

Spring 2012 English department Seminar Course Descriptions as of 1/26/12

Mon: ENGL 289-001 (Stewart) 2:10-5:00 pm, HMNSS 1407
Tues: ENGL 265 (Craciun) 2:10-5:00 pm, HMNSS 1407
Wed: ENGL 267 (Childers) 2:10-5:00 pm, HMNSS 1407
Thurs: ENGL 246 (Tobias) 2:10-5:00 pm, HMNSS 1407
Fri: ENGL 289-002 (Kinney) 2:10-5:00 pm, HMNSS 1407

English 289 – section 001 (Seminar in Genre) – S. Stewart **The Past and Necessity in Tragic Forms**

When we look at the way critics use the term “tragedy,” we might easily think in terms drawn from Aristotle’s *Poetics*. If we are primarily interested in Early Modern theatre, this vocabulary creates certain difficulties. For instance, some “tragedies” are also called “histories.” On the modern stage, Willie Loman is sometimes referred to as a “tragic figure,” and the play itself has been called a “tragedy.” Arthur Miller, author of *Death of a Salesman*, has written about tragedy, drawing on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as an ostensive definition of the form. Some critics think that Miller’s discussion of fathers and sons in the context of “tragedy” was as relevant to his famous play as to Williams.’ Add to this the matter of the novel, and we have a rather daunting analytical question: What sense does the term, “tragedy,” have in current critical discussion? Students of Renaissance drama might, for instance, wonder why Barabas, but not Shylock, is designated a tragic hero. Does the fact that one dies literally, and the other only culturally, explain the difference? Why are Richard III and Richard II tragic figures, but Henry VI not? We begin with the assumption that “history” is as problematic a term as “tragedy.” If Willie Loman is a tragic hero, we can probably say that history has brought about notable changes in the way we think of heroism.

The aim of this course will be to consider historical notions of agency (man’s will in relation to a purposeful or purposeless cosmos). We proceed with the further assumption that “history” is a necessary component of “tragedy.” For example, Oedipus learns that his family history dictates a horrible destiny. With or without Aristotle’s remarks, from the outset, “tragedy” and “history” are intertwined. We might think of Richard of Gloucester, for instance, who seems to have been doomed before he was born. Then why, in the Renaissance, are some “historical” figures, tragic, while others are not? Is “modern” tragedy a Calvinist literary form? We will spend ten weeks examining the concepts of “tragedy” and “history,” with a mind to elucidating the ways in which particular periods—the Renaissance, the Augustan period, the twentieth century (participants will not be bound by the instructor’s focus on the Early Modern period)—present the struggle between the individual and “history,” in those cases in which the outcome is “tragic.” Students will be asked to examine the relation between a particular

“tragedy” and either an “actual” or “fictive” notion of “history” (or circumstance) that audiences or readers are assumed to accept as determinative of human destiny.

At the first meeting of the class, a discussion Aristotle’s *Poetics* (participants can bring any translation of the work that they have handy) will precede consideration of possible examples for further analysis. The seminar will consider typical ways in which scholars and critics engage in an ongoing conversation.

English 265 (Seminar in Romantic Literature) – A. Craciun Cosmopolitanism: Oceanic, Territorial, Metropolitan

We will approach cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitans ("citizens of the world") in a novel way in this seminar, beginning with the impact of natural history, collecting, slavery, and early anthropology in shaping new visions of the global in the Romantic Century. Cosmopolitanism in literature is typically considered in tandem with the history of ideas and philosophy, i.e., through the influence of Enlightenment writers such as Voltaire and Kant, and of elite metropolitan writers, such as Lord Byron and Germaine de Staël. But long-distance voyages like those of James Cook and Alexander von Humboldt produced popular published volumes, exhibitions, collections, and visual culture that made possible the new sense of the global without which literary cosmopolitanism could not have flourished as it did. Voyagers and voyages were more diverse than the metropolitan citizens of the world that are typically the focus of studies of cosmopolitanism, and thus we will consider the role of captives, former slaves, seamen, and indigenous voyagers to Britain. Moving beyond the metropolises of Britain and Europe, we will consider cosmopolitanism as a larger oceanic and geographic phenomenon, made possible by the movement of people, animals, plants and objects across the world. In this seminar we will read writings in natural history, geography, anthropology alongside literary writings and voyage accounts (authors include Georg Forster, Alexander von Humboldt, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Lord Byron, Helen Maria Williams, Olaudah Equiano). We will also read key works in social, political, anthropological and historical scholarship relevant to cosmopolitanism and its resurgence in the humanities and social sciences since the 1990s. As advance reading before the first seminar, students should read Linda Colley's *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (NY: Anchor, 2007) (isbn 978-0-385-72149-3) and check the class website for syllabus details: <http://craciun.ucr.edu/teaching/>

English 267 (Seminar in Victorian Literature) – J. Childers
Dicken’s Men

Few argue that the works of Charles Dickens’ exerted considerable influence on any number of cultural formations and practices in Victorian England. By far the best selling—and toward the end of his career perhaps most notorious—of British authors during the Victorian era, his works reached into all corners of English every day life with amazing constitutive force. Many of our contemporary images of Victorian England, from the working poor to the observance of Christmas, are redolent with the residue of Dickens’s fiction. Recently scholars such as Catherine Hall, Sonya Rose, James Eli Adams, and others, have remarked on the emergence of the “new man” during this era as the model of masculinity. Typically white, male, urban, and middle-class, this new man seems to stand as the accepted measure of a masculinized world of industry, capitalism, and empire. However, not all eagerly embraced this notion of the “new man” as the unequivocal standard of modern masculinity. In this course we will look at the confluence of Dickens’s fiction with this emergence of the discourse of the “new man,” examining how his novels struggle with, resist, critique, and sometimes accede to the cultures of masculinity that obtained in England between 1840 and 1870. Along with concerns over sexuality, violence, practices such as matrimony and primogeniture, commerce, and juridical subjectivity, we will also be investigating how notions of masculinity inform Victorians’ sense of public and private space, surveillance, authority, and the activities of the state. Our lens will be Dickens’s fiction, but we will also be reading a number of critics who both directly and indirectly comment on these topics. The novels we will read are (in order) *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Great Expectations*.---Childers

English 272 (Seminar in Critical Theory) – J. Tobias
Digital Media and Technocultural Studies

This seminar examines theories and practices of pre- and post-cybernetic media. Digital communications mediate globally extensive processes of cultural production; contemporary digital networks thus call our attention to the changing dynamics of *historical* networks of peoples, technologies, cultures, or sovereignties. Because the formal specificities of contemporary digital cultural forms (say, the graphical interface, interactive narrative, user-generated content, mash-ups, behavioral targeting in marketing, or networked authorship) demonstrate significant shifts in the temporal-spatial dynamics of cultural production and reception, digital media works have prompted, in the academy, large-scale re-evaluations of accounts of subjectivity, corporeality, situatedness, authorship, agency, materialities of communication, or audience response. At the same time, cultural narratives of the cybernetic media appearing in print, audiovisual, or interactive media also provide important objects of study for contemporary critique relevant to understandings of everyday life. 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.

English 289 – section 002 (Seminar in Genre) – K. Kinney
War Literature and the War Dead

From *The Iliad* to *Slaughterhouse-Five* to *Saving Private Ryan*, the representation of the dead body and the memorialization of the collective war dead have demanded and resisted meaningful interpretation. We will be reading three critical works in depth: Drew Gilpin Faust's history, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the Civil War*; James Tatum's *The Mourner's Song: War and Remembrance from the Iliad to Vietnam*; and Daniel Swift's *Bomber County: The Poetry of a Lost Pilot's War*. Different in range and methodological approach, these works will help us grapple with key questions about the identity, nature, and significance of the dead in a range of literary works. We will read the *Iliad*, a bit out of our expertise, because the story of Hector's body, desecrated by Achilles in his rage and grief, and ransomed by a humbled king, defines the ways in which the war dead are both shrouded in respect and dragged literally through the dirt.

Primary works include: *Saving Private Ryan*; *The Thin Red Line*; Walt Whitman's poetry and prose of the Civil War; *The Red Badge of Courage*; "The Gettysburg Address"; *Iliad*; *Ransom* (a novel by David Malouf about the ransoming of Hector's body); Euripides, *The Trojan Women*; poetry of Wilfred Owen, Dylan Thomas, and Randall Jarrell; Geoff Dyer's *The Missing of the Somme*; *Catch-22*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*.