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LIT 522.03: Seminar on Comparative Literature - The Contemporary Novel

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LIT 522-03:

The Contemporary Novel

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Office Hours: TuThs 11:00-12:00 (via Zoom or E-mail) & by appt.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Atwood, Margaret. *The Testaments*.

Barnes, Julian. *The Sense of an Ending*.

Edugyan, Esi. *Washington Black*.

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.

Erdrich, Louise. *The Round House*.

Greer, Andrew Sean. *Less*.

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Buried Giant*.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *The Sympathizer*.

Orange, Tommy. *There There*.

Powers, Richard. *The Overstory*.

Rushdie, Salman. *Quichotte*.

Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad*.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

LIT 522 examines a limited number of recent novels, some well-known and prize-winning, others less celebrated but nonetheless extraordinary. Arbitrarily limiting our selection to novels published in the last ten years (or so), we will explore some of the following questions: have we entered a new era of Realism? Magic Realism? Fabulism? Dystopianism? Modernism? (Has Modernism run its course?) An era of After-Postmodernism? What –ism or –isms apply—or should be applied—to the contemporary scene? What new terms can or should we come up with? Has a new type or form of fiction emerged? What, if anything, unites current writers in terms of interests, narrative strategies, philosophies, and more? What new themes, techniques, and subjects, if any, have emerged in the twenty-first century? Think of this course as a critical experiment: while a great deal has been written about some of our writers, others have received relatively little critical attention: what are they about? do they matter? will readers still be reading them five, ten, fifty, or one hundred years from now? how are they, individually or collectively, advancing the art of literary fiction? We will read each work carefully and intensely, but we'll also be working at creating a critical vocabulary or lexicon with which to talk about and describe the contemporary scene.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each seminar participant will be responsible for the following:

1. Bring to each class, either in paper form or on screen, at least **THREE** observations, comments, questions, or critiques about each week's reading. Keep your observations brief and pithy—one or two sentences at most. You will EMAIL (as Word attachments) the **THREE** observations, etc., to me **BEFORE** class. (You may, of course, *supplement* these three notes during class—and email me your supplementary observations if you wish—but you must come to class already armed with three killer insights/questions/comments/somethings.)
2. Submit, at the end of the semester (specific due date TBA), a 15-20+ page scholarly essay that analyzes or critiques one (or perhaps, though rarely, more) of the course's primary texts. Your essay must display a working knowledge of (that is, include directly) such secondary sources as may be available (including reviews, interviews, and scholarly articles and books, etc.). Strong, smart-as-hell theoretical readings are especially welcome (depending, of course, upon your interests, investments, and backgrounds in literary and cultural theory).

SYLLABUS

- W Aug 19: Introduction/Semester Plan
Mini-Lecture: Realism, Modernism, Magical Realism, Postmodernism, And?
- W Aug 26: Powers
- W Sept 2: Atwood
- W Sept 9: Egan
- W Sept 16: Barnes
- W Sept 23: Erdrich
- W Sept 30: Ishiguro
- W Oct 7: Nguyen
- W Oct 14: Whitehead
- W Oct 21: Greer
- W Oct 28: Edugyan
- W Nov 4: Orange
- W Nov 11: **Veterans Day: No Class**
- W Nov 18: Rushdie