Course Information: Spring 2011

English 100-199, Literature

ENG 0107-01
Chaucer
Fyler, J

This course explores the works of one of the three or four greatest poets in English. We'll read Chaucer in Middle English, but he is in almost every respect easier to understand than Shakespeare, who lived two centuries later. We will spend roughly half of the semester on the Canterbury Tales, the other half on Chaucer's most extraordinary poem, Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer is primarily a narrative rather than a lyric poet: though the analogy is an imperfect one, the Canterbury Tales are like a collection of short stories, and Troilus like a novel in verse. We will talk about Chaucer's literary sources and contexts, the interpretation of his poetry, and his treatment of a number of issues, especially gender issues, that are of perennial interest. This course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement.

ENG 0116-01
Mapping London
Flynn, C

I am interested in how people become "urban," in this case how outsiders taught themselves to become Londoners in the eighteenth century. We will consider London as an urban space that can be mapped, measured, ordered, and imagined. First we will look at the 1746 John Rocque map, measuring thirteen feet by six and a half feet and the 1705 map of St. James's Park, a map of such skewed perspective that horses in the park are larger than St. Paul's Cathedral. We will also read excerpts from eighteenth-century guides to London telling its clients where and not where to go. Applying the theory of Benjamin, Foucault and Certeau, we will study "urban" texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century including Ned Ward's London Spy, Addison and Steele's The Spectator, Aphra Behn's The Lucky Chance, Rochester's London Poetry, Gay's Beggar's Opera, Defoe's narratives of the life of Jack Sheppard, Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year, Pope's Dunciad, Swift's urban poetry, Burney's Evelina, Boswell's London Journal, excerpts from Equiano's autobiography, Sancho's Letters, Wollstonecraft's Maria, and Blake's London poetry. You do not need a passport to get into the course. This course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement.

ENG 0118-01
Reason and Revolt
Flynn, C

The two great revolutions of the 18th century, both American and French, changed the way that England intellectuals understood elementary ideas of freedom and equality. Human rights became suddenly tangible and inclusive and dangerous. The Rights of Men became, at least in theory, the right of women, the rights of the enslaved, the rights of chimney sweeps, and the rights of the Irish people. We will read revolutionary writers like William Blake, Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Equiano, and Helen Maria Williams. In their political writings and in their novels and memoirs, they challenge social and literary conventions. Their novels, more than their political writings, seem to take into account the cost of revolution. Both Wollstonecraft's Maria and Godwin's Caleb Williams measure its cost as they examine the relatively powerless position of the revolutionary subject. Blake is defiantly unaware of the cost of revolutionary action; his system of poetical/graphic expression overthrows contemporary critical assumptions while it produces revolutionary social spaces. We will also read at least two defenders of monarch and authority, Edmund Burke and Frances Burney. Burney, especially complicated in her political views, attacks Wollstonecraft by putting her into novel as a most irritating revolutionary feminist. The course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement and the Women's Studies requirement.

ENG 0149-01
American Literature 1620-1815
Rosenmeier, J

"For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill" Governor John Winthrop, 1630.

"Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us—and our governments, on every level, national, state, and local, must be as a city upon a hill—constructed and inhabited by men aware of their grave, trust and their great responsibility"
President-elect John F. Kennedy, 1960.

"Let us resolve that we did act worthy of ourselves, that we did protect and pass on lovingly that shining city on a hill"

"We will save America; we will save the world" President-elect Barack Obama, 2008.


We will place these texts in the context of early American culture, including the displacement of native peoples, the puritans as immigrants, the beginnings of slavery, the longing for and yet never-to-be-realized American dream of a glorious future, gender relations, the growth of democracy, and the ever-present tension between individualism and community. A journal will be required. No exams.

Graduate students will be invited to participate in a separate section which will include additional readings.

ENG 0154-01
American Indian Writers
Ammons, E

Many people can name only one or two American Indian writers - if that.

Some are even surprised to find they exist. What does this erasure mean? How do Indigenous writers in the United States refuse and resist this racism? We will begin with three late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century authors, Sarah Winnemucca, Luther Standing Bear, and Zitkala Sâ, and then concentrate on contemporary writers: N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn; Louise Erdrich's The Bingo Palace; Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead; Simon Ortiz's from Sand Creek; Leonard Peltier's Prison Writings; Sherman Alexie's Reservation Blues; and Wendy Rose's Bone Dance. We will view and discuss films that focus on important issues and contextualize our study in historical and political questions still current in Native America. Major topics include: the politics of representation/self-representation; Indian resistance to white colonialism, exploitation, and theft; Indigenous people's self-definitions and demand for sovereignty; the relationship between art and political struggle; and our own subject positions and responsibilities in relation to the material in the course. This seminar meets a number of articulated English Department objectives, especially in its emphasis on critical thinking, historical and socio-political contexts, and diverse aesthetics. We will have a guest speaker, and the issue of activism will be an important part of our work together, as will active student participation in class. This course fulfills the World Civilization distribution requirement and counts towards both the Women's Studies major and the post-1860 requirement for the English major. It is open to majors and non majors. All are welcome!

ENG 0160-01
Environmental Justice & US Literature
Ammons, E

The U.S. consumes over 40% of the world's gasoline and more paper, steel, aluminum, energy, water, and meat per capita than any other society. Four additional planets would be needed if each of the Earth's inhabitants consumed at the level of the average American. This course examines the contribution of contemporary U.S. literature to the environmental justice movement, examining writers' treatment of environmental racism, global warming, ecofeminism, homophobia and the social construction of nature, U.S. environmental imperialism, and urban ecological concerns. What analyses and insights can we gain? What is the role of art in the struggle for social change? Material in the course is multicultural, foregrounding texts from diverse racial locations - Asian American, African American, Native American, white European American, and Latino/a; and the course meets a number of articulated English Department goals in its emphasis on critical thinking, socio-political contexts, diverse aesthetics, and the work of the humanities in the world. Literature includes Helena Maria Viramontes, Under the Feet of Jesus; Annie Proulx, "Brokeback Mountain"; Gloria Naylor, Mama Day; Karen Tei Yamashita, Tropic of Orange; Awikaht, Selu; Simon Ortiz, Men on the Moon; and poems by Audre Lorde, Janice Mirikitani, Richard Espada, and Adrienne Rich. Also we will view several films and discuss key arguments in environmental justice theory. The goal of this course is empowerment for social change. How can each of us participate as a change agent in the struggle for environmental
justice, locally and globally? How can our understanding of literature contribute? Group work, a field trip, one research paper, and active class discussion will be important parts of the course. Nonmajors as well as majors are very welcome. This class counts toward the Women's Studies major, the Environmental Studies major, the Peace and Justice major, and the post-1860 requirement for the English major.

ENG 0162-01
Phillip Roth and Company
Freedman-Bellow, C

We will take a tour through Philip Roth's fiction reading his work alongside that of a number of writers whom he has either influenced, parodied, refracted, obsessed about or appropriated. Texts may include: Portnoy's Complaint, The Ghost Writer, American Pastoral, The Human Stain, Indignation (all by Roth), Gogol's "The Nose," Kafka's "Metamorphosis", Henry James's "The Lesson of the Master" and Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King. This course fulfills the post-1860 requirement.

ENG 0163-01
Speak Memory: Contemporary Memoir
Wilson, J

We will look at a number of contemporary memoirs, "fictional memoirs," and occasional works of fiction paying particular attention to the blurring of borders between the genres. Readings will include Sophie Calle The Appointment, Kathryn Harrison The Kiss, Jamaica Kincaid My Brother, Tim O'Brien The Things They Carried, Primo Levi The Periodic Table, Gillian Rose Love's Work and other texts. This course fulfills the post-1860 requirement.

ENG 0164-01
Representing the Jew
Litvak, J

Neal Gabler has argued that "the Jews invented Hollywood," and there is nothing inherently anti-Semitic in the observation that Jews continue to figure prominently behind the scenes of mass entertainment in the United States. But even in an age of multiculturalism, Jewishness, it seems, can never fully come out of the closet.

In this course, we will try to understand the persistent anxiety attending Jewish self-representation in U.S. mass culture. Tracing this anxiety back to the 1927 film The Jazz Singer (Hollywood's first full-length "talking picture," and an apparent exception to the rule of the Jewish closet), we will look at a series of exemplary moments in the project of turning Jews into Americans. We will think about this project in relation to such recent cultural texts as Sarah Silverman's Jesus Is Magic, Larry David's Curb Your Enthusiasm, and Sacha Baron Cohen's Da Ali G Show. And we will examine a variety of works from the eighty years between The Jazz Singer and Sarah Silverman: fiction about Hollywood (Budd Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run?); Broadway plays (Clifford Odets's Awake and Sing!, Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett's The Diary of Anne Frank); musicals (Fiddler on the Roof, The Producers); television "sketch" comedy (Your Show of Shows, Saturday Night Live); sitcoms (The Dick Van Dyke Show, Seinfeld, South Park); films (Charles Chaplin's The Great Dictator, Woody Allen's Annie Hall, Paul Mazursky's Next Stop, Greenwich Village). We will pay some attention to Jewish representations outside the United States (particularly in France and Germany). Readings will include theoretical essays by such authors as Hannah Arendt, Alain Badiou, and Jean-Paul Sartre, and selections from cultural histories (Michael Rabin's Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot, Andrea Most's Making Americans: Jews in the Broadway Musical, David Zurawik's The Jews of Prime Time). Films and other visual materials will be screened outside of class.

ENG 0165-01
Perspectives on American Poetry
Bamber, L

The contemporary philosophy that has been so important to literary studies, deconstruction, and the ancient philosophical religion of Buddhism are both versions of the "negative way". Both are attacks on the center and on the hierarchical, dualistic, theological logical tendencies of Western metaphysics. Both are intent on taking things away from us—things like our identity as a separate self, the difference between Here and There, the idea of Truth or God or any word that begins with a capital letter. Both are silent or deliberately frustrating on the question of what we gain from so much renunciation. "I don't talk about dharma," says the American Buddhist teacher Charlotte Beck. "Why talk about it? My job is to notice how I violate it." Barbara Johnson, a Harvard deconstructionist. Writes that "Truth is
preserved [only] in vestigial form in the notion of error." Both systems are a kind of dance around an empty space; the same can be said about much of the imaginative language of poetry. "Tell the truth but tell it slant," says Emily Dickinson, for whom poetic language is one long evasive maneuver.

In this course we will look at selected American poets whose work is illuminated by these systems of thought. We will begin with some contemporary poets (e.g. Allan Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Jane Hirshfield, Mary Kean) who are themselves Buddhist and who are part of the current effort to translate Buddhism into a modern American idiom. (As one Buddhist teacher put it, we need to understand how Buddhism changes when life is no longer a matter of "Chop wood, carry water" but "make love, drive freeway.") Then we will consider the two great American poets of the nineteenth century, Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, to see if they can be understood as part of an alternate tradition. Other poets we will read are Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, Frank O'Hara, James Schuyler, and Mark Halliday.

No prior experience with either Buddhist thought or deconstructionism is required.

ENG 0170-01
Modern European Novel
Cantor, J

Something happened around 1900 to 1939. C.S. Lewis wrote, "I do not think any previous age produced work which was, in its own time as shatteringly and bewilderingly new as the Cubists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists and Picasso have been in ours. And modern poetry is not only a greater novelty than any other 'new poetry' but new in a new way, almost in a new dimension." And what of the novel, what Lawrence called "the bright book of life"? Did it, too, become new in a new way? We will look at works by Joseph Conrad, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, and James Joyce. We may take a sidelong glance at Sigmund Freud, and at modern art and philosophy. Is the work really as new as Lewis describes? And why? What changed in the world so much that the novel in order to do its jobs--to educate, entertain, enlighten and terrify--had to become so damn different from the works of the past? Students are advised (but not required) to have taken a good background in the novels preceding our period. This course fulfills the post-1860 requirement.

ENG 0192-01
Seminar in English: Whitman for Whitmaniacs
Jackson, V

This is a seminar for advanced students of literature. Between 1855 and 1891, Walt Whitman wrote seven different books called Leaves of Grass. Who writes the same book seven times? Why would anyone write the same book over and over the second half of the nineteenth century? As we shall see, it's not always the same book of poems. As we shall also see, the iterations of Leaves make us think about what we mean by "book," by "poems," by "Walt Whitman," by "the second half of the nineteenth century"--not to mention by "sex," "America," and perhaps most all, by "reading." This is a course on reading, and on the radical challenges to norms of public and private reading Whitman posed over a century and a half ago and that we have yet to comprehend. We will make extensive use of digital and paper archives in order to think about the difference between newspaper print, book print, and the encoded screen; we will think about poetic theory, we will think about reading as political and spiritual exercise, but most of what we will do is to read Whitman, over and over. The seminar will end in the reading room in the Houghton Library at Harvard, where we will be able to see the different bound editions of Leaves, the book/s we will spend the semester reading in various forms.

ENG 0192-02
Woman's Place: Gender, Space, and Power in Early Modern Literature
Elsky, S

In this course, we will read poems, plays, diaries, household manuals, court records, and travel narratives written during the early modern period, challenging the assumption that a Renaissance woman's place was in the home. In reading about the various spaces that women inhabited and traversed, we will think together about the divisions constructed along gender lines between private and public, domestic and political -- dichotomies that are still subjects of heated debate today. What are the ramifications for our understanding of gender if the past conceived of and represented these categories in multiple ways, some still familiar and some deeply alien to us? We will read some contemporary theory addressing the idea of the public in order to gain purchase on this question. Readings by William Shakespeare, Isabella Whitney, Anne Clifford, Andrew Marvell, Margaret Cavendish and others also offer a
tantalizing glimpse into past in yet another way: they allow us to visit the sites and locations thatloomed large in the early modern English imagination, from the nunnery to the battlefield, from the city of London to the strange lands of the East and New World and even to planets beyond our own.