Course Information: Fall 2010

English 17-99, Literature

ENG 0021-01
General View of English Literature I
Haber, J
A survey of English literature from the beginning through the middle of the seventeenth century. Readings will probably include Beowulf, selections from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and Milton's Paradise Lost, lyrics by Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne, Queen Elizabeth, Amelia Lanyer, Ben Jonson, and Andrew Marvell, and plays by Marlowe and Webster. Designed as an introduction to the English major, this course will be of interest to anyone who wishes to gain both a broad overview of earlier English literature and a good understanding of the basic techniques of literary analysis.

ENG 0023-01
American Literature: First Contact to 1855
Clytus, R
A survey of writing in English produced by contact with the New World, from the first English settlements in Virginia and New England, through the emergence of a national literature in the mid-nineteenth century. We will read a wide range of texts: exploration narratives, settlement propaganda, sermons, official histories, autobiographies, political pamphlets, philosophical essays, various genres of poetry and short fiction. We will conclude with two experiments in writing "America" in English in the middle of the nineteenth century: Whitman's genre-crossing Leaves of Grass, and Stowe's genre-bound Uncle Tom's Cabin.

ENG 0030-01
Twice Told Tales
Genster, J
If literature consists in a continuing conversation among authors and works, there are cases in which the exchange sharpens into a tête-à-tête. We'll look at a number of instances in which a later writer very explicitly pitches a tent on grounds earlier claimed by what J.M.Coetzee calls a "classic" work: Coetzee's own Foe as a response to Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe; Jean Rhys's The Wide Sargasso Sea as a reply to Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Jane Smiley's A Thousand Acres as a rewriting of Shakespeare's King Lear, and Peter Carey's Jack Maggs as the boomerang to Dickens' Great Expectations. The relations between texts may be aleatory, retaliatory, both, and everything in between. We'll try to think out the terms, the motives, the satisfactions and the challenges for readers and writers of such work, and to test our conclusions against other sets of textual relations in the works of Kipling, Ondaatje and Gordimer, and Tennyson and Munro.

ENG 0031-01
Underworlds
Genster, J
In classical mythology, the underworld is the kingdom of the dead; for living mortals access is, except under extraordinary circumstances, strictly forbidden. The journey from upper to lower world involves danger, difficulty, and grief, and such voyages provide poignant myths, and describe turning points in a number of epics. In some works, the capacity to undertake the journey-- and to understand the revelations it offers--grounds and defines heroism. We will look at a number of underworlds, in classical representations like Homer's and Virgil's, in Judeo-Christian iconography like Dante's and Milton's, in eighteenth-century drama and nineteenth-century novel, and in the works of twentieth-century writers like Ellison, Pynchon, and Robinson, to trace out an evolving view of what business the living have in the world of the dead, and what place the underworld occupies in the imagination of the living. Writers to be studied may include Virgil, Dante, Milton, (in selections), John Gay, Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Ralph Ellison, Thomas Pynchon, and Marilynne Robinson.

ENG 0045-01
Nonwestern Women Writers
Roy, M
This course is designed to introduce you to the diversity of women's writing from countries often referred to as "third world." Through an eclectic selection of texts, the course will explore some of the key concerns of women in places such as South Asia, the West Indies, Africa and Latin America. We shall be concerned also with issues of literary technique, genre and representation. We shall focus on the connection between literary texts and the social and political contexts within which the writing was produced. Authors will include Ama Ata Aidoo, Marta Traba, Joan Riley,
Anita Desai, Merle Hodge among others.

NOTE: This course counts towards World Civilization, Women's Studies, Africa and the New World and Peace and Justice.

ENG 0046-01
Girls' Books
Flynn, C
Girls' books construct our ideas about femininity, sexuality, agency and identity. This course will examine the cultural values that girls' books produce. Without being too subjective, we will unpack some of the cultural values that have become part of our own cultural baggage. We will read some of the classical texts: Little Women, The Secret Garden, and Girl of the Limberlost, works that introduce their readers to a life of domesticity and consumerism. We will also look at the mystery genre, from Nancy Drew to Harriet the Spy and Sammy Keyes. We will finally read more contemporary texts, like Blubber, Weetzie Bat, Toning the Sweep, Finding My Voice, My Heartbeat, and Twilight. This list is subject to revision. All I can say for sure is that we will read quite a lot of books, and also do a great deal of writing, both analytical and creative. I will e-mail the students registered for the course the final book list over the summer.

ENG 0049-01
English Bible
Dunn, K
In this course we will read substantial selections from the Bible. Although we will consider theological, textual and historical perspectives in reading the text, our primary focus will be literary. Our most sustained inquiries will be into questions of narrative, but we will also consider issues of poetics, genre, and translation. Finally, we will discuss the place the Bible has in the history of interpretation, with particular emphasis upon the way the book interprets itself and establishes its own canonicity.

ENG 0050-01
Shakespeare I
Dunn, K
A study of eight Shakespeare plays: Titus Andronicus, Richard II, The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, Measure for Measure, Hamlet, Macbeth and The Tempest. We will engage the plays in a variety of critical, historical and literary historical contexts.

ENG 0058-01
Short Fiction
Bamber, L
Some of the stories we will read in this course will be straightforward narratives, but we will read many quirky, unconventional and idiosyncratic ones as well. The emphasis will be on language and form as we interrogate the genre by exploring its margins. Many of the stories we will read have the linguistic density of poetry; many dispense with what we take to be the necessities of fiction -- plot, character and action -- in favor of formal experimentation. The stories vary in all sorts of ways: from the meticulous, self-effacing prose of Gustave Flaubert to the post-modernist self-indulgence of David Foster Wallace; from the political engagement of Gina Berriault and Langston Hughes to the aesthetic distances of Anton Chekov and Gabriel Garcia Marquez; from the slow, "old fashioned" style of Herman Melville and Sarah Orne Jewett to the intense, elliptical prose of Isaac Babel; from the extreme reliance on voice of Juno Diaz to the cool omniscience of Flannery O'Connor; from a novel-length story by Leo Tolstoy to a one-sentence story by Lydia Davis. (Actually a sentence fragment!) Students will be required to undertake a peer teaching project as well as to write the usual papers and response papers and to contribute in class.

ENG 0077-01
The Modern Mind
Cantor, J
Is there a "modern mind?" The question should raise anxieties about our own reaction to history. Are we-as Nietzsche said--"the heirs to all ages" (a condition he described as being close to madness)? Is history our burden, something we have left behind, or our field of play? Is modern consciousness a state of fragmentation and crisis, a sickness in love with itself, a continual crisis that is always looking for ways to reconstitute itself? What have the effect of Freud's and Marx's thought been on our attitudes towards ourselves, our culture and our civilization? Do we have "culture?" How can we conduct our lives without gods, "without culture," in a constant state of flux? Are there limits to interpretation (and to production) or must we (and can we) learn to live in a dizzying world without boundaries, without fixed points? What new ideas of the meaning and conduct of politics might we derive from the work of modern artists,
using the operation of the poetic imagination as a guide for our thinking about our work and the future of our world? The course will try (and fail) to look at all these impossible questions in texts of Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, and their inheritors (N.O. Brown, Herbert Marcuse). And we will consider a range of modern poets, prose writers, and artists who both embody and describe modernism and its resonances.

ENG 0081-01  
Postmodernism and Film  
Edelman, L

Everyone talks about postmodernism, but few understand what it really means. This course will introduce students to some major tenets of postmodern thought by studying a wide array of films in relation to major essays written by postmodern critics and philosophers. While providing students with an introduction to some of the most significant figures in postmodern theory (including Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, Donna Haraway, and Jean Baudhillard), this course will approach those readings in relation to various films. In the process, we will consider whether film as a medium has something distinctive to tell us about the movement between modern and postmodern thought and how these two modes of conceptualizing human experience intersect with and diverge from one another. In the process, we will consider how postmodern thought transforms our ideas about history, narrative, and visual perception. This is not a course for students unwilling to grapple with complex ideas and make their way through some difficult texts. Similarly, students unwilling to view film as anything but a transparent medium of popular entertainment might prefer a different course.

Although we will attend to a number of films that raise issues central to postmodernism, that doesn't mean that the films we will study are all postmodern films. In fact, the tension between the postmodern ideas the films put into play and the resistance to those ideas by the films themselves will be central to our discussions. The following are likely to be among the cinematic texts considered in class: the Wachowski's The Matrix, Scott's Blade Runner, Polanski's Chinatown, Zemekcis' Who Framed Roger Rabbit?, Cameron's The Terminator, Beineix's Diva, Gilliam's 12 Monkeys, Amenabar's Abre los Ojos, Nolan's Memento, Lynch's Mulholland Drive, Luhrman's Moulin Rouge, and Haneke's Funny Games.

No prior experience in the study of film or theory is required, but students enrolling in this class should come prepared to think seriously about both. There will be a weekly film screening outside of class time in the Tisch Media Lab.

ENG 0091-01  
Writing in the Beat Generation  
Johnson, R

The Beat Fifties were “cool,” “hot,” and “mad”— but what did hipsters mean by that and what meanings did it carry in Life magazine and for its Eisenhower era readers? Was “beat” really radical and, if so, for whom? How does it reprise and revise 19th-century American individualism and romanticism? Was “beat” an anticipation of the postmodern present? We consider the impact of the bombing of Japan and the Nazi Holocaust, jazz, the McCarthy HUAC trials, Abstract Expressionism, cross-cultural racial influences, and the nascent civil rights movement in the writings of authors associated with the Beat Generation – not only the ersatz canonical trinity of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs, but also writers who have been usually marginalized in commentary on Beat writing, such as Joyce (Glassman) Johnson, Hettie Jones, Diane di Prima, Anne Waldman, Janine Pommy Vega, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Ted Joans, Bob Kaufman and others.

The course examines how cultural meanings given to the category “beat” function as strategies for the marginalization or dismissal of the writers and texts of this movement. Through study of the literature, painting, and music of the Beat generation, we will consider rhetorical figures and discourses used to effect social and political dissent in the beat subculture and in mainstream U.S. communities, in particular those of addiction and madness, which slide and vary according to the race, gender, class, and sexual orientation of the trope’s user, as LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka has framed it. We will focus on ways in which these elements played out to bring into being the politics and countercultural liberations of the 1960s.

We will read the writers through their own statements about writing, and juxtaposed with each other, with a view to assessing their formation of an identifiable school of writing. The course will attend to anticipations of the postmodern evident in the texts and in their contemporary reception. Topics will include: gender and race politics of the era and of the writing; canon formations; literary and sexual censorship; autobiography as impediment to and constitutive of fictive discourses and their interpretation, and the transformation of memoirs, journals, and letters in the production of literary texts. There is a substantial body of film and audio recordings, and even music, produced by these writers, and we will sample that too.
ENG 0091-02  
Slavery’s Optic Glass: The First Century of African American Literature  
Clytus, R  
This course considers the epistemological impact of slavery on nineteenth-century American literature. Surveying a broad range of texts, beginning with the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and concluding with D.W. Griffith’s Birth of a Nation, we will examine how the “peculiar institution” not only helped to initiate and revitalize various American literary genres, but also how its aesthetic and cultural influence extended well beyond the Civil War. Of particular interest will be those stakes involved in continuing to define an African American (literary) consciousness through “black” racial identity.

ENG 0091-03  
Romance  
Fyler, J  
Romance is one of the most interesting and historically most popular genres, combining as it does the sheer delights of storytelling with the working out of seemingly endless variations on a few common themes: alienation; the quest; the loss of and search for identity; the incest taboo; magic; disguise; doubling and repetition as a generator of narrative. We will read a number of romances, across a broad historical range, as we explore the genre’s distinctive features. The reading will include at least some of the following works: Homer’s Odyssey; medieval Arthurian romances, including Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the works of Chrétien de Troyes and Thomas Malory; Shakespeare’s late plays, and J.R.R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings.