

# **GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

## **FALL 2010**

### **English 200: (Heidi Brayman Hackel)**

#### **Introduction to Graduate Study**

This seminar will introduce first-year doctoral students to the profession of literary studies and provide students with a range of skills to help them successfully navigate their way through graduate school and into academia. Seminar meetings will focus on matters foundational to successful engagement with graduate work. We will discuss strategies for maximizing the seminar experience across fields, including how to read comprehensively and critically, speak pedagogically, and write strategically; further, the seminar will encourage students to develop working relationships with faculty and to see themselves as contributing to a larger critical conversation.

Course readings will include essays that faculty members in the department have designated as “essential reading” in their areas. To facilitate the seminar’s goals, a number of faculty members in the department will join the seminar to discuss their own research and areas of specialization. We will also actively discuss the process of creating academic writing: taking reading and seminar notes, creating an annotated bibliography, conducting research, writing presentation papers (talks), and revising short writing (such as talks) into longer essays. Seminar work will culminate in students presenting their work in a writing workshop and then revising this work into a short paper for presentation at a final mini-colloquium.

### **English 246: (James Tobias)**

#### **Seminar on the Virtual: Digital Media and Technoculture**

This seminar examines theories and practices of post-cybernetic media. Digital communications mediate globally extensive processes of cultural production, and call our attention to the changing dynamics of historical networks of peoples, technologies, cultures, states. Because the formal specificities of contemporary digital cultural forms (the graphical interface, interactive narrative, user-generated content, mash-ups, behavioral targeting, or networked authorship, distribution, and response) demonstrate significant shifts in the temporal-spatial dynamics of cultural production and reception, digital media works have prompted large-scale re-evaluation of accounts of virtuality in relation to subjectivity, corporeality, situatedness, authorship, agency, materialities of communication, or audience response. At the same time, cultural narratives of the cybernetic media as “virtual” in print or audiovisual media also provide important objects of study for contemporary critique. This seminar explores the specificities of networked

digital media and the way we situate these theories and practices within larger cultural fields undergoing changing local and global relationships. Participants will present on seminar topics, and complete a final research paper.

Our reading list for Fall 2010 *may* include: Bateson, *Steps Towards an Ecology of Mind*, Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze, Gilles, *Logic of Sense*, Haraway, Donna, *When Species Meet*, Hayles, Katherine, *My Mother was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*, Rajan, Kaushik Sunder, *Biocapital*, Raley, Rita, *Tactical Media*, Stafford, Barbara Maria, *Echo Objects* Stengers, Isabelle, *The Invention of Modern Science*, Tatsumi, Takayuki, *Full Metal Apache*

### **English 260: (Andrea Denny-Brown)**

#### **Medieval Literature: Ornament: Pre-Modern and Post-Modern**

This class will examine ornament as a hermeneutical system: that is, the motifs, patterns, scriptings, tropes, and other verbal commonplaces and visual images shaped by discursive and ideological forces that frame, naturalize, distinguish, enhance, and enable meaning. We will combine readings in medieval literature with postmodern theoretical work, using ornament as a critical lens to examine subjects such as poetic form and allegory, medieval manuscript illumination and architecture, thing theory and receptions of material culture, cosmetics and fashion, gendered aesthetics, and the link between epistemology and materiality. Medieval authors/texts will include Alain de Lille, Thomas Aquinas, William Durandus, Dante (*La Vita Nuova*), *Pearl*, Chaucer, Lydgate, and medieval lyric and macaronic (or mixed-language) poems. Theoretical readings will include Alois Reigl's *Kunstwollen* ("the will to art"), Siegfried Kracauer's *Mass Ornament*, Adolf Loos's *Ornament and Crime*, Oleg Grabar's *Mediation of Ornament*, Kent Bloomer's *Nature of Ornament*, and aesthetic theories from Umberto Eco's *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* to Kant, Adorno, and Scarry. This course on medieval literature and culture will ground students in theoretical approaches and concepts that are applicable to the study of periods and cultures other than the Middle Ages.

### **English 269: (Michelle Raheja)**

#### **American Literature to 1900**

#### **Cannibalism and Metaphors of Incorporation**

Few themes in the American literary imagination are as pervasive as cannibalism. The spectre, threat, and fact of cannibalism is a recurrent theme in literature as diverse as Native American oral narrative depictions of figures like the windigo, an anthropophagous spirit haunting the northern forests of what is now known as the United States and Canada; Captain John Smith's ironic accounts of cannibalism in Jamestown; and contemporary pop culture's

fascination with figures such as Jeffrey Dahmer, Hannibal Lecter, and the post-apocalyptic human flesh eaters in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. In this seminar we will examine how the literature of cannibalism in a wide range of early American texts and contexts and discuss how it is intertwined with a number of other critical issues: race, class, gender, violence, and colonialism. We will collectively reimagine the linguistic, cultural, and geographical terrain of early American literature, unmooring it from the scholarly focus on Anglophonic Puritan discourse, and become acquainted with a range of discursive responses to contact with the "Other" from Indigenous oral narrative through the 17<sup>th</sup> century in what is now known as Canada, the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. We will question and think critically about the ways in which invasion and encounter between Africans, Native Americans, and Europeans is figured in literature, focusing on how the trope of cannibalism works as a powerful and pervasive way of incorporating, (mis)understanding, and committing violence against the "Other."

**English 270: (Rob Latham)**  
**American Literature Since 1900**  
**Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day***

Description: This class is devoted to close study of a single major text: Thomas Pynchon's 2006 novel *Against the Day*. Set during the three decades between the Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the first stirrings of the film industry in Hollywood, this massive and rollicking story tracks the evolution of modern technoscience and capitalist industrial development as they come to grasp and command the world. Yet it also traces important counter-histories that contest this overarching metanarrative, from occult manifestations and non-Western spiritual practices to the political resistance emanating from working-class and anarchist groups during the period. To tell this complex story, Pynchon borrows heavily from the popular discourses of the era: the novel is an extravagant pastiche that evokes a vanished world through the styles and genres of that world. As with most of Pynchon's work, this is a book with serious themes conveyed in an impishly playful fashion.

It is also a book about which very little criticism has to date been produced, so students would have the opportunity to generate original research papers that could potentially lead to publication. We will read through the novel, with the assistance of an online Wiki that will help to identify many important historical references; we will then read the extant criticism on the book; the remaining weeks of the class will be devoted to pursuing specific threads through its intricate tapestry based on the particular research interests of individual students. We could, for instance, sample some of the discourses that the book parodies—such as dime novels, or late-imperial adventure stories, or works of early science fiction or occult horror—to see how Pynchon has reworked their themes and motifs; or we could examine a particular event or historical context treated in the text, such as the Columbian Exposition, or the Mexican Revolution, or the

international anarchist movement, or the birth of Hollywood. Our second reading through the novel would thus be more focused than our first, driven by the specific concerns of the students enrolled.

**English 274: (Carole-Ann Tyler)**  
**Seminar in Feminist Discourses: Feminist Theory**

The course focuses on contemporary feminist theory (feminist theory influenced by the poststructuralist “revolution”), rather than the history of feminist theory or feminism, or women’s creative writing, art, or media production. It explores the following topics: the social construction and deconstruction of sex, gender, and transgender identities; the body and embodiment; identity, experience, and “the signature”; “difference” feminisms (“French feminism”), essentialism, and the problem of the universal; masculinities; feminism, race, and empire; images of women, “the gaze,” and “recognition”; lesbian identity and desire. The (tentative) list of authors to be read and discussed includes Waldman, Pollock, Kamuf, Miller, Bartky, Scott, Derrida, Garber, Bornstein, Shepherdson, Freud, Irigaray, Kristeva, Salecl, Spivak, Spillers, Smith, Lee, Silverman, DiPiero, Halberstam, Mulvey, hooks, Doane, de Lauretis, Butler, Martin, Braidotti, and Grosz (about 3 essays a week, depending on their length and difficulty). Other requirements include a 15-20 page final research paper; reading notes and discussion questions for one week (or for a couple of readings, depending on the size of the class; 2 pages); and a short report (5-6 minutes; 2 pages) on a recommended essay or book chapter related to the issues addressed by the required reading. Professor Tyler.

**English 275: (Keith Harris)**  
**Seminar in Film & Visual Cultures:**  
**The Male Nude in Photography and Film."**

This seminar is a detailed study of the contemporary male nude in film and photography. The goal of the seminar is to examine the shifts in meanings of the male nude as a sign. We, therefore, discuss the nude, male and female, in the visual arts, including sculpture, painting, drawing and etching; the discursive significations of the nude as a form; and the divergence of these significations along the lines of male and female. Topics include gender construction and performance, race and semiotics, sexuality and visible difference. Students are required to do extensive readings and research leading to a final research paper.

**English 278: (Traise Yamamoto)**  
**Seminar in Minority Discourse:**  
**Asian/American Literary & Cultural Studies**  
**Memory, Masculinity and Maternity**

The advent of various theoretical orientations has significantly intervened in the study of Asian/American literature. Transnationalism, trauma studies, masculinity studies, Queer Theory and feminism have all productively shifted a field that was once dominated by sociology and sociological approaches to the literature. Having said that, it is also true that the ways in which literature itself theorizes the experiential has been lost along the way. Thus, this course will approach Asian/American literature as both theory and as that which resists Theory. Additionally, the seminar will be designed both to cover a representative swath of an over 100-year literary history and to explore in depth subjectivity and subjection in relation to three key sites: the role of memory (and its attendants of forgetting and deliberately mis-remembering), the place of masculinity in racial formation, and the construction of the maternal in conjunction with concepts of home and homeland. While this course will provide primary grounding in Asian/American literary and cultural studies, it will also provide key points of entry and inquiry into other literary fields and traditions.

Possible literary and theoretical authors: Frank Chin, Joy Kogawa, David Mura, Noel Alunit, Hisaye Yamamoto, Toshio Mori, Susan Choi, Nam Le, Chang-rae Lee, Monique Truong, David Eng, Lisa Lowe, Mae Ngai, Colleen Lye.