AFTER POSTMODERNISM: LITERATURE & LITERARY STUDY IN THE 21st CENTURY

Spring 2015 // Wednesday 4 to 6.40p // 104 Curtin
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
What do literature and literary study look like in the twenty-first century? How have transformations of form, content, and criticism made it necessary to dispense with older ways of periodizing contemporary literature? And what might such transformations tell us about the place of writing—and of writing about writing—in our current cultural moment? This course aims to answer these questions by following two parallel trajectories: in alternating weeks, we’ll study six major novels and six significant critical works or debates from the last decade and a half. Our task will be, first, to make sense of the major novels of the period; and second, to see how changes in literary form have been accompanied by changes in how critics understand things like the nature of reading, the idea of meaning, the significance of context, and the relevance of institutions. On the side of literature, we’ll be concerned with what experimental writing looks like after metafiction; the struggle between irony and sincerity; the rethinking of genre and convention; and new representations of political engagement. On the side of criticism, we’ll grapple with debates about the scale and scope of literary reading; changing frameworks of periodization; institutional historicism and the rise of sociology; the recovery of aesthetics and the turn to affect; and theories of ecology and economy. Taking stock of what both literature and literary criticism look like today, our main goal in this course will be determine what, if anything, is distinctive about the contemporary period—and why it is necessary to make such periodizing claims about our present in the first place.


—George Saunders

or do section on short story: Saunders, Galchen, Wells Tower
— Sam Lisypte, Junot Diaz, China Mieville, Margaret Atwood, Zadie Smith, Roberto Bolano, Hilary Mantel


0. White Teeth [—?—]
1. The Pale King
2. Freedom
3. Remainder
4. Lightning Rods // Atwood? — Oryx and Crake
5. Cloud Atlas
6. Atmospheric Disturbances
7. Leaving the Atocha Station // or Sheila Heti

— —

***economic crisis novel***

8. Sag Harbor
9. On Beauty

10. 2666

11. My Year of Meats (Ruth Ozeki)
12. Personal Days (Ed Park)

13. The Road

think about what the major novels of the period have to say for themselves and to each other; and to how the aesthetic and political shifts marked by the literary texts have been accompanied

thus seeks to pair a survey of truly contemporary literature with a
an account of the larger conceptual and methodological questions that invariably haunt the contemporary—questions about what really distinguishes contemporary literature, and what defines literary criticism today.
studying along two parallel tracks: a set of six (or so) distinctive and significant novels from the last decade, and an equal number of recent critical works and critical debates that seek to identify contemporary methods of reading.

The aim of this course

Debates about the fate of the humanities and the future of literary studies rarely refer to the literature or the criticism of the immediate present. They are not all that attentive to what literature and its study actually look like today (as opposed to thirty years ago). This course is an attempt to change that.

What do the methods of literary criticism look today?