

ENGL 4431: Contemporary British and Irish Fiction Spring 2020

Course Description

How have British writers responded to the legacy of two world wars, the end of empire and the Cold War, economic decline (coupled with globalization), and radical changes in racial and sexual politics? This course offers an introduction to contemporary British and Irish fiction in an era of profound political and economic change and social upheaval. We will focus on fiction (novels and at least one film) profoundly influenced by the shadow of war, by immigration from the former colonies, by dramatic shifts in gender relations and sexuality, by class conflict and deindustrialization, by the impact of global capitalism, by media obsessions with urban violence and the underclass, by the so-called war on terror after the events of 2001, and by the question of Ireland in relation to the imperial past and its place in the global present. In light of some of these vast historical transformations, how has British culture adapted to its uneasy geopolitical position? How does a nation that is often nostalgically obsessed with images of its past power and traditions produce literature that might imagine alternative, post-imperial futures? How have Irish writers negotiated that nation's independence, the legacies of colonial history, and its place in a global economy?

"Contemporary literature" is an evolving field, and in attending to how authors engage with the present, we will also explore how fiction helps imagine and shape present and future identities, national and global. The course will cover the period from the 1980s rise of Thatcherism and the New Right through the first decade of the twenty-first century. Our reading, though, will not be chronological; rather, we will approach the period according to several thematic units. The authors we'll read are writing in the wake of postmodernism and developing compellingly experimental techniques with historical fiction, realism, and popular genres. Likely units for the course are: War, Empire, and Memory (Pat Barker, Kazuo Ishiguro); Figuring Ireland (Patrick McCabe, Mike McCormack); Multicultural Britain? (Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith); and Terror: British Fiction after 9/11 (Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie).

Tentative Reading List

Pat Barker, *The Eye in the Door*. Plume/Penguin. 978-0-452-27272-9.
Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*. Vintage. 0-375-72440-0.
Patrick McCabe, *Breakfast on Pluto*. Harper. 0-06-093158-2.
Mike McCormack, *Notes from a Coma*, Soho. 978-1616952327.
Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Penguin. 978-0-14-013168-0.
Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*. Vintage. 0-375-70386-1.
Ian McEwan, *Saturday*. Doubleday. 0-385-51180-9.
Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown*. Random House. 0-679-46335-6.

***Please contact the professor, Carey Mickalites, with suggestions or questions about the course.**

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