

Spring 2021

ENGLISH 4563/5563

Thematic Title: *Contemporary Literature*

MWF 11:00 AM - 11:50 AM

all online

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Virtual Office Hours: MWF 12:00 PM-1:00 PM 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, exploring multiple forms and genres, with an eye towards understanding Agamben’s future-facing call “to perceive, in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot”; in fact, every text we will discuss was published in its current form between 2018 and 2021. The book list includes Chris Ware’s *Rusty Brown, Vol. 1*, Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future*, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun*, and Zadie Smith’s *Intimations*, as well as additional short stories, films, plays, poems, and video games.

LEARNING GOALS

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

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

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the Book Marq)

Chris Ware, *Rusty Brown, Vol. 1*

Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (likely not available in print)

Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* (not available until March)

Zadie Smith’s *Intimations*

Any edition of these texts is suitable, including a digital version. Selected additional texts will be made available through D2L, as well as during class; some televisual material will also need to be streamed using popular streaming platforms like Amazon Prime.

FORMAT

Like many classes at Marquette this semester, the originally planned format for this course has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The course has been reconceived and rebuilt to make sense in an entirely online format, facilitated by asynchronous work on Marquette's D2L learning platform and by synchronous meetings on the free video-conferencing platform Zoom.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, we will meet together on Zoom. If possible, we will have full-class meetings on these days; if that proves unwieldy, we will switch to a "flex" model in which half the class signs into the Zoom conference and the other half watches the recorded discussion afterwards. Attendance will not be required on these days; if you are unable to make the synchronous meeting, you can watch the recorded session and make a D2L response afterwards to receive full credit for attendance.

On most Fridays, I will ask you to post a freeform response in the designated "sandbox" forum for that week. This does not have to be a formal written post, but can also take the form of a podcast, short video, a work of art or music, a short story or fan fiction, a comic, or more; any response of any sort is fine, provided it is thoughtful and substantial. By the end of the weekend, I will ask you to respond to at least two other sandbox posts. The idea is to respond collectively to the material we are studying together in a way that is not stifling, anxious, or overstructured by academic expectations that cannot really apply to this odd and altered educational context; my hope is to strip away grading strictures that can only be dysfunctional in the current moment and foster instead more multifaceted, more generous, and hopefully richer intellectual encounters, driven by your interests.

These sandbox posts will replace much of the written assignments in the course. The remaining assignments will be mini-papers that test some of our powers of analysis in a low-stakes experiential way, without rising to the level of a traditional academic paper. In lieu of a final exam, students will produce an "Intimation" of the sort Zadie Smith creates in her book for publication in the Marquette English Intimations Project, to help memorialize this very odd year.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND PERSONAL EMERGENCIES

Everyone at Marquette recognizes that this is an extremely difficult time which may be filled with different sorts of uncertainty as we move forward with the academic year. Your safety, health, and well-being are our primary concern and we want to be able to support you in any way that we can.

The university also understands that you may be facing personal obstacles that may make it difficult to meet your typical academic goals. Please refer to the Student Resources page on the Marquette COVID-19 Response webpage for information and resources on basic needs such as housing, food, financial aid, and medical and mental health; the webpage also offers information on official University communications, access to technology, and student services. Faculty and staff are also here for you.

If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your situation outside of class, please don't hesitate to talk with me. I want to be a resource for you. You are not alone.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation (Mon/Wed Zoom Lectures and make-up D2L Posts)	20%
Sandbox Posts (weekly Friday post and two weekly responses)	20%
Close Reading mini-paper	20%
<i>Ministry</i> Response	20%
Final “Intimation”	20%

Additional details on these assignments can be found as an appendix at the end of this document, as well as under CONTENT on D2L.

Graduate students will be responsible for a separate set of assignments, which will be distributed separately to them.

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.

Grades are not awarded on an artificial curve or in competition with each other. There is no reason that every student cannot receive an A in this course.

UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS

Your makeup posts and sandbox posts will be graded on an extra-credit / pass / low-pass / fail basis:

- Fulfilling all the requirements of the assignment will earn you full credit;
- Failing to do so will earn you half-credit (at best) or no credit (at worst);
- Going beyond the terms of the assignment in an especially ambitious or creative way can earn you extra credit.

QUIZZES

I do not like to give reading quizzes; I think they infantilize the college-level scholar. However, this is by necessity a very reading-intensive class; if it seems to me that people are not keeping up with the reading, pop quizzes may become necessary despite my philosophical objections. You have been warned.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Your final paper 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-closetoreading.docx. Get into the habit of giving your files descriptive names of this sort.

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.

PAPER SUBMISSION

The papers should be submitted via D2L's Dropbox by class time on the due date. **Late papers will be penalized a full grade for each day that they are late.** However, see below about extensions.

Work can be submitted early with no penalty. Please feel free to organize the timing of assignments in this class in a way that works for you.

EXTENSIONS

Although the papers in this course have a sufficiently long timetable to allow you to plan and complete all assignments in a timely manner, I nonetheless recognize that each of you has a unique schedule and that some of the due dates I have selected could occasionally prove problematic for individual students in the course, especially in the context of the pandemic. **If you find that you will need an extension on a particular assignment due to this kind of conflict, please contact me to arrange an alternative due date.** There is no need to concoct an elaborate story to justify this, or to lie to me; simply tell me the truth about what's going on and we can work out an alternative that works for you.

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, as well as having viewed any prefatory textual or audiovisual material I have posted on D2L.

As noted above, due to the circumstances of this semester I will not begin the semester requiring attendance in our Zoom meetings, provided you watch the recorded session and post on D2L afterwards. However, this policy will be subject to review; the Zoom sessions require a critical mass of students to be functional and if they become too empty I *will* need to start requiring attendance. This is a collective action problem and I trust that we will be able to figure it out together.

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 **three absences** (defined as neither attending the Zoom nor writing a D2L post before the next class period) over the course of the fall semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the seventh unexcused absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

As with a face-to-face class, each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough. If there is a reason you feel you cannot participate in a given session, please let me know before class begins so I do not call on you that day.

D2L FORUMS

This course will 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—and you are of course always free to make a post for a Monday or Wednesday class even if you did attend the Zoom session. I will take note of any such posts for extra credit at the end of the course.

Before class on Friday every student is required to take the following actions:

- * **upload a picture either of their face or a representative symbolic image to their D2L profile;**
- * **take the entrance survey on D2L;**

*** craft a “sandbox” response to “What Is the Contemporary?” using the prompt online as your starting point.**

Students will post a sandbox post and two sandbox responses most weeks in the course, missing up to two weeks without penalty.

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.

CONFERENCES

All students are asked to meet with me in at least two short one-on-one conferences either via Zoom or at an appropriately socially distanced outdoor location, once before Fall Break and once after. Weekly signups will be available on D2L.

Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss either graded work or work-in-progress in excess of this requirement as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly Zoom office hours, or email me to set up an appointment.

FLEXIBILITY

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

WRITING CENTER

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, located in Raynor Library Room 240, at any stage of the writing process.

Please visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.marquette.edu/english/writingcenter/> to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio’s online resources.

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.

Marquette students now sign an Honor Pledge, which states:

- *I recognize the importance of personal integrity in all aspects of life and work.*
- *I commit myself to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, by which I earn the respect of others.*
- *I support the development of good character, and commit myself to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity as an important aspect of personal integrity.*
- *My commitment obliges me to conduct myself according to the Marquette University Honor Code.*

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://www.marquette.edu/provost/academic-integrity.php>.

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** impact your class participation grade.

KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN!

I want this class to be a meaningful and valuable experience for you, both in its own terms and in service of the development of your larger college experience. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns about the way things are going, my door is always open. I put this statement on every syllabus, but I think it is especially important in a semester that is likely to be as chaotic and disorienting as this one. Please, keep me in the loop about what is going on with you in the world outside our Zoom sessions, and help me to make this class as successful as it can be.

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.

synch	M	1/25	FIRST DAY OF CLASS
synch	W	1/27	<i>Among Us</i> game and thinkpieces [D2L]
asynch	F	1/29	Giorgio Agamben, “What Is the Contemporary?” [D2L]
synch	M	2/1	PLAY/MOVIE: Heidi Schreck, <i>What the Constitution Means to Me</i> (including bonus material) [Amazon Prime]
synch	W	2/3	<i>What the Constitution Means to Me</i> discussion continues
asynch	F	2/5	POEM: Andrea Gorman, “The Hill We Climb” [D2L] and online reactions
synch	M	2/8	SHORT STORY: N.K. Jemisin, “Emergency Skin” [Amazon Kindle]
synch	W	2/10	SHORT STORY: Ted Chiang, “Anxiety Is the Dizziness of Freedom” [online]
asynch	F	2/12	Jemisin and Chiang sandbox assignment
synch	M	2/15	COMIC: Chris Ware, <i>Rusty Brown, Vol. 1</i> , part one
synch	W	2/17	COMIC: Chris Ware, <i>Rusty Brown, Vol. 1</i> , part two
asynch	F	2/19	COMIC: Chris Ware, <i>Rusty Brown, Vol. 1</i> , part three sandbox assignment
synch	M	2/22	COMIC: Chris Ware, <i>Rusty Brown, Vol. 1</i> , part three discussion
synch	W	2/24	COMIC: Chris Ware, <i>Rusty Brown, Vol. 1</i> , part four
asynch	F	2/26	Haruki Murakami, “Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey” [D2L] <i>optional</i> : Haruki Murakami, “A Shinagawa Monkey” [D2L]
synch	M	3/1	Haruki Murakami, “Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey” discussion
synch	W	3/3	<i>Hades</i> [Steam or Nintendo Switch]
asynch	F	3/5	<i>Hades</i> sandbox assignment
synch	M	3/8	<i>Hades</i> discussion continues
	W	3/10	UNIVERSITY MENTAL HEALTH DAY—NO CLASS
asynch	F	3/12	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> , chapters 1-16 CLOSE READING DUE
synch	M	3/15	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> , chapters 17-30
synch	W	3/17	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> , chapters 31-45
asynch	F	3/19	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> , chapters 46-60

synch	M	3/22	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> , chapters 61-74
synch	W	3/24	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> , chapters 75-90

asynch	F	3/26	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> , whole book
synch	M	3/29	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> and responses
synch	W	3/31	Kim Stanley Robinson, <i>The Ministry for the Future</i> and responses
	F	4/2	GOOD FRIDAY—NO CLASS
synch	M	4/5	Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>Klara and the Sun</i> (page range TBD)
synch	W	4/7	Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>Klara and the Sun</i> (page range TBD)
asynch	F	4/9	Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>Klara and the Sun</i> (page range TBD)
synch	M	4/12	Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>Klara and the Sun</i> (page range TBD)
synch	W	4/14	Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>Klara and the Sun</i> (page range TBD)
asynch	F	4/16	Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>Klara and the Sun</i> (page range TBD) MINISTRY RESPONSE DUE
synch	M	4/19	CREATIVE NONFICTION: Zadie Smith, <i>Intimations</i> (first half)
synch	W	4/21	CREATIVE NONFICTION: Zadie Smith, <i>Intimations</i> (second half)
asynch	F	4/23	MOVIE or TV SHOW TBD
synch	M	4/26	MOVIE or TV SHOW TBD
synch	W	4/28	MOVIE or TV SHOW TBD
asynch	F	4/30	MOVIE or TV SHOW TDB
synch	M	5/3	MOVIE or TV SHOW TBD
	W	5/5	UNIVERSITY MENTAL HEALTH DAY—NO CLASS
	F	5/7	INTIMATION DUE LAST DAY OF CLASS

FOLLOW FAME: FRIENDS AND ALUMNI/AE OF MARQUETTE ENGLISH

On Facebook (page): www.facebook.com/marquettefame

On Facebook (group): www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194

(search for “Undergraduate English at Marquette”)

On Twitter: @MarquetteFAME

While our ability to see each other in person is necessarily constrained this semester, there will be opportunities for department events and virtual meetups that will be advertised through these outlets. I hope you can attend!

APPENDIX: GUIDE TO WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Makeup Posts (due by the next class period after the Zoom session you missed): A personal response to something under discussion in the previous Zoom session, extending, critiquing, or transforming that discussion in a substantive way. As a general guideline, a makeup post should be approximately 200-300 words.

Sandbox assignments (due every Friday): A substantive response, in a critical or creative format of your choosing, responding to some aspect of the material under discussion that week. A prompt will typically be provided, but you are not required to use it.

As a general guideline, a sandbox post should require a level of effort commensurate with a 400-500-word D2L post.

Close reading mini-paper (due by Friday, March 12): Your first mini-paper in this course will be a close reading of a short sequence from the first half of the semester, seeking to demonstrate how the design of that passage (its *form*) helps to generate its political, philosophical, or existential *content*. This mini-paper does not need a formal introduction or conclusion; it might be helpful to think of it as a prospectus for the formal paper you *would* write, *if* this class were requiring formal papers this semester. The point of the assignment is to demonstrate that you understand *how* and *why* we close read a given kind of text. As a general guideline, this mini-paper should be approximately 800-1000 words; a full description of the assignment is available on D2L.

Ministry response (due by Friday, April 18): Your second mini-paper in this course is a response to Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* that calls upon you to imagine yourself in some fashion as part of the Ministry (however you conceive that role) fighting on behalf of the future (however you conceive that concept). This can be formal prose argument; it can be a creative or curatorial response; you may work together in groups. The sky is the limit. As a general guideline, you should think of this as requiring a level of personal effort commensurate with a four-to-six-page paper, though what this looks like in practice may vary wildly from student to student. Let me know if the idea of such a completely open-ended assignment fills you with anxiety and we can certainly talk through it.

Personal "Intimation" (due Friday, May 7): In coordination with ENGLISH 4503, in lieu of a final exam, you will produce a personal "Intimation" of the sort Zadie Smith crafts in *Intimations*. This creative nonfiction essay asks you to memorialize some experience of this very strange time for publication (with your permission of course) in the Marquette English Intimations Project online. Additional details on this project will be provided in class.