ENGLISH 460D: CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND
Spring 2015, Section 01, 11:30-12:20, MTF, DWE 3522A

Course Syllabus:

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A. Course Description and Objectives:

“English 460D: Contemporary Literature of the United Kingdom and Ireland” obviously covers the contemporary literature of the two nation-states on the islands to the west of Europe. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, its official name, is composed of the four nations of England, Wales, attached to England by an Act of Union in 1536, Scotland, attached by an Act of Union in 1707, and Northern Ireland, partitioned from Ireland in 1922. The Republic of Ireland, the other nation-state, was separated from the United Kingdom (to which it had been attached by an Act of Union in 1800) in 1922 and founded as an independent republic in 1937 and 1949. All of these spatial and national realities will be, as we shall see, entirely relevant to our study of their contemporary literature.

So if these two nation-states constitute our spatial horizons, what are our temporal horizons? What is contemporary? We will be taking a rather longish or generational view of the contemporary. A generation is usually taken to exist for about thirty years: so thirty years back from 2015 would place us in the early 1980s, which is exactly where we shall begin. Our first text, Margaret Drabble’s The Radiant Way, opens on a New Year’s Eve party at the end of 1979, seven months after Margaret Thatcher had first been elected Prime Minister. Thatcher’s election in May of 1979 is usually taken to be the definitive end of the post war period, which began thirty years or a generation earlier with the creation of the welfare State out of the economic collapse of 1946-49. With the Thatcher revolution, as it is often called, the thirty years of the post war ends, and the contemporary begins.

In the UK, this transition from the planned economy of the Welfare State to a free market economy in the 1980s and 1990s was both bitterly contested and ruthlessly embraced, both dividing and uniting society at all levels. Antagonism, the cultural forces that both divide and unite a society, along with its opposite or twin term from Postcolonial theory, hybridity, will be an important concept for us. The antagonisms of the Thatcher revolution will function as a precursor or parallel to the multiple antagonisms that characterize our period. In both nation-states, these antagonisms were both ancient and modern, dividing and uniting across all areas of human life: class, region, religion, race and ethnicity, migration, gender, sexuality, etcetera. Our central objective is to study the literary manifestations of these ancient and modern antagonisms in this period that may come to be called Postmodern when it ceases to be contemporary. This period of the Postmodern was also characterized in literature and other discourses by Postcolonialism and Poststructuralism and by the global literary phenomenon known as Magic Realism, all of which will be central to our study.
To these ends, the course is organized into three sub-units:

- The **first** examines three Postmodern feminist novels (by the Englishwomen Margaret Drabble and Angela Carter, and the Scotswoman Ali Smith) where the central literary antagonism of Magic Realism between intertextuality and representation reflect and organize all of the other multiple conflicts.
- The **second** examines two male lyric poets (the Northern Irishman and Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, the Englishman and Poet Laureate Ted Hughes) who stage the poetic antagonism between the ancient and the modern, between the magical and the real, in the contexts of national and religious conflict and sex and gender respectively.
- The **third** examines two realist novels (by the Londoners Ian McEwan and Zadie Smith) that represent the diverse contemporary realities of the capital city of the UK, 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 objective is to read these texts to understand them as literary artifacts and, in doing so, to know our own experience of the contemporary more fully.

**B. Required Texts:**

- Margaret Drabble, *The Radiant Way* (McLelland and Stewart)
- Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (Vintage)
- Ali Smith, *Girl Meets Boy* (Vintage)
- Zadie Smith, *NW* (Penguin)

**C. Class and Reading Schedule:**

**MAY:**

**Week 1:**

**Week 2:**
- 11-12-15: “ “

**Week 3:**
Week 4:
25-26-29: “: Short essay due, 29th

JUNE:

Week 5:
1-2: Smith, Girl Meets Boy (2009)
5: Mid-term #1: The Novel

Week 6:
8-9-12: Heaney, selections from North (1975)

Week 7:
15-16-19: Heaney, selections from Field Work (1979)

Week 8:
22-23-26: Hughes, selections from Birthday Letters (1998)

Week 9:
29-30: “ “

JULY:

3: Mid-term #2: Poetry

Week 10:
6-7-10: McEwen, Saturday (2005)

Week 11:
13-14-17: “ “

Week 12:

Week 13:
D. Assignments and Grading:

1. Short essay: Worth: 15%
2. Mid-term examinations:
   - **Mid-term #1: The Novel**: Worth: 10%;
   - **Mid-term #2: Poetry**: Worth: 10%.
3. Research essay: Worth: 30%.
4. Final examination: Worth: 35%

1. Short essay. Due: May 29, Worth: 15%, Length: 4-5 typed, double-spaced pages (1000-1250 words). Topics to be assigned. MLA seventh edition system of citation required. Submit as an rtf, doc, or doc.x file on Learn 460D.


3. Research essay. Due: July 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 seventh edition system of citation required. Submit as an rtf, doc, or doc.x file on Learn 460D.

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. 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:*

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

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (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://wwwadm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm

**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://wwwadm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.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://wwwadm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm

**Academic Integrity website (Arts):** http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

**Academic Integrity Office (UW):** http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/