

I. COURSE TITLE: Teaching Selected Authors

Contact Information

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Office Hours:

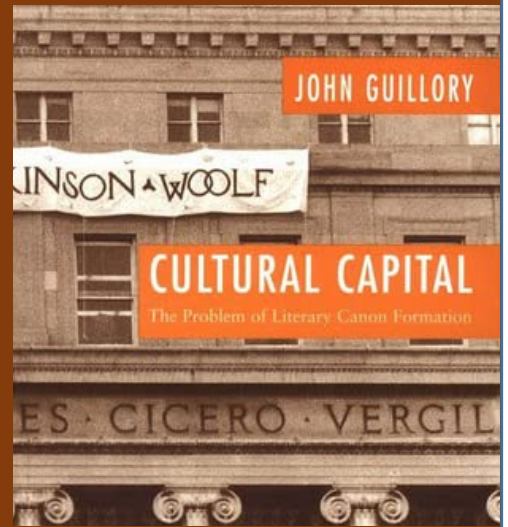
Available to meet via Zoom or
Google chat by appointment.

Course Information

3 Credit Hours
WEB

Contemporary Authors and the Question of Canon Formation: Zadie Smith

English 773.01 | Summer 2021



II. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PREREQUISITE(S):

An intensive study of one or more selected authors and approaches to teaching those authors. May be repeated once for credit with a different emphasis.

III. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students who successfully complete ENG 773 will be able to:

- A. demonstrate familiarity with key critical, contextual, and pedagogical questions surrounding the novels, short stories, and essays of Zadie Smith;
- B. develop strategies for teaching contemporary authors in various contexts, strategies anchored in but not limited to extensive engagement with Smith's writing and a range of secondary resources;
- C. design activities and assignments that illustrate the relationship between literary criticism and literary pedagogy, particularly with regard to contemporary writers and canon formation; and
- D. engage in respectful and reasoned discourse with other educators about their interpretations of and approaches to teaching contemporary writers such as Zadie Smith.

“When teachers and students turn their collective attention to texts in classrooms, they decide together upon the interest that texts hold; they experiment with creating and conveying value. Perhaps singularly among the disciplines, literary study is enacted rather than rehearsed in classrooms; the answer to the question ‘Did I miss anything last week?’ is truly ‘Yes—and you missed it forever.’”

Rachel Sagner Burma and Laura Heffernan, *The Teaching Archive*

“It’s an everyday sensation for most of us, yet it proves a tricky sort of problem for those people who hope to make art. For though we know and recognize discontinuity in our own lives, when it comes to art we are deeply committed to the idea of continuity. I find myself to be radically discontinuous with myself—but how does one re-create this principle in fiction? What is a character if not a continuous, consistent personality? [...] It is by reading and watching consistent people on the page, stage and screen that we are reassured of our own consistency.”

Zadie Smith, “Some Notes on Attunement”

IV. CONTENT OUTLINE:

If your colleagues or students ever insinuate that teaching contemporary literature is comparatively “easy,” you might refer them to the following factoid. In the year 2013, approximately 300,000 new books were published in the United States alone. While none of us can pretend to have read completely and comprehensively in any period of literary history, we who venture into the teaching and study of living authors find ourselves particularly humbled by the sublimity of sheer volume. What authors should we teach? What movements, schools, or trends in contemporary writing will prove—ten, twenty, or a hundred years from now—to have been significant rather than ephemeral? And how might our pedagogical choices regarding contemporary writers, whether thoroughly considered aesthetic judgments or slapdash syllabus additions, contribute to the endless shaping and reshaping of tomorrow’s canons?

In this course, we will take up several major works by Zadie Smith, a contemporary writer whose fiction stretches across multiple continents and whose influence, since publishing her debut novel *White Teeth* at the age of 25, has been global from the beginning. Sometimes appearing at the end of a British literature survey, sometimes categorized under the rubrics of Postcolonial or Global Anglophone literature, and, thanks to her many years of teaching creative writing at New York University, occasionally thought of as part of the university-bound “program era” that defines postwar American literature for critics like Mark McGurl, Smith seems to fit virtually any situation where teaching contemporary authors is appropriate.

By studying a significant portion of Smith’s work – three novels, a short story collection, and her most essays – we will consider questions that may prove relevant for the teaching of any contemporary writer. What does it mean to historicize a literary text when its relevant historical context is still in flux? How do we capitalize on the ubiquity of biographical information (author interviews, social media presence, YouTube clips, etc.) without limiting our students’ analyses to those that seem sanctioned by the author herself? Where do the personal and the political meet when living writers take up conflicts and crises that we ourselves have lived through, and how can we, as teachers, make productive use of the sometimes razor thin imaginative gap between literature and life? How do our routine choices—about which writers to teach, why we teach them, and under what circumstances—contribute to the way in which, as Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan argue in their *New History for Literary Study*, “literature classrooms are in the business of creating literary value, not merely receiving or reproducing it”?

During the first week of the course, we will immerse ourselves in debates carried out by scholars who have considered the relationship between literary pedagogy and literary criticism, particularly as it pertains to questions of canon formation. In weeks two, three, and four, we will read one novel, two scholarly articles about the novel, and two essays devoted to related pedagogical issues. Finally, in week five, we will conclude with Smith’s stories and essays while giving broader consideration to some of the most urgent connections, present and future, between literary scholarship and the teaching of literature.

V. INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES: In this course, students will:

- A. read all assigned texts carefully, commenting on all readings via online class discussion;
- B. write two short position papers;
- C. write two responses to classmates' position papers; and
- D. develop a self-directed, research-based final project that links the course content to their own needs and experiences as teachers.

This is an **asynchronous** online course, meaning that we will not have scheduled meetings as a class. There are, however, regular deadlines built into the course. If your summer schedule will require some flexibility with these deadlines, please keep me informed with as much notice as possible.

Despite being an online class, this will still be a *discussion-driven*, not lecture-driven, course. I will occasionally post short videos and notes to Canvas in order to provide background information or explain confusing concepts. For the most part, however, our conversation will take place on the Canvas discussion board. I will also be available throughout the course to meet one-on-one via Zoom.

VI. FIELD, CLINICAL, AND/OR LABORATORY EXPERIENCES: None

VII. TEXTS AND RESOURCES:

Required Texts:

- Buurma, Rachel Sagner and Laura Heffernan. *The Teaching Archive: A New History for Literary Study*. (Chicago, 2020.) ISBN: 978-0226736136
- Smith, Zadie. *Intimations: Six Essays*. (Penguin, 2020.) ISBN: 978-0593297612
- Smith, Zadie. *Grand Union: Stories*. (Penguin, 2019.) ISBN: 978-0525558996
- Smith, Zadie. *NW: A Novel*. (Penguin, 2013.) ISBN: 978-0143123934
- Smith, Zadie. *On Beauty: A Novel*. (Penguin, 2006.) ISBN: 978-0143037743
- Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth: A Novel*. (Vintage, 2001.) ISBN: 978-0375703867
- Additional required readings will be posted as PDF files on Canvas.

VIII. EVALUATION AND GRADING PROCEDURES:

Grades in this course will be assigned through a simplified form of specifications grading. This system enables grades in a course driven by reading, writing, and discussion to hinge on a student's overall contribution to the class instead of the accumulation of points from assignment to assignment. Your final grade for the course will be based on the following assignments, each of which will have a separate assignment sheet with details and due dates. Instead of percentages or letter grades, assignments will receive one of the following assessments: "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations," "does not meet expectations," or "unacceptable."

- Regular participation in Canvas discussion groups, including weekly responses to instructor's prompts and classmates' comments.
- Two position papers (~3 pages each).
- Two responses to classmates' position papers (1-2 pages each).
- One self-directed, research-based final project (length may vary depending on project).

Grades for the course will be distributed as follows:

B: Consistent, weekly participation in Canvas discussion groups. All assignments meet expectations.

A: All requirements for a B, plus thorough and exemplary participation in Canvas discussion groups. At least one of the following exceeds expectations: (1) both position papers, (2) the final project.

C: All requirements for a B, but either (1) weekly participation in Canvas discussion groups is insufficient, (2) one of the shorter written assignments (position papers or responses) is unacceptable or incomplete, (3) two of the shorter written assignments (position papers or responses) do not meet expectations, or (4) the final project does not meet expectations OR process components of the final project (prospectus, draft) are not completed.

D: All requirements for a C, but meets more than one of the criteria above for reducing a B to a C.

E: No participation in Canvas discussion group, final project incomplete or unacceptable, or both position papers incomplete or unacceptable.

I will post instructions for all writing assignments to Canvas. Assignments will be returned, with comments, through Canvas. (A graded assignment marked “3” in the Canvas gradebook exceeds expectations; “2” meets expectations; “1” does not meet expectations; and “0” is incomplete or unacceptable.) I will update your grades on Canvas regularly, and it is up to you to check your grades.

Policy on Revisions and Late Work:

Any essay that you submitted complete and on time may be revised as many times as you wish. Late or incomplete essays will receive no higher grade than “does not meet expectations,” and late / incomplete work may not be revised.

Extensions:

Sometimes life interferes with your ability to turn in your best work. You may request an extension on any essay. Essays turned in with an extension will be graded as though they were submitted on time, but they cannot be revised. With the exception of emergencies, you must request an extension within 24 hours of the deadline.

IX. ATTENDANCE POLICY: As an asynchronous online course, there is no attendance policy. Regular participation in your Canvas discussion groups is required, however, and it is important that you keep up with all deadlines and notify me at any point that you are worried about falling behind.

X. ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY:

Murray State University takes seriously its moral and educational obligation to maintain high standards of academic honesty and ethical behavior. Instructors are expected to evaluate students’ academic achievements accurately, as well as ascertain that work submitted by students is authentic and the result of their own efforts, and consistent with established academic standards. Students are obligated to respect and abide by the basic standards of personal and professional integrity.

Violations of Academic Honesty include:

Cheating - Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized information such as books, notes, study aids, or other electronic, online, or digital devices in any academic exercise; as well as unauthorized communication of information by any means to or from others during any academic exercise.

Fabrication and Falsification - Intentional alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification involves changing information whereas fabrication involves inventing or counterfeiting information.

Multiple Submission - The submission of substantial portions of the same academic work, including oral reports, for credit more than once without authorization from the instructor.

Plagiarism - Intentionally or knowingly representing the words, ideas, creative work, or data of someone else as one's own in any academic exercise, without due and proper acknowledgement.

Instructors should outline their expectations that may go beyond the scope of this policy at the beginning of each course and identify such expectations and restrictions in the course syllabus. When an instructor receives evidence, either directly or indirectly, of academic dishonesty, he or she should investigate the instance. The faculty member should then take appropriate disciplinary action.

Disciplinary action may include, but is not limited to the following:

- 1) Requiring the student(s) to repeat the exercise or do additional related exercise(s).
- 2) Lowering the grade or failing the student(s) on the particular exercise(s) involved.
- 3) Lowering the grade or failing the student(s) in the course.

If the disciplinary action results in the awarding of a grade of *E* in the course, the student(s) may not drop the course.

Faculty reserve the right to invalidate any exercise or other evaluative measures if substantial evidence exists that the integrity of the exercise has been compromised. Faculty also reserve the right to document in the course syllabi further academic honesty policy elements related to the individual disciplines.

A student may appeal the decision of the faculty member with the department chair in writing within five working days. Note: If, at any point in this process, the student alleges that actions have taken place that may be in violation of the Murray State University Non-Discrimination Statement, this process must be suspended and the matter be directed to the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Access. Any appeal will be forwarded to the appropriate university committee as determined by the Provost.

XI. NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Murray State University endorses the intent of all federal and state laws created to prohibit discrimination. Murray State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, veteran status, or disability in employment or application for employment, admissions, or the provision of services and provides, upon request, reasonable accommodation including auxiliary aids and services necessary to afford individuals disabilities equal access to participate in all programs and activities.

In particular and without limiting the preceding and pursuant to and consistent with the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its regulations 34 CFR 100 et seq.; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its regulations 34 CFR 104; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 USC 1681 et seq., and its regulations 34 CFR 106 et seq; and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and its regulations 34 CFR 110, Murray State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, or age in its educational programs and activities. This non-discrimination in education programs and activities extends to employment and admissions and to recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student services, athletics, and housing. Murray State is required by Title IX and 34 CFR part 106 not to discriminate on the basis of sex and the prohibition

against sex discrimination specifically includes a prohibition of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Examples of prohibited sexual harassment and sexual violence can be found in the “Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment” which can be accessed via the link referenced in Appendix I.

For more information concerning the application of these provisions may be referred to: 1) the Executive Director of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Access / Murray State University Title IX Coordinator, Murray State University 103 Wells Hall, Murray, KY 42071 Telephone: 270-809-3155 Fax: 270-8096887; TDD: 270-809-3361; Email: msu.titleix@murraystate.edu.

XII. OTHER INFORMATION

Student Face Covering/Mask Policy

- Students must wear face coverings/masks on campus, including but not limited to in-person classroom settings (classrooms are also required to be configured to achieve social distancing) unless exempted with documentation by a medical professional.
- Student documentation should be registered with the Office of Student Disability Services, which may offer classroom accommodations regarding the face covering/mask student policy. The Office of Student Disability Services is located at 423 Wells Hall. Office staff can be reached by phone at 270- 809-2018 or by email at kashlock@murraystate.edu.
- Failure to comply with the face covering/mask policy may result in the student being subject to the Murray State Student Disciplinary Procedure. This policy can be found here: <https://www.murraystate.edu/headermenu/administration/StudentAffairs/policies.aspx>.
- Students are not required to wear face coverings/masks in their residence hall room, in dining facilities upon receiving food/beverage, or in community restrooms/bathrooms.

Counseling Resources on Campus

Murray State University has two centers on campus that offer free and confidential mental health services for students. The University Counseling Center is located in Oakley Applied Science and will be offering primarily remote services this spring. You can call them at 270-809-6851, email them at msu.counselingcenter@murraystate.edu, or visit their website at www.murraystate.edu/CounselingCenter. The Psychological Center is located in Wells Hall and will be offering primarily in-person sessions this spring. You can reach them at 270-809-2504 or visit their website at www.murraystate.edu/PsychologicalCenter.

In a crisis situation, or after hours, please contact Murray State Police at 270-809-2222 or call 911 if you are off campus. You can also call the 24-hour crisis hotline at 800-592-3980 or contact the Crisis Text Line at 741-741.

Students with Disabilities

Students requiring special assistance due to a disability should visit the Office of Student Disability Services immediately for assistance with accommodations. For more information, students with disabilities should contact the Office of Student Disability Services, 423 Wells Hall, Murray, KY 42071. Telephone: 270-809-2018 (Voice) 270-809- 5889 (TDD).

Email: msu.studentdisabilities@murraystate.edu. Our office will contact professors directly regarding any specific accommodation needs that may be applicable to their particular classroom setting.

Class Absence due to COVID-19

Students diagnosed with COVID-19 will contact their instructors and msu.studentcovidpositive@murraystate.edu immediately. Instructors will make adjustments to due dates or other course requirements to accommodate the severity of the illness and/or the availability of resources needed to complete tasks. If possible, students will continue to check Canvas regularly, and maintain regular communication with their instructors. COVID-19 positive students will be required to isolate for 10 days (or as directed by the individual's medical provider). Students may return to class at the end of the 10-day isolation period if they are symptom-free.

Students that have had close contact with or have had potential exposure to a COVID-19 positive person will contact their instructors and msu.studentcovidquarantine@murraystate.edu immediately to mark the start of the quarantine period. Students experiencing no symptoms and after Day 5, have a negative PCR test result and are still symptom-free are required to quarantine a total of 7 days. Students 1) experiencing no symptoms and do not get tested, or 2) have had symptoms, must quarantine for 10 days. Students may return to class at the end of the quarantine period, provided they are symptom-free.

For additional information about MSU Quarantine and Isolation Procedures, please refer to this site: <https://www.murraystate.edu/racerrestart/procedures.aspx>.

Starfish Student Success Network

Your success is important! This course is part of the Murray State University student success initiative that utilizes the Starfish Student Success Network. Starfish may be used to communicate with you about your academic progress and get you help if you need it. Throughout the term, you may receive emails regarding your attendance, course grades or academic performance. To benefit, it is important that you check your Murray State email regularly and follow through on recommended actions. You may also be contacted directly by others on campus who care about your academic success and personal well-being. This may include your academic advisor and staff from Student Engagement and Success and other student support offices across campus. Starfish provides you with the opportunity to "Raise Your Hand" if you need help. Take advantage of this and other features by logging into your Starfish account through myGate. More information can be found at murraystate.edu/starfish.

Racer Safe and Healthy Guidelines

1. Regularly wash hands for at least 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer frequently
2. Check your temperature daily
3. If you feel sick, stay home
4. Wear a face mask
5. Utilize MSU Health Services (call, visit, or tele-visit)
6. Practice social distancing
7. Keep your workstation/room sanitized
8. Get a flu shot
9. Exhibit healthy behavior
10. Download the Apple COVID-19 app (or similar app) for daily use
11. Eat Well. Exercise. Get Plenty of Rest.
12. Make good choices

COURSE SCHEDULE – Subject to Change

*Indicates that the assignment is posted to Canvas as a PDF.

Week 1. Literary Criticism and the Teaching of Literature (July 6-9)

Read:

- Zadie Smith, “Some Notes on Attunement.”*
- Robert E. Scholes, excerpts from *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English**
- John Guillory, excerpts from *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation**
- Rita Felski, excerpts from *The Uses of Literature**
- Joseph North, excerpts from *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History**
- Buurma and Heffernan, *The Teaching Archive: A New History for Literary Study* (introduction, conclusion, plus chapters based on your discussion group assignment)

Watch:

- Roundtable with Buurma and Heffernan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOZNP8B1yjs>

Write: Introductions and discussion board responses by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, July 9.

Week 2. The International, Intersectional, and Intergenerational Imagination (July 12-16)

Read:

- Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*.
- Markella Rutherford and Peggy Levitt, “Who’s on the Syllabus? World Literature According to the US Pedagogical Canon.”*
- John K. Noyes, “Decolonizing the Literature Classroom.”*
- Benjamin Bergholtz, “‘Certainty in Its Purest Form’: Globalization, Fundamentalism, and Narrative in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*.”*
- Mindi McMann, “British Black Box: A Return to Race and Science in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*.”*

Write: Discussion group comments (7/14). Group A position papers (7/14) and Group B responses (7/16).

Final project prospectus due by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, July 18.

Week 3. Aesthetic Judgment and the Ethics of Education (July 19-23)

Read:

- Zadie Smith, *On Beauty*.
- Eir-Anne Edgar, “Teaching Empathy and Promoting Global Citizenship through Literature.”*
- Michael Clune, “Are Humanities Professors Moral Experts?”*
- Dorothy Hale, “*On Beauty* as Beautiful? The Problem of Novelistic Aesthetics by Way of Zadie Smith.”*
- Ray Horton, “Children of the Culture Wars: Secularism, Aesthetics, and Judgments of Value in Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty*.”*

Write: Discussion group comments (7/21). Group B position papers (7/21) and Group A responses (7/23).

Week 4. (Dis)continuous Identities (July 26-30)

Read:

- Zadie Smith, *NW*.
- Kaelin B.C. Alexander, “Teaching Discomfort? Uncomfortable Attachments, Ambivalent Identifications”*
- Heather Thomson-Bunn, “Mediating Discursive Worlds: When Academic Norms and Religious Belief Conflict”*
- Julia Siccardi, “‘There Is Such a Shelter in Each Other’: Women Looking for Homes in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, *On Beauty* and *NW*.”*
- Tammy Amiel Houser, “Zadie Smith’s *NW*: Unsettling the Promise of Empathy.”*

Write: Discussion group comments (7/28). Group A position papers (7/28) and Group B responses (7/30).
Final project draft due by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, August 1.

Week 5. Literature and the Crises of the Present (August 2-6)

Read:

- Zadie Smith, *Grand Union* (short stories based on your discussion group assignment)
- Zadie Smith, *Intimations* (essays based on your discussion group assignment)
- Elaine Showalter, excerpts from *Teaching Literature**
- Paul T. Corrigan, “The State of Scholarship on Teaching Literature.”*

Write: Discussion group comments (8/4). Group B position papers (8/4) and Group A responses (8/6).
Final project due by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, August 6.