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Course: English 390-2 Special Topics in a Single British Author
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Kazuo Ishiguro

English 390-2: Special Topics in a Single British Author

Course Description

The 2017 Nobel Prize committee recognized Kazuo Ishiguro for his novels, citing them as works of “great emotional force,” through which he “has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection within the world.” This course is a chronological study of Ishiguro’s novels, including his Man Booker Prize winning *Remains of the Day* and the mainstay of Duke syllabi, *Never Let Me Go*. As one of the most celebrated writers of contemporary fiction in English, Ishiguro provides a lens through which we can trace the development of Anglophone literature from the ‘80s through to today. We will turn to his novels (as well as their adaptations) to trace contemporary literary responses to World War II, Britishness, nationalism, postcolonialism, cosmopolitanism, neoliberalism and globalization. His novels also span broad genres and time periods, allowing us to ask questions about history, form, and artistic practice.

We will read these texts together in order to develop a complex understanding of Ishiguro’s work throughout his career. We will develop an understanding of the historical, theoretical, and literary context from which his work emerges, and how his work transforms across media. This will open up questions about his influence on those contexts – how have Ishiguro’s novels helped to define contemporary fiction itself? Why have his novels won so many awards? Is there something about them that encourages adaptation? The Nobel Committee thought he deserved the highest of all literary prizes – by the end of the course, we’ll be able to ask “Do we agree?”

Course Goals

By the end of the course, students will have developed in their ability to:

- Recognize and assess key terms and concepts in contemporary literary theory, including but not limited to postcolonial theory, cosmopolitanism, neoliberalism, globalization, and cultural capital, as well as strategies for literary analysis (narrative and genre theory, historicism and periodization).
- Identify significant developments in the history and production of contemporary Anglophone fiction from the last 30 years, mapped through Ishiguro’s own development as a writer.
- Assess the strengths and limitations of literary adaptation to film, and differences between artistic media.
- Respond critically to literary texts through informal written responses (blog posts) and in-class discussions.
- Develop strong, evidence-based analysis drawn from primary texts.
- Revise these written arguments using multiple sources of feedback, including peer-review and instructor’s comments.
- Reflect on their own development as readers and writers throughout the semester.

Required Course Texts and Media:

We will be reading chronologically through Ishiguro's published novels. These include:

A Pale View of Hills (1982)

An Artist of the Floating World (1986)

The Remains of the Day (1989)

The Unconsoled (1995)

When We Were Orphans (2000)

Never Let Me Go (2005)

The Buried Giant (2015)

All course texts will be ordered through the Duke Bookstore, but students are encouraged to purchase used copies when available. We will also be screening film adaptations of two of the novels, *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*, which will be available streaming through Sakai. All supplemental materials (essays, speeches, secondary criticism, etc) will be available under the resources tab on Sakai.

Other Required Materials / Technology Policy

This course relies on close critical reading of the primary texts. This type of reading requires careful annotation and as such all students are expected to have access to physical copies of all the required texts, and to print out any secondary material. There will also be class-time devoted to in-class workshopping and revision, for which laptops may be necessary. For many students, the use of technology in classes can prove very distracting; for others, they are a necessary part of note-taking etc. This is not a "technology free" classroom, but students should not expect to have laptops/tablets/etc. open all class, or even most of it. I encourage students to try keeping them in their bag unless absolutely necessary.

Assignments and Evaluation

Participation, in-class work – 10%

Semester Blog Assignments – 15%

Short Paper – 25%

Novel Review – 20%

Final Paper – 30%

Participation, in-class work

Discussion and communication with your peers is a crucial element of the course. You are therefore expected to come to class having done the readings, taken notes, and ready to participate. Failure to be prepared for class or to act professionally in the classroom will count for an absence. Throughout the semester we will do informal in-class assignments that will figure into this portion of your overall grade.

Thematic Blog Assignment

As a class, we will be using Sakai to create a class blog. **Seven** times throughout the semester (one for each novel), you will be expected to post a response to the prompt by midnight of the last day of discussion for each novel. **These posts should identify one thematic term or phrase you identify as particularly**

relevant in each novel and serve as a place for you to begin developing an argument. These short blog posts (~250-300 words, or roughly one page, double spaced¹) will be graded, but they are mostly a chance for you to informally play around with ideas, grapple with our course texts, and explore questions pertinent to our class while also crafting an academic/online persona. You are permitted to miss **one post** without penalty.

****For all of the following assignments, you will be provided with clear rubrics for assessment at the time of their assignment. What follows is a brief overview of what these assignments entail. As with everything in the syllabus, these assignments are open to change and revision****

Short Paper

Students will produce a short (3-4 page) critical essay drawing from discussions of the first three novels of the course. We will discuss strategies for close-reading and constructing arguments. Students are encouraged to draw from their blog posts to develop their short essays. We will workshop the first page together in small groups in class, and students will have the opportunity to revise their papers after receiving feedback.

Novel Review

Ishiguro has become a canonical figure in what critics call “contemporary Anglophone fiction,” but in a single-author course it is easy to lose sight of the broader conversations in which the target author is a part. As such, students will be required to select and read a novel by one of Ishiguro’s contemporaries and draft a book review of that novel (3-4 pages), which you will present in class to your peers at the end of the semester. Good writers inspire readers to find other authors like them – sharing a list of excellent novels we’ve read is how we become parts of literary community. Guidelines for selection and rubrics for the assignment will be provided in-class.

Final Paper

Students will produce a longer final critical paper (5-7 pages) drawing from at least two of the final four novels, and their blog posts, if relevant. Students will workshop the first 2-3 pages (due in class) before submitting the final draft in lieu of a final exam.

Course Policies and Day-to-Day Protocols

Absences and Class Conduct

According to institutional policy, attendance to class is compulsory. It is expected that you come to class daily and on time. You are responsible for all of the material that was discussed and covered on days you miss. In this course, you are allowed three absences with no penalty and no questions asked. After you have missed three classes, each successive unexcused absence will lower your overall grade (on the fourth absence, a B will become a B-, with the fifth a C +, and so on). On the sixth absence, you will automatically fail the course. In the case of prolonged illness or personal issue, please meet me during my office hours or contact me via email as soon as possible so we can formally come to an arrangement with your Academic Dean. Feel free to send STINFs, but they will count toward this maximum allotment.

You will be considered absent if you arrive late to class, are unprepared, are texting, sleeping, or otherwise acting in a manner that disrupts class.

Communication

Outside of class time, I will contact you via Duke’s email service to communicate with you. It is your responsibility to routinely check your email and the course’s Sakai page to stay informed about the course. I will generally try to respond to emails quickly, but I will not answer emails late at night or over the weekend.

¹ All page-counts refer to double-spaced, 12-point standard font, with one-inch margins, headers and footers.

Beyond email, I highly encourage you to come to my office hours or set an appointment to meet with me when you have questions about assignments or the course in general.

Academic (Dis)honesty

It is expected that all students comply with the institutional policies present within the Duke University. Part of this policy is the referral of students who violate the intellectual and academic integrity of this institution to the Office of Student Conduct (OSC). Plagiarism, or the intentional use of another person's work without giving appropriate credit, is a serious academic offense that will not be taken lightly. Other forms of academic dishonesty include: a.) cheating on a paper or project; b.) downloading an essay from the internet; c.) paying/soliciting another person to write your essays; d.) turning in an assignment that was used for credit in another course; and e.) other similar cases that breach the Duke Community Standard. If it is determined that you committed any of the academic offenses listed above, you will fail the assignment and be reported to the appropriate academic authorities. If the act of academic dishonesty is serious, or if multiple acts are committed consecutively, you will not only be reported to the university, you might also face consequences such as an automatic failure of the course, and suspension or possible expulsion from the university. For more information on academic honesty, please visit the web address for the Duke Community Standard, especially the section on Academic Dishonesty: <https://registrar.duke.edu/university-bulletins/duke-community-standard>.

Respect and Open-mindedness

We will discuss controversial and politically charged topics throughout the semester. It is expected that you approach every topic discussed in class and in the course assignments with the high level of maturity, sensibility, rationality, and open-mindedness that is expected from a student of Duke's caliber. Negative and damaging attitudes and judgments during the discussion of sensitive topics such as race, socioeconomic class, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, and political views will not be tolerated. If you are unable to approach controversial/charged topics, discussions, and language use in a sensible and open-minded fashion, then you are advised to un-enroll from the course.

Thompson Writing Studio

You are highly encouraged to visit the Thompson Writing Studio at least once during the semester to help with the course's written assignments. When you visit, the Writing Studio consultants will help you by listening to your questions attentively, reading your papers carefully, and talking with you intelligently about your ideas.

Consultants work with writers during all stages of the writing process from understanding an assignment, to developing a thesis, to organizing a paper, to revising an advanced draft, to editing the final product. The consultants do not write or edit your papers for you. Rather, they help you develop effective and long-term strategies for your written work. To learn more about the Thompson Writing Studio and schedule your session(s), see: <https://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio>.

Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and would like to request accommodations for this course, please register with Duke's Student Disability Access Office (<https://access.duke.edu/students/>). Once you have requested accommodations with SDAO, please speak with me. Per University policy, you, I, and the SDAO will make any necessary arrangements together.

Course Schedule and Outline

**** This schedule is subject to change and it may be amended during the semester. If and when changes do occur, they will be announced in class and shared online****

All readings and assignments are due by the beginning of class unless otherwise noted (there are some assignments that are due by midnight the day before class, most notably blog posts. This is to ensure that you and I have time to prepare for the next day's discussion).

Day 1 – Introduction / Background

Day 2 – *A Pale View of the Hills*

Day 3 – *A Pale View of the Hills* (cont'd) **(Blog post due midnight before class)**

Day 4 – *An Artist of the Floating World*

Day 5 – *An Artist of the Floating World* (cont'd) **(Blog post due Midnight before class)**

Day 6 – Benedict Anderson & Edward Said

Day 7 – *The Remains of the Day*

Day 8 – *The Remains of the Day* (cont'd)

Day 9 – *The Remains of the Day* (cont'd) + “The Global Anglophone” **(Blog post due Midnight before class)**

Day 10 – Class Rescheduled for Film Screening of *The Remains of the Day*

Day 11 – Film Discussion / In-class workshop **(First Page of Short Paper Due)**

Short Paper Due Sunday 8 pm

Day 12 – Literary Cultures and Awards **(Introduction of Book Review Assignment)**

Day 13 – *The Unconsoled*

Day 14 – *The Unconsoled* (cont'd)

Day 15 – *The Unconsoled* (cont'd) **(Blog post due Midnight before class)**

Day 16 – Genre Fiction vs. Literary Fiction / Genre Fiction *as* Literary Fiction

Day 17 – *When We Were Orphans*

Day 18 – *When We Were Orphans* (cont'd) **(Blog post due Midnight before class)**

Day 19 – *Never Let Me Go*

Day 20 – *Never Let Me Go* (cont'd) **(Blog post due Midnight before class)**

Day 21 – Class Rescheduled for Film Screening of *Never Let Me Go*

Day 22 – Film Discussion / How to Write a Book Review

Day 23 – Myth & National Identity (Britishness Revisited)

Day 24 – *The Buried Giant*

Day 25 – *The Buried Giant* (cont'd) (**Blog post due Midnight before class**)

Day 26 – *The Buried Giant* (cont'd) (**Written Book Reviews Due**)

Day 27 – Book Review Presentations

Day 28 – Final Paper Workshops (bring first 2-3 pages to class) / Course Wrap-Up

In lieu of final exam – Final Essay