CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE FICTION

English 563.401
Fall 2011
Thurs 3:00-6:00
BENN 139

Jim English
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Hours: T2-3, W2-3
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DESCRIPTION
This course is for graduate students interested in studying the contemporary novel in English beyond the frontiers of a national literature, distinguishing contemporary literature from modernism as a field of specialization, and considering the stakes for our discipline of a turn to “global English.” It is an introductory survey class, and no previous advanced study or expertise in the field is expected.

We will read a selection of novels from the expanding canon of Anglophone world literature, and consider these in light of an admittedly disparate set of questions and debates that have arisen in recent critical work: 1) Is a comparative literary practice that restricts itself to Anglophone literature abetting a process of global monolingualization, even as it enlarges and complicates the scope of English studies as such? 2) Is the contemporary “cosmopolitan novel” in English detachable from western secular values, and is it reconcilable with organized religions, especially non-western religions, in their global form? 3) Do contemporary “world fictions” help us conceive a global sexual politics, or are queer and feminist writers better understood to be deploying visions of the local over and against the imperatives of a “global” social order? 4) How is the canon of Anglophone world literature being formed? What new relationship is emerging on the literary field between commercial and aesthetic value, between the economy of bookselling and of that of cultural prestige? 5) How does the “global city” differ from the modern city, and how does the relationship of literature to urban experience differ from that of an earlier, modernist period? 6) Finally, why have so many of the major English-language novels of globalization tended to merge literary fiction into the genres of speculative fiction: SciFi, Cyberpunk, the New Weird, etc? Does speculative fiction represent, as Fredric Jameson has argued, the best option for literature at a point when both modernism and realism have become exhausted and incapable of offering “reliable information about the contemporary world”?

We will of course only scratch the surface of these broad and complex areas of discussion. You will have the opportunity in your written work to do more focused research along a particular path of inquiry.

TEXTS
The novels below are available from the Penn Book Center, 34th and Sansom Streets. Other readings will be made available through digital distribution.

Margaret Atwood, Oryx and Crake
Lauren Beukes, Moxyland
J M Coetzee, Disgrace
Teju Cole, Open City
Jessica Hagedorn, Dogeaters
Yann Martel, Life of Pi

China Miéville, The City and the City
David Mitchell, Cloud Atlas
Ken Saro-Wiwa, Sozaboy
Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things
Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses
REQUIREMENTS

Students in this class, including auditors, will be expected to complete all the assigned reading. In some cases a piece of secondary reading will be assigned to one student who will present it to the class, and other students will be responsible only for the primary reading.

Other requirements include two oral presentations on selected topics, a book report, and a short essay.

The presentation topics will usually be some area of historical or cultural background, or an important essay that the rest of us are not required to read, or useful bibliography on a particular author or field. Your presentations must be very brief: a 6-minute time limit will be strictly enforced. Any additional presentation of your findings should emerge in response to questions from classmates. To help focus the presentation and prompt good discussion, the presentation should be keyed to a one-page handout and should conclude with a one-sentence discussion question.

In addition to the two handouts, written work consists of a 1500-word book review of any novel published in English in the last twelve months (due Oct 28) and a 3000-word critical essay that involves close reading of one of the novels on our syllabus and addresses one of the main areas of debate and discussion covered in the class (due Dec 16). Exact submission dates are negotiable, but all work must be submitted by the end of the semester; no incompletes will be allowed.

SCHEDULE

I. Global Englishes, World Literatures

9/8   Introduction: Why Anglophone? Why the novel?

9/15  Ken Saro-Wiwa, Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English (985)

      Presentation Topics:  West African Pidgin English (Lisa)
                             Bibliography on “new Englishes” (Jenny)
                             Nigerian literature in English (Ana)

II. The Cosmopolitan Novel and Global Religion: the Verses Affair


      Presentation Topics:  Salman Rushdie biography (Lisa)
                             Rushdie and Black British Studies: biblio
                             Immigration policy under Thatcher (Angela)

Presentation Topics:  Verses Affair Timeline (Gabriel)
The “satanic verses” heresy (Ashley)
Huntington’s “clash” thesis: biblio (Sarah)
Ulrich Beck’s “cosmopolitan vision” (Christine)

III. Sexual Politics in World Fiction

10/6  Jessica Hagedorn, Dogeaters (1990)*

Presentation Topics:  Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos (Chris)
Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Deven)
Anglophone literature in Philippines (Jackie B)

Susan Stanford Friedman, “Feminism, State Fictions, and Violence: Gender, Geopolitics, and Transnationalism” (2001)

Presentation Topics:  Roy’s political activism (Kelly)
Theory/politics of the “local”: biblio (Christine)
Feminism in India: bibliography (Angela)

IV. Canonicity, Commerce, and the Global Economy of Prestige

10/20  Yann Martel, Life of Pi (2001)

Presentation Topics:  Life of Pi: reception and sales history (Jenny)
Critical work on Yann Martel: biblio (Ashley)
P. Casanova, World Republic of Letters (Jackie P)

10/27  J M Coetzee, Disgrace (1999)

Presentation Topics:  Critical work on Coetzee: biblio (Deven)
Disgrace: editions, translations, sales (Chris)
Disgrace the movie (Victor)

BOOK REVIEWS DUE VIA EMAIL 10/28
V. Fictions of the Global City

11/3  Teju Cole, Open City (2011)
      Saskia Sassen, “Global City: Strategic Site, New Frontier” (2001)

      Presentation Topics:  New York City immigration statistics (Jackie B)
                                       Saskia Sassen, Global City thesis (Joe)
                                       Global City: bibliography (Sarah)

11/10 China Miéville, The City and The City (2009)**
                  Calame and Charlesworth, Divided Cities, chapter ten (2009)

      Presentation Topics:  China Miéville: biography and biblio (Gabriel)
                                       History of divided cities: biblio (Kalyan)
                                       The New Weird (Jackie P)

VI. The Speculative Turn in World Fiction

       Berthold Schoene, “The World Begins its Turn With You, or
       How David Mitchell’s Novels Think” (2011)

      Presentation Topics:  David Mitchell: bio and biblio (Ana)
                                       Utopian and Dystopian literature: biblio (Bret)

12/1   Lauren Beukes, Moxyland (2008)
       Deidre C. Byrne, “Science Fiction in South Africa” (2004)

      Presentation Topics:  History of cyberpunk: biblio (Kalyan)
                                       SF as field of literary study: overview

12/8   Margaret Atwood, Oryx and Crake (2004)
       Margaret Atwood, “Handmaid’s Tale and Oryx and Crake in Context” (2004)
       Fredric Jameson, “Then You are Them” (2009)

      Presentation Topics:  Margaret Atwood, Year of the Flood (Kelly)
                                       Fredric Jameson, The Seeds of Time (Victor)

CRITICAL ESSAYS DUE VIA EMAIL 12/16

*Workshop class: Jim will be away
**Two-hour class: Department Lecture by Brent Edwards