (group assignment; due Thursday, June 28);
6. **Two “discussion inauguration” days** (variable dates);
7. **Five D2L posts** (variable dates).

Samples for the syllabi, thinkpiece, and book review assignments are available on D2L. I leave the form of the lesson plan and the discussion inauguration in your hands.

Please feel free to see or write me if you would like more direction on any of these assignments.

GRADING

Grades will follow the following rubric:

* To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A C essay may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or analysis of its sources. C essays are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.

* To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A B essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B essays are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.

* To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

* A **D** means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.

* **A-**, **B+**, **B-**, **C+**, and **C-** grades fall squarely in the gaps between the above categories.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Your papers should be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-firstpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even blog posts and blog comments. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

Please give each piece of writing an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page. Insert page numbers if your work spans more than one page.

All sources relied upon for the writing of your paper, including the primary text, must be appropriately cited.

WRITING SUBMISSION

Your work should be submitted via D2L's Dropbox by the time listed on the syllabus. **Late work will be penalized a full grade for each day that it is late.** Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

Much of your work in this class has **flexible due dates** driven by your own interests and responses. **It is thus your responsibility to make sure you are properly keeping up with this portion of the course.**

TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often; save backup copies of essential documents, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is therefore crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

Consequently, attendance in this class is absolutely mandatory. You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

You are allowed **two absences** over the course of the summer semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by a letter grade for each additional absence.** Upon the fifth absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

Merely being present is insufficient to earn an “A” for class participation. Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

DISCUSSION INAUGURATOR

Each member of the class will have two days in which they are expected to inaugurate our discussion by articulating a detailed, five-to-ten-minute response to the day's reading. The requirements for this are necessarily very loose, as each day of the course will have a very different type of text to be discussed; in general, however, the discussion inaugurator will be asked to (1) articulate a thoughtful and critical response to some aspect of the material and (2) direct our collective attention to one or two problems in, questions about, or particularly important moments from the reading for that day. A sign-up sheet will be distributed in class.

D2L FORUMS

This course will also make extensive use of the D2L forums at <http://d2l.mu.edu>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, D2L also features an online forum where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The D2L discussion forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. I will be reading the discussion forum regularly and I recommend you do the same. You may choose either to begin a discussion thread on a new topic or to respond to a post composed by one of your classmates.

Before class *this* Thursday, every student is required to take the following actions:

- * **upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile;**
- * **write a short, 200-400-word response to some aspect of Jameson, Wallace, or related critical work.**

After that, students must write **at least four substantive (200-400-word) posts (approximately one per week with one week off)** responding to **any four texts** across the remainder of the course. These posts should be completed either by 8 AM before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by 8 AM before the following class. At least half of the posts should be completed before the midterm.

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once the afternoon before a scheduled class meeting, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night they are due and expect an immediate reply.

LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. No use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

FLEXIBILITY

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who believe they may require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met.

I am of course more than happy to work with you to make sure you are successful in this course and to make this course most accessible for you. However, without documentation, I am limited in what I am able to do. Therefore, in order for me to help you most effectively, I need you to be proactive in contacting Marquette University's Office of Disability Services (located on the fifth floor of the 707 Building).

ODS can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or by email at ods@marquette.edu.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#academichonestypolicy>.

On a personal level, I (like everyone) hate being lied to. Please, do not feel you need to concoct elaborate stories. Simply be honest with me about whatever is going on and we will work it out.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF SUMMER SCHOOL

College courses that take place during the summer session are, by their nature, quite different from classes that take place during the fall or spring semesters. That situation is compounded, in our case, by the fact that ours is a graduate course that meets daily for ninety minutes at a stretch. I have endeavored as best I can to schedule the course so that the readings will not be onerous. (I have also attempted to select material that I hope will be interesting and engaging, so that it never *feels* onerous.) I have also eliminated long papers in this class in favor of extended D2L forum posts, daily in-class presentations, mini-articles, and professional and pedagogical preparation. In doing all this I am trying to be realistic about what is possible for us to achieve together within a six-week summer course, and to develop the richest intellectual experience possible within those constraints.

Despite all of the above, however, I must stress that this course is still *serious business*: it is meant to be the equivalent of a fall or spring fifteen-week course. The fact that the course has been paced for summer should *not* be mistaken for an excuse for you to blow this class off or fail to take it seriously. I hope, instead, that you will embrace the unique opportunity this course's unusual pacing offers for close consideration of the texts under discussion and intense scholarly engagement with your peers. What will make this class both most fun and most useful to you as emerging scholars is a collective commitment to diving into this experience and getting the most that we can get out of it, together.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

READING AND ASSIGNMENTS		
M	May 21	FIRST DAY OF CLASS Giorgio Agamben, "What Is The Contemporary?" [D2L] Theodore Martin, "Contemporary, Inc." [D2L]
T	May 22	Postmodernism Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" [D2L] David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" [D2L]
W	May 23	David Foster Wallace, "Octet" [D2L]
Th	May 24	Post-Postmodernism David Foster Wallace, "Octet" continued Adam Kelly, "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction" [D2L] Luke Turner, "The Metamodernist Manifesto" and "Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction" [D2L]
M	May 28	MEMORIAL DAY—NO CLASS
T	May 29	NO CLASS

W	May 30	Neoliberalism Colson Whitehead, <i>Zone One</i>
Th	May 31	...and Empire Colson Whitehead, <i>Zone One</i> continued
M	June 4	Identity Octavia E. Butler, <i>Fledgling</i>
T	June 5	Octavia E. Butler, <i>Fledgling</i> continued
W	June 6	Octavia E. Butler, <i>Fledgling</i> continued
Th	June 7	Octavia E. Butler, unfinished <i>Fledgling</i> sequels [excerpts] [D2L] Gerry Canavan, "Paraclete" [excerpts] [D2L] THINKPIECE #1 DUE
M	June 11	Ecology Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" [D2L] McKenzie Wark, "Critical Theory after the Anthropocene" [Web] Daniel Hartley, "Against the Anthropocene" [Web] Margaret Atwood, "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet" [Web] Ted Chiang, "The Great Silence" [Web]
T	June 12	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> , Day One
W	June 13	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> , Day Two
Th	June 14	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> , Day Three excerpts from <i>The Year of the Flood</i> and <i>Maddaddam</i> [D2L]
M	June 18	History Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>The Buried Giant</i> , Day One
T	June 19	Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>The Buried Giant</i> , Day Two
W	June 20	Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>The Buried Giant</i> , Day Three <i>The Buried Giant</i> reviews [Web] Kazuo Ishiguro, Nobel Prize lecture [Web]
Th	June 21	Kazuo Ishiguro Lesson Plan Workshop LESSON PLAN ASSIGNMENT DUE
M	June 25	The Darkness of the Present <i>House of Leaves</i> , Day One
T	June 26	<i>House of Leaves</i> , Day Two
W	June 27	<i>House of Leaves</i> , Day Three and forums [Web]
Th	June 28	GROUP SYLLABUS WORKSHOP THINKPIECE #2 DUE BOOK REVIEW DUE LAST DAY OF CLASS