

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FALL 2011

GRADUATE

ENGLISH 200: INTRODUCTION TO GRADUATE STUDY

This seminar introduces first-year doctoral students to advanced inter- and transdisciplinary studies of 1. narrative, aesthetic, or compositional form; 2. materialities and technics of literary, cultural, or media communication; and 3. modalities of critical engagement. The goal of this seminar is to prepare graduate students with the range of skills required for professional research, critical writing, and pedagogy in literary, cultural, and media studies. Seminar meetings will focus on fundamentals of critical interpretation (including engagements with form, context, history, method, historiography, and the ethics of interpretation and critical knowledge production). Seminar requirements will focus on professional productivity: formulating and proposing research projects; composition of critical papers and essays; presentation of work.

Faculty members from the department will be invited to present perspectives on the “state of the field” for their areas of work. Course readings will include essays that faculty members in the department have written, or have designated “essential reading” in their areas.

James Tobias. Fridays 2:10-5:00pm.

ENGLISH 260: SEMINAR IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Formal Contingencies: History, Gender, and Poetic Form

“The truly social element in literature is the form.”

--George Lukács

This course will examine the current status of reading for form in literary criticism, with an emphasis on the poetry and poetics of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, or the often-neglected literary period after Chaucer’s death and before Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy*. What is the critically responsible way to analyze poetic form in the wake of New Historicism? Is it the “activist formalism” described by Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown? The “revenge of the aesthetic” called for by Michael P. Clark? We will attempt to answer these questions as we study the historical and ideological contexts of poetic form at the meeting point of late medieval and early modern England, examining the formal constraints and formal experiments of poetry writing at the dawn of the modern age. Topics will include the intersections between poetics and material culture, gender physiology, consumer practices, and linguistic change, as well as the historicizing function of emerging and/or revised poetic forms such as aureation, doggerel,

macaronic verse, uncategorized tonal inventions such as those found in Dunbar's "flytings," and Skeltonics. Primary readings will include Lydgate, Hoccleve, Dunbar, Charles d'Orléans, the Wakefield Master (Towneley cycle plays), Skelton, Wyatt, Howard, and a variety of anonymous lyrics. Critical readings will include those by Kant, Adorno, Eagleton, Christopher Cannon, Paul Zumthor, Seth Lerer, Vance Smith, Maura Nolan. No prior knowledge of Middle English necessary.

Andrea Denny-Brown. Thursdays 9:10 am- 12:00pm.

ENGLISH 270: SEMINAR IN AMERICAN LITERATURE SINCE 1900

The Postmodern Novel

This course surveys the postmodern American novel, covering representative texts from the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s. The class will examine a range of narrative forms and experimental techniques that have characterized postmodern writing. Specific themes we will track include: the contrast between minimalist and maximalist styles of writing; the playful and/or conspiratorial revision of historical narratives; the interrogation and incorporation of mass media forms and images; the collapse of distinctions between elite and popular cultures; and the transformation of personal and social identity through technological systems. We will also sample major conceptual models of postmodernity and significant theorizations of postmodernism in literature. Authors we will cover include Donald Barthelme, Joan Didion, Ishmael Reed, Thomas Pynchon, Leslie Marmon Silko, Kathy Acker, William Gaddis, and Don DeLillo.

Rob Latham. Wednesdays 5:10- 8:00pm.

ENGLISH 273-001: SEMINAR IN CULTURAL STUDIES

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, and the Frankfurt School

Since the 1970s, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) has emerged as one of the seminal thinkers of the twentieth century and a principal theorist of western modernity. His writings have become central to understanding the origins of cultural studies, media studies, and historiography; they have influenced an array of interdisciplinary work such as the urban semiotics associated with Michel De Certeau, Arjun Appadurai's 'social life of things,' and the archaeological historicism associated with Michel Foucault and Frederic Jameson. *The Arcades Project* was Benjamin's unfinished analysis of nineteenth-century European urban life, commodity culture, technology, media and fashion. A completed manuscript is rumored to have been lost during his failed flight from Nazi-occupied Europe in 1940. The titular arcades were glass-roofed commercial enclosures similar to shopping malls, where flâneurs could idle and people-watch. *The Arcades Project*, along with Benjamin's other important late essays (such as "Surrealism," "Franz Kafka," "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility," "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," and "On the Concept of History"), extended and transformed Marx's concept of commodity fetishism from a description of bourgeois self-deception, to an indicator of modern signifying practices with potential for collective consciousness. By critiquing the "auratic" quality of high art, Benjamin challenged traditional aesthetics, reorienting analysis to the perceptual and experiential potential of social groups. He also tried to invent a mode of critical writing capable of intervening in its own historical moment.

Benjamin's effort to forge such a political criticism by refashioning Marxist dialectics was shared by the Frankfurt School, with which he was associated. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) attempted to explain the apparent failure of the Enlightenment; Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1951), the inhuman experience of industrial modernity. This seminar introduces students to Benjamin's and the Frankfurt School's writings, with a special focus on *The Arcades Project*; topics will include (but are not limited to) urban life, commodity fetishism, media and mediation, and the Judaic and messianic aspects of Benjamin's theory of history. Although familiarity with this material is helpful to all who work in literary studies in English, the course will be especially productive for students interested in the theoretical bases of cultural studies, media studies, historiography, and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century studies. Course requirements include copious reading, participation in class discussion, one instance of facilitating class discussion, a 20-page research paper, and a brief précis in preparation for writing the paper. Papers may relate the course material to students' other interests. Students will be asked to prepare readings for the first class session on Tuesday, September 27.

Susan Zieger. Tuesdays 10:10am – 1:00pm.

ENGLISH 273-002: SEMINAR IN CULTURAL STUDIES

"The book is not simply the object one holds in one's hands" according to Foucault: "the frontiers of a book are never clear cut." In this seminar we will investigate the materiality of the book as object, combining approaches from book history and textual theory. In recent years, textual scholarship, bibliography and book history have been reinvigorated by the growing interest in questions of mediation and material culture shared across disciplinary lines. The materiality of the codex book, the apparent stability and permanence of its physical form and bibliographic codes, seems to offer a stable ground upon which scholars can build more elaborate theories of unstable texts, discourses, authors, audiences, digital environments. But books are objects whose materiality is as much a part of social, discursive and historicized practices as are the words, ideas and images they "contain." Grounding our inquiry in an understanding of books as material objects, we will consider the wide-ranging theoretical possibilities of this dynamic materiality. We will read from major theoretical statements and recent historical work on textual history, textual theory, material and print culture, including the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Robert Darnton, Jacques Chartier, Adrian Johns, Katherine Hayles, Franco Moretti, William St Clair, Jerome McGann, D.F. McKenzie, Elisabeth Eisenstein. Each student will be responsible for an oral presentation, short critical response papers, and a seminar paper. This seminar is open to graduate students from all humanities disciplines and satisfies one course requirement for UCR's Designated Emphasis in Book, Archive and Manuscript Studies.

Adriana Craciun. Tuesdays 2:10 – 5:00 pm.

ENGLISH 276: SEMINAR IN COLONIALISM AND POSTCOLONIALITY

"Neoliberalism and Postcolonialism"

This seminar examines the problem of neoliberalism in relation to postcolonial and global literature and theory. Broadly speaking, neoliberalism is an economic ideology that tries to limit the power of state sovereignty, while creating new technologies of governing, self-management and market rationality in other spheres of society and everyday life. While neoliberal rationality often involves the regulation of human capital and bodies (“biopower”) as well as physical space in order to maximize the production and flow of capital and finance, whether or not it has a similar regulatory effect on culture and politics remains an open question. We will begin with foundational discussions of neoliberalism in conjunction with postcolonial theory and literature. Then, in the spirit of Frederic Jameson’s *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, we will consider how literature in a neoliberal moment both maps and interrogates this particular rationality through a “neoliberal aesthetic.” Texts include David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, Lydia Kwa’s *Pulse*, Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*, Salman Rushdie, *Fury*. Assignments: Class presentations, journal article discussion, annotated bibliography, final research paper.

Weihsin Gui. Wednesdays 2:10– 5:00pm.

ENGLISH 278: SEMINAR IN MINORITY DISCOURSE

African American Literature and the War on Terror

The assumptions of African American literature as a self-conscious creative and literary critical enterprise have been transformed by the post-nationalist shifts in black politics, black studies, and black art since the institutionalization of black literary studies in American universities after 1968. These transformations have been even more self-consciously forged since the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. Since 9/11, African American writers and critics have mourned the *end* of a U.S. black literary tradition while calling for the solidification and reinvention of a new black literary tradition. If African American literature since 2001 has risen within and against what Roderick Ferguson names ‘a racial state that we have never seen before, one that does not enunciate itself primarily through abstract universalism but that articulates itself through minority difference,’ what formal and thematic concerns shape this new literature? How does the War on Terror both enable and disable post-9/11 black literature and black literary theory? How do the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan reshape and redirect the materialist study of African American literature? What does the figure of the black soldier tell us about the reinvention of black literature in our time?

In our efforts to theorize post-9/11 African American literature, we will pay particular attention to African American literary theoretical texts of the last 20 years, including Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, Kenneth Warren’s *What Was African American Literature?*, and Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black*. Primary texts will include a broad range of fiction, film, drama, memoir, and poetry, including Alice Randall’s *Rebel Yell*, Shoshana Johnson’s *I’m Still Standing*, and Evie Shockley’s *The New Black*. Requirements will include one oral presentation and one seminar paper of 20-25 pages.

Erica Edwards. Tuesdays 5:10– 8:00pm.

ENGLISH 279: SEMINAR IN RHETORICAL STUDIES

Subject Me: Visual and Ethnic Rhetorics as Epistemic in an Neoliberal Age

W.J.T. Mitchell argues that “our social arrangements take the forms they do because we are seeing animals,” while rhetorician Steven Mailloux argues that episteme (knowledge) and ethnicity are “Interpretation all the way down, rhetoric all around, performative and ideological here, there, and everywhere,” This seminar will examine rhetorical theory, visual rhetoric and theory, and the materiality of rhetoric to better understand the relation of rhetoric, ontology, and ethnicity. In addition, the seminar will provide a survey of theories and methods informing a variety of ethnic rhetorics and epistemes (Native American, Puritan, Chinese and Chinese American, Japanese-American, African American, and Mexican/Chicano, Corporate-Yes, Corporate!). Informed by rhetoricians such as Protagoras, Aspasia, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Mira Chieko Shimabukuro, and James Berlin and LuMing Mao, our seminar will rethink ontology and delve into ethnicity as rhetoric, practice, pedagogy, and effect.

In addition to resisting the tendency to reduce ethnic/local knowledges to mere *sociology/difference*, seminar participants will theorize the relation of episteme, spatiality and ethnicity while interrogating liberal-humanist notions of tolerance/diversity as critiqued by scholars such as Lisa Lowe, Susan Giroux, and Slavoj Zizek. Such an approach allows us to more productively understand how ethnic rhetorics remain both heard and unheard, commodified, yet invisible. This invisibility occurs vis-à-vis a hegemonic political rationality that, according to political theorist Wendy Brown, not only “governs the sayable, and the intelligible” but also, is a “specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship.” The seminar then, will wrestle with how increasingly, ethnicity, and the very idea of the human, is mediated through market, corporate, and visual logics that disturb the reality of ethnicity.

Vorris Nunley. Thursdays 5:10– 8:00pm.

ENGLISH 289: SEMINAR IN GENRES

Life Writing, Autobiography and Memoir

This seminar will survey a range of autobiographical modes and autobiography theory. We will look in particular at questions of self-representation, trauma, the role of memory, the relationship between the writing and written selves, and the creation of community through writing the self. Additionally, we will be asking questions about audience: what is the difference between voyeurism and witnessing? Between identification and appropriation? What are the roles of commodification and consumption? Why have autobiography and memoir become particularly privileged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries? My purpose is to use autobiography as a way of thinking through issues of subjectivity, agency, the role of language, the workings of memory and its gaps, the disciplining of subjects, and the construction of gender, race, sexuality and class through tropes of becoming.

Some possible types of autobiographies/memoirs we will be exploring: historical trauma narratives; memoirs of whiteness; internment autobiographies; portraits of the artist as a young person; AIDS narratives; abuse narratives; academic memoirs.

Students should have knowledge of or have read: *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*; slave narrative, especially *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs; Ben Yagoda's *Memoir* (this is required and should be read before seminar begins). Ideally, I would also like students to be familiar with *The Book of Margery Kempe*, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, and *Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

Traise Yamamoto. Thursdays 2:10- 5:00pm.