

ENG 400 Seminars

Summer 2016

Resistance and Results in South Africa: South African Resistance and Post Apartheid Literature

Dr. Chris Kwame Awuyah

In this seminar we will analyze how major South African writers recreate the inner tensions and strains of the apartheid system, a tendency which Stephen Clingman defines as writing "history from the inside." As they witnessed the tightening grip of the apartheid system, South African writers saw an urgent need to protest against this oppressive system and to reveal its brutal face. The writers have served as society's conscience, by holding up mirrors in hope that the nation would catch glimpses of its own image. Current South African writing (Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*) resonates with recent social and political developments in the post apartheid era.

The seminar will also consider how the urgency to respond to political imperatives has resulted in marginalizing the aspirations of women. However, one of the few exceptions to this trend is Bessie Head who deals with such blind spots in the literature. A no less vital dimension, the seminar will reflect on the correlation between S. African resistance literature and African American protest writing.

We will examine the intrinsic value of our primary texts, noting the vigor of imagination and the technical resources, qualities which belie the notion that protest literature foregrounds message and sacrifices aesthetic elements. South African writers create a rich texture of the reality that pervades their society, the experience of living under and resisting oppression, as well as the expectations of a society undergoing fundamental transformations.

Asian American Literature, Transnationalism and Empire

Dr. William Nessly

This seminar is targeted toward students interested in the connections between twentieth-century U.S. literature, U.S. ethnic literature, postcolonial studies and the study of imperialism. We will use important literary works by Asian American authors as a means to explore theories of nationalism and transnationalism, cross-cultural representation, colonialism, U.S. empire, race and ethnicity, the effects of war and trauma, and the representation of these themes in narrative fiction. You will read literature by Onoto Watanna, Richard Kim, Chang-rae Lee, and David Henry Hwang, alongside selections from theoretical works by Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, Ania Loomba, Amy Kaplan, and Homi Bhabha, among others. Secondary works on key aspects of the historical contexts will also be read. An important consideration in this seminar will be the comparative analysis of U.S. and Japanese Empire.

Fall 2016

Visual Narrative in Comics and Graphic Novels

Dr. Amy Anderson

Why are we continually drawn to Batman's attempts to save Gotham? And why are we willing to follow Calvin and his smart-alec buddy Hobbs as they careen off yet another cliff in nothing but a wagon? The engrossing visual narratives in comic strips and graphic novels tell their stories both through what is shown and what is hidden in the gutter. In this course, we'll take a closer look at how these narratives are constructed. We'll learn a basic vocabulary for talking about visual narratives from Scott McCloud, Molly Bang, and other visual theorists. Then, we'll turn our discussion to a series of graphic novels and the personal, social, and cultural work that they accomplish. We'll join in the scholarly discussion on the COMIXSCHOLARS listserv, and you'll also have the chance to further research a comics-related topic of your own choosing. Students can learn more about the instructor's research interests from the English Department's website.

The Culture of Categories

Dr. Kristine Ervin

Male/Female, White/Black, Heterosexual/Homosexual, Sighted/Blind, True/False, Rational/Emotional, Sober/Drunk

In many ways, much of our culture and our identities is organized into categories, often as sets of binary oppositions, with one side of the binary being privileged over the other. For example, male is traditionally privileged over female, sober over drunk (though the latter may be quickly negated by the average college student). In this course, we will examine contemporary texts—both critical and creative—that challenge established categories and the authors who take immense pleasure in destabilizing a system that does not accurately reflect humanity and its diversity. Stephen Kuusisto, for example, shows the beauty in the gray area of partial blindness. Carole Maso writes a novel that has no plot, consists entirely of fragments, and refuses to pin down its characters. Lauren Slater lies, or may lie, in a memoir that is supposed to be true. Meaning becomes messy as the lines dividing definitions blur. Your goal is not, however, to be a reader and critic alone, as you will also act as writer/artist, producing both creative writing and a creative project that addresses (and hopefully disrupts) established categories within your lives, your experiences, and your culture.

Genre and Multimodal/Multimedia Writing

Dr. Margaret C. Ervin

Less than 10 years ago, the term “multimodal composition” first came into wide use among those who teach and study how to teach writing. In the same decade, “multimedia writing” was

proliferating online, and conventions for multimedia genres were evolving. This course brings the concepts of “multimodal composition” (the process of creating texts that incorporate some combination of audio, video, images, and text) and “multimedia writing” (those texts themselves) into play with theories of “genre.” The central question of this course: *How can genre theory help us understand the evolution of multimodal writing on the Web over the past five years?* Those who are entering the teaching profession can use this course to understand how and why to teach multimodal writing and multimedia reading to secondary school students. Those who are interested in continuing their study will do research in this class that will assist in graduate school applications. This seminar will also interest any English major who wants to further explore today’s popular Web and mobile app genres (viral videos, YouTube, Vine, Snapchat, vlogs) in order to understand how and why these are, in fact, forms of “writing.”

Behind Barbed Wire: Occupation, Internment, and WWII in Children’s Literature
Dr. Gabrielle Halko

This seminar focuses on literary and cultural representations of children and childhood in conditions of occupation and incarceration, including children as internees, refugees, and POWs, during World War II. While Europe and the Holocaust often dominate the “foreign” portion of America’s WWII narrative, this course features representations of lesser-known experiences of wartime incarceration, internment and occupation in the U.S. and Asia. The course texts include children’s and young adult literature in a range of genres (picture books, non-fiction, historical fiction, memoir) as well as oral histories and critical works. As a class, we will take a cultural studies approach, first examining childhood as a cultural construct and establishing historical/cultural context and then studying various representations of children’s experiences as POWs, internees, or occupied citizens during World War II. We will also employ aspects of war studies in our work with this material.

All the Way Live From the 2-1-5: The Culture and Politics of Philadelphia Hip-hop
Dr. H. Bernard Hall

This course takes an intersectional approach to exploring and understanding the cultural politics of hip-hop through the artistic and personal lives of Philadelphia hip-hop artists. Drawing from the burgeoning discipline of critical hip-hop studies, students will examine hip-hop’s (re)negotiation of language, race, class, gender, and sexuality in post-Civil Rights America. Students will also engage in critical analysis of texts produced by featured artists such as Cool C, DJ Jazzy Jeff and The Fresh Prince, The Roots, Jill Scott, State Property, Meek Mill and more. Particular areas of focus will include: the political-economics of the ghetto, African-American literary traditions, hip-hop as a cultural industry, the politics of “realness”, the aesthetics of the MC battle, postmodern religious expression, and constructions and performances of masculinity and femininity.

Christian Themes in British and American Fiction Since 1980

Dr. Paul Maltby

Fiction has long served as a resource through which to explore core themes in Christian thought and experience. These themes embrace questions of divinity and transcendence; the experience of epiphanies, conversions, and miracles; and a concern with sin, atonement, and redemption. This course will consider how these themes are addressed in five currents of Christian fiction as practiced, from 1980 down to the present, in the United States and Britain. First, we shall examine the spiritual-warfare fiction of leading fundamentalist authors: Dan Betzer, Frank Peretti, and Tim LaHaye/Jerry B. Jenkins. Second, we shall read writers whose “miraculous-mundane” strain of fiction pursues the divine in daily life: John Updike and Marilynne Robinson. Third, we shall look at an ecstatic current of Christian fiction that narrates female visionary encounters with the sacred: David Guterson, Jodi Picoult, and Ron Hansen. Fourth, we shall consider eremitic narratives, whose protagonists seek seclusion to open a channel to the divine: Frederick Buechner and Walker Percy. Finally, we shall examine the revisionist agenda of secular novelists who rewrite key tenets of the Christian faith: Jim Crace, Philip Pullman, and Michèle Roberts. One of our critical approaches will be guided by the methods of cultural studies, with particular attention given to an ethnographic focus on “lived religion,” readership demographics, the boom in Christian publishing, the recent surge in “post-secular studies,” and the spiritual crises generated by the devastating effects of the free market. Another critical approach will compensate for the extrinsic focus and ideology critique of cultural studies by adopting the phenomenological practice of “surface reading”; that is to say, an approach that respects the original compositional complexity of the text and that seeks immersion in or submission to the “affect” or “enchantment” of prose that strives for intimacy with the sacred.

Early Modern Prose, 1500-1700

Dr. Joe Navitsky

This seminar focuses on prose works—some fictive but most non-fictive—from the early modern period, 1500-1700. And while most students know this time period for the drama of Shakespeare and the dazzling lyric poetry of John Donne and others, fully 90% of works published before 1700 were written in prose. Nearly every discipline was represented—science, law, philosophy, religion, education—but the seminar’s reading list will concentrate on genres that remain popular today. Literary texts will include Philip Sidney’s romance *The Arcadia*, Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* (early sci-fi), and the first English translations of some classics from the Continent: Montaigne’s *Essays* and the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes*. The rest of the readings will consist of nonfiction, such as Milton’s *Areopagitica* (anti-censorship essay), Francis Bacon’s *Essays* and the unfinished *The New Atlantis* (a utopia), Izaak Walton’s *The Complete Angler* (an environmentally sensitive fishing manual), and Lucy Hutchinson’s *Memoirs*. Other genres might include recipe books, educational treatises, travelogues, news reports, and character assassinations. Additional attention will be paid to book history, manuscript culture, and creative engagements in imitating and parodying the varied styles of prose from this remarkable era.

Language, Poetics, and Cognition
Dr. Eirini Panagiotidou

This course focuses on the interface between language and cognition and investigates the impact of a range of linguistic features on the reading experience. It draws on methodologies developed in the field of cognitive poetics, a relatively recent development in the area of literary criticism. Cognitive poetics brings together linguistics, psychology, and advancements in the field of cognitive sciences to study how meaning is constructed in literary texts. Students will be introduced to a number of cognitive poetic frameworks including blending theory, conceptual metaphor, deixis, prototype, frame, and schema theory. We will also investigate the relationship between literary texts and reader engagement and address a series of questions related to why we are moved by literature. Using a number of literary texts from a variety of genres, students will be encouraged to reflect on how meaning is constructed through linguistic and stylistic choices and on the role of the reader in the meaning construction process.

Investigating Race
Dr. Cherise Pollard

In ENG 400: Investigating Race, we will explore the genre of the passing novel written by Twentieth Century African American authors. We will focus on the plight of mixed-race characters, using an African Americanist critical lens that will be sharpened with Feminist and New Historicist theoretical approaches. In particular, we will analyse the ways that the passing protagonists's struggle for equality challenges Twentieth Century definitions of race, class and gender and, in doing so, highlights deeply American racial and sexual anxieties. Students will be pursuing these lines of critical inquiry as they write three research papers (two short 5 page research papers and one long final research paper). One of the goals of the course is to give students practice with writing in the genre of the literary research paper, especially the process of finding and incorporating appropriate secondary sources into their analysis of the texts. To this end, the professor has planned for several writing workshops.

Writing and Social Action: The Case of Environmentalism
Dr. Justin Rademaekers

This course explores the intersection of language and action through the lens of environmentalism. Students taking this course are given an opportunity to engage with theories of public rhetoric and produce texts, written and otherwise, which are designed to urge readers and viewers to take action on pressing environmental concerns such as land conservation, water pollution, and global climate change. The course itself is divided in two, with the first eight weeks emphasizing a theoretical view of writing as means for social action and the tropes of environmental advocacy. The second eight weeks emphasizes action as students propose a writing assignment that enables them to take action on an environmental topic of their choosing. In particular, students will be asked to show how their writing (action) is crafted in response to theoretical knowledge developed in class readings and class discussions.

Professionals from environmental advocacy groups will be invited to speak to our class during the second portion of the semester, and students will be encouraged to pursue writing assignments that might aid these organizations in their work. This course provides a unique opportunity for students to engage with advanced rhetoric and writing theories while developing writing samples for their professional portfolio and networking with local community organizations.

Access to environmental groups and invitations to speak are contingent on availability of such partnerships. In the event no partnerships are developed, alternative class projects will be developed in consultation with students in the course.

19th-Century American Indian Literature

Dr. Carolyn Sorisio

Scholarly understanding of nineteenth-century American Indian literature is constantly evolving, as scholars recover texts remarkable for their diversity. This course will focus on American Indian authors' conceptions of authorship and use of print culture. To further explore these concepts, we will need to analyze representations of American Indians; US-American Indian relations; US colonialism; and, nationalisms. Authors we will study include: Black Hawk, William Apess, George Copway, Elias Boudinot, John Rollin Ridge, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Zitkala-Sa. Interpreting their works in these contexts allows us to both draw upon and question some of the critical methods and paradigms you may have encountered in ENG 194 (consideration of generic choices and interpretive communities); ENG 295 (matters of canonicity, the situated practices of interpretation and authorship, and the importance of historical contexts); or ENG 296 (the relevance of post-structural approaches, the changing conception of authorship and postcolonial critique). The research and writing skills you learned in your core courses will be further developed, especially as you work toward and complete your final research project.