

SPRING 2012 SEMINARS

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

1. WILLIAM NESSLY: Asian American Literature, Transnationalism and Empire

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, John Okada, David Henry Hwang and Jessica Hagedorn, 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.

2. RANDALL CREAM: Digital Literary Studies: Texts, Technologies & Tradition

As the discipline of English increasingly embraces digital environments, this course examines literature and writing as acts of technology. Our class will attend to both the material and the digital, from printed books to digital ephemera, constructing a view that is simultaneously historical, comparative, methodological, and theoretical. We'll read foundational texts in the history of writing, investigate histories and philosophies of technology and media, and perhaps even attempt to separate the literary from some of its various accidental carriers and memes. Throughout, we'll conduct a survey of current digital humanities projects to investigate the benefits and limitations of digital technologies in/as English studies. By working ahistorically, we'll try to develop an understanding of literary technologies that allows us to move beyond notions of progress and attend instead to the cycles, events, and ruptures that mark human history. Part of the work of the semester will involve some fairly standard but intense theoretical investigations: Plato, Heidegger, Derrida, Butler, Stiegler, and Foucault. We'll also cover the methodologies that define digital literary studies: Castells, Manovich, Hayles, Kirschenbaum, Davidson, Unsworth, and Moretti. But we'll situate these acts of reading in and amongst a critical survey of the limits of digital humanities work, along two main trajectories: Data and Databases & Gaming and Writing.

3. JOSEPH NAVITSKY: The Drama of Revenge: Ancient Greece to Modern America

Our topic for this section of the research seminar is the 2500-year-old tradition of revenge drama. An abiding fascination with the human desire for vengeance has produced a long history of revenge stories that continue, even today, to evoke the work of the genre's earliest purveyors. Part I of the course will analyze this early history, from the ancient Greeks (Aeschylus and Euripides) to pre-modern English (Shakespeare and Middleton) and Japanese (Izumo). Part II moves to the 20th-century British and American stages with brief stops on the European Continent. We will consider each "tale of blood" in its political and historical context by analyzing how writers adapt the conventions of the tradition (disguise, madness, justification, delay, Senecan rhetoric) in order to appraise the shifting moral values of their societies. More specifically, we will consider the questions that this drama raises about the nature of legal justice, violence, and sexuality. Special emphasis will be given to the communal/collaborative nature of theatrical production and on those critical approaches (trauma theory, psychoanalytical theory, cultural studies, historicism) important to the study of vengeance.

4. ERIN HURT: The Phenomenon of Chica Lit

This course contextualizes the literary genre of chica lit (Latina chick lit) within various literary, critical, and social movement. The protagonists of these novels are mostly upper-middle class, college-educated second-generation Latinas whose concerns about culture and identity matter as much, if not less, than love lives and careers. This representation of Latinidad differs from, and positions itself against, canonical Latina literature. To show students how this genre intervenes in the field of Latina literature, the course will examine literary works that focus on "conventional" themes such as social protest, poverty, immigration, and assimilation. The course will then move to the generic conventions of chick lit and chica lit. The course will end by reading chica lit novels alongside third wave feminism and postfeminism. Throughout the course, students will be asked to trace the ways in which literary Latinas define themselves and their culture, and the ways in which class and genre affect these representations.

5. JUDITH SCHEFFLER: Working Girl: Women at Work in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century American Literature

This seminar will explore works of nineteenth and twentieth-century American literature in which theme and characterization develop concepts of women's work. A variety of texts will represent women's work in many forms, including indentured servitude, factory labor, and home and family responsibilities. We will read a number of works that depict aspiring women and their stories of "success" in business, the arts, and the professions. We will explore the goals of these aspiring women and their conflicts with societal expectations and restrictions based upon race, gender and class.

6. AYAN GANGOPADHYAY: The Legal and the Literary: Globalization and the Problem of the “Religious”

The course will explore the interrelationship between the realms of the legal and those of the literary, where the latter is understood as mediated by “religious” categories. That is to say, we shall examine the question of whether the foundational elements of the law are literary and are effects of an essentially monotheistic religiosity. The course will require students to engage in multiple writing assignments in order to make sure that they learn about the nature of legal, religious, and literary discourses, and are able to effectively communicate that knowledge in writing. This course will also employ an historico-interdisciplinary approach, as the emergence of a specifically “legal” realm is a modern phenomenon. As such, students will learn about the apparatuses of governance during the pre-“legal” phases of history. Such an historical understanding also necessitates that students engage in a comparative framework of thought. Thus, we will begin our study with two different cultural contexts in a comparative perspective, and from there we will try to cover primarily the ramifications of “the legal” in the West and, then, the non-Western/post-colonial worlds. Foregrounding that comparative perspective at the outset will ensure that the subsequent developments in the West are always contextualized *in relation to* other parts of the world.

7. PAUL MALTBY: Postmodern Film

This course will explore the instructor's thesis that postmodern film, in its most characteristic mode, is most productively read as an ironic and critical response to the film and television genres prevalent in a late-capitalist media culture. We shall examine such formal and structural features as self-reflexiveness, genre-splicing, and parodic intertextuality, which constitute the art of postmodern film. We shall consider the themes, premises, and formal experiments of some postmodern films as symptoms of a culture defined by consumerism and a weakened sense of historical consciousness. We shall also consider how the themes and formal properties of other postmodern films may be read as a source of critique and resistance to the cultural degradations of late capitalism and to sexist, racist, and homophobic attitudes. We shall look at how the public response to postmodern films has been orchestrated by film journalism, by marketing through the Web, and by TV entertainment channels which promote the celebrity status of postmodern film-makers (like Quentin Tarantino, David Lynch, Tim Burton, and Oliver Stone). And we shall examine the extent to which these films are informed by post-structuralist concepts of textuality and subjectivity, and consider how postmodern film theory problematizes the modernist concepts of auteurism and avantgardism.

8. CHERYL WANKO: The Beggar's Many Operas

Famous for its satiric depiction of the London underworld of thieves and prostitutes, John Gay's play *The Beggar's Opera* inspired many "ballad operas," but the play's life did not end in the 18th century. Modern playwrights have revised and recast the play to fit their political, social, and cultural milieus: Brecht and Weill's celebrated *Threepenny Opera*; Vaclav Havel's version (without either beggars or opera), which commented on the communist Czech state; Wole Soyinka's version, which addresses Nigerian politics through arguments over clothing. Film versions present viewers with both Lawrence Olivier and Roger Daltrey as the male lead, Macheath – quite a range! This seminar will comprise the following sections: the original play and its sequel, the later 18th-century ballad operas, the 20th-century versions, the film versions, and reviews/commentary on all of the adaptations and their productions. Using languages of hybridity and intertextuality to inform New Historical methodologies, we will supplement each version of the *Beggar's Opera* with contextual readings on sociopolitical and artistic issues (for example, for Havel, we would concentrate on communist Czechoslovakia and his political writings in such works as *Disturbing the Peace*). The class will require both individual and group projects. Our class's driving research questions will include: Why the play has had such a long life and such wide influence? What about it inspires playwrights to revise, recast, and reinterpret it in so many ways? Why haven't women playwrights found it as attractive a model as men? And with some luck, we will locate a nearby production and arrange a class trip.

9. CARLA L. VERDERAME: Southern Women Writers

The course Southern Women Writers provides students with an overview of the struggles that female writers of the South confronted, and the manner in which they addressed such struggles in their writing. While not a survey course, the class begins with Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and ends with Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*. We will also study the fiction of: Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter, Ellen Gilchrist, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and others. The course will consider the following topics: female authorship, the legitimization crisis of the South as a region, the body--especially the female body--as a site of the grotesque, the departure of the Southern women writer from the nineteenth century romance, violence, and other topics that we generate as we read, think, and write about these works. We will study the literature of Southern women informed by a selection of essays on the South and its writers. In particular, we will apply feminist theory as we study the literary selections of the course.

10. TIMOTHY RAY: Gonzo: The Literary, Cultural, and Countercultural Legacy of Hunter S. Thompson.

Hunter S. Thompson is best known for his far-fetched fictionalized *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* and for his parodied persona of “Duke” in Garry Trudeau’s comic strip *Doonesbury*, and as such, he is frequently dismissed as a serious American writer. Even so, he has been one of the more popular American writers of the past half century, inspiring a cult following of readers as well as a host of imitators, few of whom have come close to successfully emulating his ascerbic, pointed, and insightful style. He is also one of the founders of a first-person journalistic style known variously as literary journalism, New Journalism, and “Gonzo” journalism. This class will attempt to explore Thompson’s position as an American literary figure and his role as an icon of the American countercultural movement.

11. GRAHAM MacPHEE: Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies

Decolonization had a powerful impact on postwar British writing. On the one hand, mainstream British writers from Eliot to Greene struggled to come to terms with the end of claims to the universal value of British culture and the new rhetoric of abstract freedom of the Cold War. On the other hand, the infusion of multi-ethnic cultural and literary sensibilities has often articulated histories and modes of experience which have proved unsettling for dominant accounts of Britishness/Englishness and indeed the nature of the literary itself, by posing questions about: the legacy of empire; the persistence of racism; the ethnic basis of British/English national identity; what counts as and who speaks ‘proper English’; the role of the British state in postwar global politics; and the limits of cultural tolerance within modern, Western democracies. To address these kinds of question, the growth of multi-ethnic writing in Britain has required the enlistment of elements from within postcolonial studies and postcolonial theory – centrally, concepts of migrancy, hybridity, and multiculturalism. This course aims to give students an overview of how postwar British literature has engaged with the processes of decolonization and migration, as well as a familiarity with relevant aspects of postcolonial studies and the critical discourse surrounding postimperial British national identity. While it will address canonical texts and writers, it will also attempt to include writers who have not been included in the canon or whose inclusion has been problematic.
