Course Information: Spring 2017

English 17-99, Literature

ENG 0017-01
The Poem
Shapero, N.

This course will focus on the fundamentals of how to read and write poetry, looking at how poets transform kernels of observations and analyses into fully-realized works of literature, with an emphasis on sound structures, visual organization, and argument. Each week, we will investigate a different facet of how a poem is made – that is, how do poets negotiate sonic architecture, visual composition, intellectual through line, and imaginative locus at the level of the line? At the level of the stanza? The poem? The sequence? We'll engage in explication of the assigned reading, collective in-class exercises, and workshop days. Assignments include writing poetry, memorizing poems, and writing analytical book reviews. No previous experience with poetry needed.

ENG 0020-01
Black World Literature
Thomas, G.

The international newspaper of the largest Black political organization in history was entitled Negro World in the early 20th century. The premier journal of the Black Arts/Black Aesthetics/Black Power movement era in Afro-North America was entitled Negro Digest before it became Black World in the late 1960s, or 1970. This course moves in the mode of those Pan-African landmarks as “Black World Literature.” Critically, it is not some “black” version of “world literature” as studied by the white West. It is a study of some literature of the Black world itself. We will survey texts of the Global African tradition as they launch from both continental Africa and the African Diaspora with no hemisphere excluded. Our texts will be selected from various colonized and anti-colonialist terrain, geographically; various time-periods; various genres such as fiction, drama, poetry, film and polemic or critical-political essays; and various Black literary movements worldwide. And they will confront slavery and neo-slavery, colonialism or neo-colonial imperialism as well as racism and “white-supremacy” in due course.

ENG 0022-01
General View of English Literature II
Hofkosh, S.

This survey provides an introduction to English (and a tiny bit of Scottish and Irish) poetry, fiction, and drama from the era of social and political revolution of the late 18th Century to the transformations of Modernism ushered in by the World Wars in the first half of the 20th Century. We will take a rather sweeping "general view" of the literature written during these one hundred and fifty years by paying close attention to aesthetic experiment and formal innovation in particular works within the context of persistent themes and broad cultural trends. Considering some of the highlights of the English tradition, including some which challenge or revise the very notions of Englishness and tradition, we will trace evolving ideas about the function of the artist in society, practice reading poetry out loud to learn about meter and prosody, and look at some of the ways the literature of this period has been interpreted by and absorbed into the present, for example in parody, contemporary music, or the visual and graphic arts.
ENG 0031-01
Underworlds
Genster, J.

In classical mythology, the underworld is the kingdom of the dead; access is forbidden to the living except under extraordinary circumstances. Journeys from upper to lower world involve danger, difficulty and grief and only remarkable mortals venture down and return. In later works the underworld may take the form of a physical hell, or of history or ghosts or spies or madness or criminality, but it continues to haunt, even taunt, the upper world with what it conceals and with what it reveals. We will move from classical representations in Homer and Virgil to those of Dante and Milton, to diverse underworlds in eighteenth and nineteenth and twentieth-century writers. We end with contemporary works, including The Wire. We'll 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 Homer, Virgil, Dante, Milton, John Gay, Dickens, Ellison, Pynchon, Robinson and DeLillo. This course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement.

ENG 0046-01
Girls' Books
Genster, J.

Arriving at the hospital nursery, Judith Thurman's aunt saw her niece named and described on the card in her crib: “It's a girl.” Next to her lay an equally recent arrival, whose card read “I’m a boy.” She turned on her heel and returned with her natal gift: a copy of Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex.

What girls read about themselves shapes their ideas about who they are and how they may and should make their ways through the world. We will read a variety of texts describing girls’ lives, ranging from 18th-century conduct books to contemporary young adult novels. We’ll consider the works as they describe, prescribe and proscribe. We'll also look at some feminist theory as it bears on our reading and discussion. Texts may include Northanger Abbey, Jane Eyre, Little Women, The Secret Garden, The Girlhoods of Shakespeare’s Heroines, Nancy Drew, A Wrinkle in Time, Roller Skates, The Witch of Blackbird Pond, Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry, and folk and fairy tales. Some of the contemporary works will be chosen by a class vote on nominations provided by class members. This course fulfills the post-1860 requirement.

ENG 0051-01
Shakespeare - S
Haber, J.

In this course, we will undertake a careful study of nine of Shakespeare's plays: Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Taming of the Shrew, Twelfth Night, Othello, Antony and Cleopatra, King Lear, Coriolanus, and The Winter's Tale. Although we will engage these plays in a variety of historical and theoretical contexts, our primary focus will be on close reading of the texts. Please note: Shakespeare S (this course) and Shakespeare F (English 50) are not a sequence; they are courses that present two different selections of plays, chosen from the entirety of Shakespeare’s career. You are free to take both courses; you may not repeat either one of them. This course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement.
ENG 0063-01
American Fiction 1900-1950
Johnson, R.

This course explores the emergence and character of American modernism, the self-conscious intellectual and aesthetic movement dating roughly from 1910 to 1945. We will study modernism in its experimental literary expressions; as a social period encompassing the First World War, women's suffrage, Prohibition and the Depression; as a period of diverse cultural expressions that include the Jazz Age, the Harlem Renaissance, European expatriation and urban bohemianism. We will focus on modernist writers' struggles to efface or subordinate plot or structure in narrative (an effort only more or less successful and oscillating in its visibility in texts under study); the condition of the modern subject, alienation; and representations of gender, racial designations, and sexuality, with emphasis on class across these categories and the difficulties attending ideas or efforts to achieve class mobility or economic self-sufficiency in this period. Texts will include: Edith Wharton, The House of Mirth; F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby; Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises, Jean Toomer, Cane; W. E. B. DuBois, from The Souls of Black Folk; Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God; Nathanael West, The Day of the Locust; The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and selections from the writings of Gertrude Stein; William Faulkner, The Bear; James Baldwin, Giovanni's Room, and others. This course fulfills the post-1860 requirement.

ENG 0077-01
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. This course fulfills the post-1860 requirement.
ENG 0084-01
Black Comedy
Litvak, J.

In narratives called "black comedies," the comic effect of pleasure is inseparable from the supposedly uncomic experience of pain. Looking at various examples of black comedy, we will attempt to think about the relations between comedy and cruelty, between laughter and shame, between escapism and satire, and between entertainment and insult. Although the course will not focus primarily on the politics of race, one of our concerns will be the not-so-coincidental ambiguity whereby "black comedy" has also come to mean comedy by African Americans. The list of edgy entertainments we are likely to consider includes films such as Fargo, Dr. Strangelove, Richard Pryor: Live in Concert, To Die For, Welcome to the Dollhouse, American Psycho, The King of Comedy, and Top Five; novels such as Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita, Don DeLillo's White Noise, Fran Ross's Oreo, Evelyn Waugh's Vile Bodies, and Muriel Spark's Memento Mori; plays such as Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Joe Orton's Loot, and Lynn Nottage's Fabulation, or, the Re-Education of Undine, and television comedies such as Key & Peele and Orange Is the New Black. We will also read critical works about comedy's political and psychological implications. This course fulfills the post-1860 requirement.

ENG 0092-01
Topics Lit & Culture: The Ghost in the Machine
Keiser, J.

Consciousness is both very familiar and very strange. As you read these words, you probably don't doubt that you're conscious. But what exactly is consciousness? Where does it come from? Is it the result of an immaterial soul buried somewhere deep within the body—a kind of “ghost in the machine,” as the philosopher Gilbert Ryle put it—or does the body alone do all the thinking? In this course, we'll consider these questions by reading literature from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a golden age for thinking about problems of self, soul, matter, will, passion, madness, dreams, and imagination.

We'll read scurrilous love poetry (by the Earl of Rochester and Aphra Behn), early experimental novels (by Eliza Haywood and Laurence Sterne), philosophical satires (by Andrew Marvell and Jonathan Swift), proto-science fiction stories (by Margaret Cavendish and Tobias Smollett), and a set of short tales that try to imagine the inner lives of non-human thinking things like a parrot, a brain in a vat, and even a single atom lodged in the pineal gland of an English haberdasher. We'll consider questions like: How do I know if I’ve gone insane? Can two minds exist in a single body? Should we punish someone for a crime they don’t remember committing? Can we build a conscious machine (and should we try)? Is freewill an illusion? Do animals have feelings? How do mere bits of brain matter give rise to complex thoughts and emotions like love, sadness, and anger? How does a ghostly incorporeal soul move a bodily machine? Above all, we'll ask how literary form figures the mind. That will mean paying attention to the metaphors we use to describe the psyche (is it like blank slate or more like a burning flame?), analyzing literature's remarkable power to make us empathize with fictional characters, and tracing the “stream of consciousness” style (so important to modern fiction) to its origins in eighteenth-century novels and philosophy. This course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement.
This course examines how the postwar U.S. women’s movement for equality, born of the mid-twentieth century antiwar and civil rights movements, made civic, legal and ethical changes that are expressed in representations of women in literature and film, in mass and high cultures, and in women’s experiences across race, class, ethnic, and sexual lines. We will study novels, poetry, and essays, as well as films, to explore the impact of second wave feminism on discourses of gender and women’s sexuality. The course will cover critiques made by feminist writers with a view to understanding a central insight of feminism, that forms of knowing are not universal but culturally constructed, contextual, mutable; gendered. Second wave feminism coincided with and helped bring into being postmodernism in U.S. arts and culture. Our study questions how feminism is postmodern and speculates on how postmodernism is in part a feminist production; how the emergence of the postmodern fits with recognitions about gender and liberations of sex and sexualities in the postwar U.S. women’s movement. Readings and screenings will include: