ENGLISH 460C: BRITISH LITERATURE 1945-present
Fall 2008, Section 01, 11:30-12:30, MWF, AL 105

Course Syllabus:
Instructor: Professor Murray McArthur
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A. Course Description and Objectives:

Rather than attempting to cover the half-century designated in the course title, we will concentrate instead in this section on the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first. The texts on the course begin in story and historical time on December 31, 1979 (The Radiant Way), six months after the first election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, and end on February 15, 2003 (Saturday), the day when over a million Britons marched in protest against Prime Minister Tony Blair’s decision to join the United States in the invasion and occupation of Iraq (though the poetry of Seamus Heaney we will study is, for historical reasons, from the mid and late Seventies). These two and a half decades constitute a distinctive period in the history of the United Kingdom, a period beginning with the overthrow of the post-World War II consensus in the election of Thatcher (PM: 1979-1990), continuing with her Conservative successor John Major (PM: 1990-1997), and developing up to our day with the New Labour Tony Blair (PM: 1997-2006) and his successor Gordon Brown. This period was and is a remarkable time of change as the multiple antagonisms within this ancient and modern nation-state moved through cycles of conflict and the possibilities of resolution and the impossibilities of irresolution.

We will be concerned with the literary manifestations of these ancient and modern antagonisms in this period that will likely be called the Postmodern, a period characterized globally by magic realism. The course is organized into three sub-units. The first addresses three Postmodern feminist novels (by the Englishwomen Drabble, Winterson, Carter) where the central literary antagonism of magical realism between postmodern intertextuality and realist representation reflect and organize all of the other multiple conflicts. The second addresses two male lyric poets (the Northern Irishman and Nobel Laureate Heaney, the Englishman and Poet Laureate Hughes) who stage the poetic antagonism between the archaic and the contemporary, between the magical and the real in the context of the impossible irresolutions of national and religious conflict and sex and gender. The third presents two realist novels (by the Bangladeshi immigrant Ali and the Englishman McEwan) that attempt to represent the diverse contemporary realities of the capital city, London, without recourse to the intertextual self-reflections of our first three novels, but in a realism that may be just as magical.

This period is our contemporary history, and the United Kingdom is the origin and an essential part of the global Anglophone culture, and our goal is to read these texts to understand them as literary artifacts and, in doing so, perhaps to know our own experience more fully.
B. Required Texts:

Monica Ali, Brick Lane (Scribner)
Angela Carter, Wise Children (F.S.G.)
Margaret Drabble, The Radiant Way (McLelland and Stewart)
Ted Hughes, Birthday Letters (Faber and Faber)
Ian McEwan, Saturday (Vintage)
Janette Winterson, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (Vintage)

C. Class and Reading Schedule:

September:

Week 1:
  8: Introduction
  10: The Eighties
  12: The Nineties and the Naughts

Week 2:

Week 3:
  22-24-26: " "

Week 4:
  29: Winterson, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985)

October:

1-3: " " Short essay due.

Week 5:
  6-8-10: Carter, Wise Children (1991)

Week 6:
  15: " " 
17: **Mid-term: The Novel**

**Week 7:**
20: Heaney, *Introduction*
22-24: Poems from *North* (1975)

**Week 8:**
27: “ “
29-31: Poems from *Field Work* (1979)

**November:**

**Week 9:**
3-5-7: Hughes, *Birthday Letters*

**Week 10:**
10-12:
14: **Mid-term: Poetry**

**Week 11:**

**Week 12:**

**Dec. 1:** Review

**D. Assignments and Grading:**

1. Short essay. Due: October 3, Worth: 15%, Length: 4-5 typed, double-spaced pages (1000-1250 words). Topics to be assigned. MLA system of citation required.

2. Mid-term examinations: Time: 50 minutes. Format: one essay in answer to one of two questions. (the novel), October 17, Worth: 10%; #2 (poetry), November 14, Worth: 10%.

3. Research essay. Due: November 28, Worth: 30%. Length: 8-10 typed, double-spaced pages (2000-2500 words). Topics to be assigned or at student’s choice and instructor’s agreement. MLA system of citation required.

4. Final examination. Time: two hours, thirty minutes. Format: two short essays based on identification and discussion of passages from texts on course and one longer essay on themes central to the course. Worth: 35%.
Notices:

Attendance and participation:
Attendance at all classes and participation in discussion is expected of all students. To succeed fully in the course, students will have to participate in this process. **In order to participate, you must have the assigned text with you in class.**

Late penalties:
Essay assignments are due on the due date. All extensions must be arranged with me before the due date. Extensions longer than five days (Saturday and Sunday count as “days”) will require documentation. A penalty of 2% per day will be taken for late assignments. Examinations will be written on the assigned date. An absence from an examination will require a doctor’s or other health care professional’s documentation in the case of illness. Any other extraordinary circumstances will also require documentation. Only under these circumstances can an alternative examination be scheduled.

Note on plagiarism:

The Faculty of Arts and the University of Waterloo require that the following notes be on all course outlines.

**Academic Integrity:** in order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm)

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm)

**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm)