

LT102 The Contemporary Novel

Seminar Leader: James Harker

Course Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:45-5:15 pm

Fall Term 2018

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00 am-12:30 pm

Course Description

The novel, by far the most widely read literary genre of the modern era, E.M. Forster reluctantly had to admit, “tells a story.” But the art of novel is not just in what the story is; it is in how the story is told. In this course we will learn how novels work through the key terms and concepts for the study of narrative fiction. We will become familiar with the fundamentals of formal realism, the story/discourse distinction, reliable and unreliable narration, focalization, storyworlds, natural and unnatural narrative, and ways of reporting speech and thought. We will see how these concepts illuminate literary works through an in-depth study of three contemporary novelists, Zadie Smith, Ian McEwan, and Kazuo, who both offer prime examples of novelistic conventions and break those conventions in interesting ways. Novels will include Smith’s *On Beauty*, McEwan’s *Atonement* and *Nutshell*, and Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. Theorists will include Henry James, Wayne Booth, Gerard Genette, Monika Fludernik, Mark Turner, and others.

Requirements

Attendance

Attendance at all sessions of the course is required. After two absences for any reason (including minor health issues, unavoidable travel, appointments, etc.), the participation grade will be lowered one step (i.e. from A- to B+) per absence.

In accordance with the Student Handbook, a failing grade for the course will be given if absences reach 30% of the course meetings.

Arriving late to class will count as ½ of an absence.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on four short response posts (250 words each), three essays (1000/1500 words), and participation.

Written Assignments

Response Posts (250 words)

Participants will sign up to offer short responses to the readings on four days. The response posts must be put on a Google Doc shared with the class by 23:59 on the day before class. They will be graded on a 4.0 scale as follows:

- 1 point for being on time
- 1 point for being between 240-270 words
- 1 point for including one quotation from the reading
- 1 point for making a connection to a previous post in the thread (except the first post)

Essay One, Two, and Three (1000/1500 words)

The essays correspond to the major readings. Essay One will address *On Beauty*. Essay Two will address *Atonement*. Essay Three will address either *Never Let Me Go* or *Nutshell*. Two out of the three essays should be 1500 words, and one of them may be 1000 words. It is your choice when you would like to write a somewhat shorter essay.

Participation

A grade will be given for participation in seminar, which includes attendance and contributions to discussion. You are required to bring your own copy of the reading to class everyday as well as a notebook for taking notes. *Laptops and other electronic devices are not permitted.* Not having the reading or a notebook in class will be marked the same as “absent.”

Reading

Mandatory Readings

The following texts **must be acquired**:

- On Beauty*. Zadie Smith
- Atonement*. Ian McEwan
- Never Let Me Go*. Kazuo Ishiguro
- Nutshell*. Ian McEwan
- A course reader

Readings in the course reader will also be made available to you in electronic format. However, a paper copy is required for class.

Additional Readings

Critical readings are suggested but are not mandatory.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

All written work must be submitted electronically and on time.

As specified in the Student Handbook, essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). The instructor is not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where the instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

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|------------------|---------------------|-----|
| 4 Response Posts | 250 words (5% each) | 20% |
| Essay One | 1000/1500 words | 20% |
| Essay Two | 1000/1500 words | 20% |
| Essay Three | 1000/1500 words | 20% |
| Participation | | 20% |

Of Essays One, Two, and Three, two out of three of them should be 1500 words. The remaining essay may be shorter (1000 words).

Schedule

Week 1 Introduction: The Origins and Ends of Realism

Monday, Sept. 3 Realism and Modernism Handout
Henry James prefaces

Wednesday, Sept. 5 E.M. Forster
Excerpts from *Aspects of the Novel*

Week 2 Contemporary Realism: Zadie Smith

Monday, Sept. 10 *On Beauty*

Wednesday, Sept. 12 *On Beauty*

Additional Reading: Philip Tew, "Contemporary Britishness: Who, What, Why and When?"
from *The Contemporary British Novel*

Week 3

Monday, Sept. 17 *On Beauty*

Wednesday: Sept. 19 *On Beauty*

Additional Reading: Dorothy J. Hale, "On Beauty as Beautiful?: The Problem of Novelistic Aesthetics By Way of Zadie Smith"

Week 4: Formal Realism

Monday: Sept. 24 Ian Watt
Excerpts from *The Rise of the Novel*

The Implied Author

Wednesday: Sept. 26 Wayne Booth
Excerpts from *The Rhetoric of Fiction*

Week 5:

Monday: Oct. 1 Wayne Booth
Excerpts from *The Rhetoric of Fiction*

Dan Shen
"What is an Implied Author?"

Wednesday: Oct. 3 Federal Holiday

Friday: Oct. 5 **Essay One Due**

Week 6:

Monday: Oct. 8 Roland Barthes
"The Reality Effect"

Disruptions of Discourse: Ian McEwan

Wednesday: Oct. 10 *Atonement*

Week 7

Monday: Oct. 15 *Atonement*

Wednesday: Oct. 16 *Atonement*

Week 8

Monday: October 22 *Atonement*

Wednesday: October 24 Presentations

Additional Reading: Huw Marsh, "Narrative unreliability and metarepresentation in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*; or, why Robbie might be guilty and why nobody seems to notice"

Spring Break

Week 9

Monday: Nov. 5 Gerard Genette
Narrative Discourse

Wednesday: Nov. 7 Gerard Genette
Narrative Discourse

Friday: Nov. 9 **Essay Two Due**

Week 10 **Dystopia and Narration: Kazuo Ishiguro**

Monday: Nov. 12 *Never Let Me Go*

Wednesday: Nov. 14 *Never Let Me Go*

Week 11

Monday: Nov. 19 *Never Let Me Go*

Wednesday: Nov. 21 *Never Let Me Go*

Additional Reading: Marina Grishakova, "Beyond the Frame: Cognitive Science, Common Sense, and Fiction"

Week 12

An Historical Interlude...

Monday: Nov. 26 William Shakespeare, "Hamlet"

Wednesday: Nov. 28 William Shakespeare, "Hamlet"

Additional Reading: Monika Fludernik, "Natural Narratology and Cognitive Parameters"

Week 13 **Impossible Narration: Ian McEwan**

Monday: Dec. 3 *Nutshell*

Wednesday: Dec. 5 *Nutshell*

Additional Reading: Marie-Laure Ryan, "Impossible Worlds"

Week 14:

Monday: Dec. 10 *Nutshell*

Wednesday: Dec. 12 Wrap-Up

Completion Week:

Essay Three Due on Wednesday, December 19 at 23:59

Essay Deadlines

Essay One: Friday, October 5 at 23:59

Essay Two: Friday, November 9 at 23:59

Essay Three: Wednesday, December 19 at 23:59