**George Orwell’s 1984 and Political Fiction Now**

**ASCI 1138 (Spring 2018) 1 Semester Hour Credit, S/U**

**Professor Thomas S. Davis (davis.3186@osu.edu)**

**Office Hours:**

**Mailbox:** Denney Hall 421

 

**Course Description**

Alternative facts, fake news, authoritarianism, political fear, dehumanization: our current political climate feels unique and without precedent. And yet it spurred enough interest in Orwell’s classic dystopian novel *1984* that the publisher reported a 9500% increase in sales since the presidential inauguration, leading some outlets like Amazon to sell out completely. Why would a novel published in 1948 appear relevant today? Is this renewed popularity a sign of its explanatory power? Does it speak to a broader mood of political paranoia? This class will start with *1984* to tease out how fiction engages in political thinking and examine the ways political interests have employed fiction and the arts to achieve their ends. We will examine *1984* in its post-WWII historical context and track how it has been used over the last 60 years. We will then turn our attention to two contemporary political novels: Ali Smith’s *Autumn* (2016), the first post-Brexit novel, and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2006), which is widely considered to be one of the most stirring meditations on what it means to be human, and who gets to be human, in the 21st century. As we move through these three novels we will ask what conceptual tools and consolations fiction offers in times of historical and political distress.

**Required Texts**

George Orwell *1984*

Kazuo Ishiguro *Never Let Me Go*

Ali Smith *Autumn*

**Course Assignments**

**Grade Scale: S/U, upon completion of all assignments**

**Participation: 60%**

 This is an intensive seminar that requires consistent participation from all members. I expect that you have read and thought carefully about all of the material. Each student will bring two questions or observations about the readings to every class.

**Roundtable Discussions 40%**

Each student will participate in a roundtable discussion. For each novel, a small group of students will present some questions, arguments, and provocations for the class to take up. Sign up on Carmen and further details on handout.

**Course Policies**

**Attendance** is mandatory and will be taken at each class session. Students are allowed to miss 1 class without penalty. Further unexcused absences will result in a "U" for the final grade. The student remains responsible for any information or assignments given out during missed classes. Official documentation for an absence (doctor’s note, note from the counseling center, etc.) must be submitted electronically and approved by me.

**Academic Misconduct**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (<http://studentlife.osu.edu/pdfs/csc_12-31-07.pdf>).

**Resources**

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the **Office for Disability Services** will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 098 Baker Hall; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>

**Class Schedule**

***Week One: Introduction: Political Fiction***

**August 25**

 - Introduction, Syllabus Review, & Expectations

***Week Two: George Orwell and Dystopian Fiction: Power, Deception, and Character***

**September 1**

 - George Orwell *1984*

***Week Three: George Orwell and Dystopian Fiction: The Question of Freedom***

**September 8**

-  George Orwell *1984*

***Week Four:* 1984 *After 1948***

**September 15**

 - George Orwell *1984*

***Week Five: George Orwell and Dystopian Fiction***

**September 22**

- ROUNDTABLE ON GEORGE ORWELL

***Week Six: Fiction Now (I): Writing in the Midst of Crisis***

**September 29**

* Ali Smith *Autumn*

***Week Seven: Fiction Now (I): Writing in the Midst of Crisis***

**October 6**

* Ali Smith *Autumn*

***Week Eight: FALL BREAK, NO CLASS***

**October 13**

***Week Nine: Fiction Now (I): Writing in the Midst of Crisis***

**October 20**

* Ali Smith *Autumn*

***Week Ten: Fiction Now (I): Writing in the Midst of Crisis***

**October 27**

- ROUNDTABLE ON ALI SMITH

***Week Eleven: Fiction Now (II): The Human & Inhuman***

**November 3**

 **-** Kazuo Ishiguro *Never Let Me Go*

***Week Twelve: Fiction Now (II): The Human & Inhuman***

**November 10**

 **-** Kazuo Ishiguro *Never Let Me Go*

***Week Thirteen: Fiction Now (II): The Human & Inhuman***

**November 17**

 **-**  Kazuo Ishiguro *Never Let Me Go*

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***Week Fourteen:* THANKSGIVING, NO CLASS**

**November 24**

***Week Fifteen: Fiction Now (II): The Human & Inhuman***

**December 1**

- ROUNDTABLE ON KAZUO ISHIGURO