

Fall 2013 Graduate Course Descriptions

English 262: “Jonson and the Theatre of Social Change”

This seminar will study the relationship between Ben Jonson’s theatrical ventures and the swiftly changing world of the seventeenth century. Students may take any approach they wish to the various epochs in Jonson’s long career, or to any aspect of his theatrical career. There was the Elizabethan Jonson, who enjoyed early success with his drama of the “humours” (*Every Man In and Every Man Out of his Humour*), and who was an active combatant in the “Wars of the Theatres” (*Poetaster*). Then there was the Stuart Jonson. With the death of Elizabeth and the arrival of James I, Jonson found himself embroiled with new governors, new demands, and new opportunities. He gained favor at court with a number of successful masques and entertainments, staged to welcome the royal family. In these efforts, Jonson entered into a productive relationship with the brilliant set designer, Inigo Jones. But he also faltered (in such plays as *Eastward Ho!*) and found himself in serious trouble in the months following the Gunpowder Plot. Given the peril of Jonson’s situation, students interested in rhetorical analysis might want to look at the letters written during this episode; or they might be interested in Jonson’s Roman plays, perhaps *Sejanus: His Fall*, a play in which Shakespeare acted. Considering the fact that *Sejanus* follows *Hamlet* and *Othello*, and precedes the darker *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, this play deserves more attention than it has been given. Seminar participants might look for thematic or dramatic elements of *Sejanus* in the last two of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies. As a group, the seminar will also examine the plays from the period of Jonson’s greatest success: *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Epicene*, and, finally, spend time on Jonson’s masterpiece, *Bartholomew Fair*.

In the early weeks of the quarter, participants will select a topic. As the seminar unfolds, they will make reports of various lengths. These presentations are meant to prepare presenters for queries from students as well as from search committees. Responses to direct questions in these circumstances are usually quite limited in length: five minutes, ten minutes. Then, during the last two weeks of the seminar, participants will deliver a 20 minute paper based on the work they have done on their topics. These presentations are timed, as if they were being read at MLA.

TEXTS:

Ben Jonson: Five Plays. Ed. G. A. Wilkes. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-955577-2.

Ben Jonson’s Plays and Masques. 2nd ed. Ed. Richard Harp. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. ISBN 978-0-393-97638-0.

Stewart. M 2:10-5:00PM.

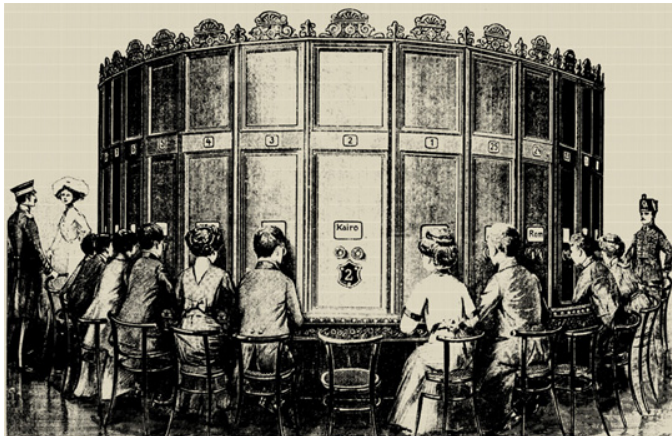
English 270: “The Age of Plath”

Post-WWII American poetry was once called “The Age of Lowell,” a term eventually supplanted by “The Bishop Phenomenon.” This seminar will playfully consider what it would mean to conceptualize post-WWII American poetry and fiction as “The Age of Sylvia Plath” instead. Her life and work will be the lens through which we study literary and cultural work done from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. Plath has played a remarkable role in literary history and in popular culture, a role that in no way seems to have diminished with the years. She continues to be featured in conversations about gender, sexuality, gifted youth, transnationality, alienation, and subjectivity. Beyond being an enduring textual presence, she is a cultural icon—a recurrent character or reference point in songs, films, novels, the internet, and social media. The figure she makes continues to inform our ways of seeing and being.

In this seminar we will closely read Plath’s major works of poetry, fiction, and life writing: *The Collected Poems*; *The Bell Jar*; *The Unabridged Journals*; and *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (a volume of her short stories and essays). We will look at such precursors and coevals as poets Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Marilyn Monroe (yes, that Marilyn Monroe) and fiction writers Virginia Woolf (*Mrs. Dalloway*), Olive Higgins Prouty (*Now, Voyager*) and J. D. Salinger (*The Catcher in the Rye*). We will also look at the traditions and oppositional currents that her life and work generated in the work of such successors as poets Rita Dove, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Frank Bidart, Lyn Hejinian, and Marilyn Chin and prose writers Kathy Acker (*Empire of the Senseless*), Sara Kane (*4.48 Psychosis*), and Susanna Kaysen (*Girl, Interrupted*). We will infuse the proceedings with larger considerations suggested by cultural theorists Jacqueline Rose, Julia Kristeva, and Slavoj Žižek. We will try to think creatively about a writer who is a knot through which many cultural threads pass. This will be an opportunity to write about Sylvia Plath directly or about some of the writers or issues associated with her.

Axelrod. M 5:10-8:00PM.

English 267: “Victorian Media Technologies”



During the nineteenth century, discourses emerged detailing the transformation of everyday bourgeois life by new technologies, from railways and electric light to refrigeration and cinema; arguably, we inhabit an intensified version of this historical moment. This course introduces students to the spatial and temporal disorientations of nineteenth-century technologies, and their

mediation of modernity as visual, sonic, consumer, and imperial experiences. It focuses on media such as telegraphy, photography, and phonography, theorizing and historicizing their relations to literature, culture, politics, and histories of the body and the senses. We will explore how media technologies helped consolidate and threatened to undermine the modern nation and the British Empire; how they challenged conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, and race; and how visual, sound, and information media challenged literary genres. Throughout, we will disturb conventional accounts of technological determinism, for example by exploring how discourses of clairvoyance and spirit photography functioned as alternative media networks; by foregrounding the materiality of media, such as human and other bodies; and by decentering realism in our consideration of genres such as the gothic novel and children's literature. Course texts may include but are not limited to: Bram Stoker, *Dracula*; Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*; Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; George Du Maurier, *Trilby*; and Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*; other reading will be posted on the course website. Formal course requirements include one facilitation of class discussion, one abstract and annotated bibliography, and one 20-page research paper. Students are asked to read *Dracula* and a selection from Friedrich Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* for the first class meeting on October 1.

Zieger. T 10:10AM-1:00PM.

English 278: "The Racial Past"



One literary theorist recently argued that the history of slavery "has assumed a primacy in black critical thought that it did not necessarily have previously, entailing a particularly black intellectual conception of politics."* This story of intellectual commonsense, of course, has much to do with the 1987 publication of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which asks us to consider the relationship between imaginative literature, critical production, and what we could call 'the political' as central to (black) theory's work in and with the past. Why has the racial past--the history of racialized being, subjection, and politics--occupied such a central place in black critical thought since 1970? How can we understand forms like the contemporary narrative of

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slavery, the afro-futurist novel, the critical monograph, and the essay as crucially impressed by the critic's and the writer's shared (*political?*) projects of documenting an unrelatable history and impossibly conceptualizing the order in which we are living?

This course is an experiment in thinking about the uses of history, trauma, remembering and forgetting in 20th- and 21st-century black narrative and theory. Considering a range of theory and narrative fiction on history, slavery, memory, and narration, we will explore the critical and imaginative worlds of the racial past at their sites of convergence and divergence. As we consider sites of articulation such as the novel, the literary critical monograph, the archive, the document, and, of course, the body, we will attempt to fashion a collective story of material and critical survival against the odds.

The professor will assume students enrolled in this class are familiar with the following texts:

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*

Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*

Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book"

Course texts may include the following:

Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

Fred D'Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*

Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*

Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*

Edward Jones, *The Known World*

Toni Morrison, *A Mercy*

Tavia Ny'ongo, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory*

Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*

Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*

Salamishah Tillet, *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination*

Kevin Young, *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness*

*Stephen Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present." *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (Sept 2012): 453.

Edwards. T 2:10-5:00PM.

ENGL 289: “New Wave Science Fiction”

This class surveys “New Wave” science fiction of the 1960s and 1970s, a period of substantial aesthetic and ideological renovation within the genre. Reacting against the formal and political conservatism of classic “hard” SF, New Wave writers evolved a more progressive ethical-political agenda and a more sophisticated literary approach than had prevailed during the pulp era. Aligned with countercultural lifestyles and 1960s liberation movements, New Wave writers began to question the core values of technocratic society and the genre’s own role in relation to them. At the same time, they pushed the limits of experimental form by fusing SF with contemporary avant-garde fiction and cultural theory. The result was to force the genre to a new self-awareness of its social mission in relation to technological culture. Reading representative New Wave novels and stories alongside contemporaneous nonfictional works produced both within and outside the genre, we will analyze how SF began to adopt attitudes and ideas emanating from the youth counterculture while the counterculture itself grew increasingly science-fictional.

Latham. T 5:10-8:00PM.

English 260: “Knighthood and Masculinity”

This course will investigate the perceptions of masculinity that develop around the concept of knighthood in the European Middle Ages. We will combine readings in medieval literature with recent theoretical work, focusing on the gendered care of the self and the body by way of the following subjects: technological and cultural changes in arms and armor; battle plunder and violence; women's love tokens as knightly attire; chivalry and self-presentation; beards, body hair, and hair cuts; Christ as knight; knightly dressing and cross-dressing; disguise and jousting; codpieces and prosthetic gender; the emergence of the “galaunt” or dandy; and the economics and aesthetics of heraldry. Although this course centers on pre-modern constructions of masculinity, it will ground students in theoretical approaches and concepts which are applicable to the study of any text, period, or culture. Primary texts will include *Song of Roland*, *Guillaume d’Orange*, *Roman de Silence*, select Middle English romances, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and chivalric manuals by Ramon Llul, Geoffroi de Charny, and Christine de Pizan. Theoretical texts will include Judith Butler, Kaja Silverman, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Judith/Jack Halberstam, and Homi Bhabha.

Denny-Brown. W 9:10AM-12:00PM.

ENGL 276: “Aesthetics, Neoliberalism, and Literary Narrative” – Weihsin Gui

What kinds of aesthetic production exist in and emerge out of a neoliberal moment of global capital, authoritarian state power, and biopolitical governance? While critical studies over the past decade have focused mainly on the social, political, and economic aspects of neoliberal rationality, problems of art and aesthetics in relation to neoliberalism have yet to be developed beyond claims of outright opposition and resistance in artistic practice. This does not mean that aesthetics is apolitical; rather, we will consider how the study of aesthetics can better illuminate or formulate connections between the social and the political, the economic and the cultural. We will begin with a brief survey of philosophical aesthetics followed by more intensive study of twentieth-century scholars of aesthetics (Adorno and the Frankfurt School, Frederic Jameson, Jacques Ranciere, among others). We will then read critical studies of neoliberalism (by Michel Foucault, David Harvey, Aihwa Ong, among others) followed by two novels that apparently thematize neoliberalism in South Asia: Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* and Mohsin Hamid’s *How To Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Recommended for those with background in postcolonial or other forms of critical theory and working on late-twentieth-century literary and cultural production. Required assignments: seminar presentation, annotated bibliography, final research paper.

Gui. W 2:10-5:00 PM.

English 200: “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 requirements will focus on professional productivity: formulating and proposing research projects; composition of critical papers and essays; presentation of 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, and a number of faculty members 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. In anticipation of the seminar, please read Greg Semenza’s Graduate Study for the 21st Century (from your gift bag) over the summer.

Brayman Hackel. R 2:10-5:00PM.