

Seminar Descriptions for Summer and Fall 2013

SUMMER I

Christopher Merkner: The American Short Story in the 21st Century: Forms, Theories, Applications

Few forms of creative prose can claim the sort of complex and robust transformations of the American short story in the past ten years, and this seminar will ask students to explore and study the form of the short story as we encounter it today. The course will open by studying the present manifestations of the short story and placing these against the short story's origins in early American print and magazine cultures; the course will then trace the trajectories of the form as they carry into the complex print and electronic media we experience today. Throughout the semester, students will be asked to write critically about the form of the short story, and students will be asked to engage the form creatively in writing.

SUMMER II

Chris Kwame Awuyah: Interrelationship of African and African American Writing

Notwithstanding the plurality of black literary voices, reflecting differentiation along the lines of political, geographical and linguistic divisions, there are a number of recurrent themes in black thoughts and letters. One of these referential points is the common racial origin and identification. This seminar will show that black literatures from widely different terrains are oriented toward fostering Pan Africanism as a means of dealing with the burden of history. In exploring the overarching theme of slavery and its aftermath, black writers often define the local struggle in terms of a world-wide movement, thereby reinforcing black consciousness, and promoting solidarity and understanding.

FALL 2013

Randall Cream: Technologies of Friendship from Athens to Facebook

This course investigates the technologies that enable friendship as a component of ethical life. Working with a trans-historical perspective, from ancient Greece & Rome to contemporary networked culture—from the art of dialogue and writing epistles to sending txts, sharing flickr sets, or pinning something on Pinterest—we'll read, think, and write about the ways in which available technologies structure and define the relationships that comprise our inner experience. Using friendship as a focus and technology as a methodology, we'll strive to read slowly and critically, think carefully and rigorously, and write creatively and clearly. Along the way, we'll also try to get at the heart of the object itself—just what is our relationship to technology, and how does it structure us even as we try to shape and mold our uses of it? We'll read a lot, we'll write a lot, we'll think a lot, and we'll discuss all of these—in class, online, and in conferences.

Eric Dodson-Robinson: Cross-Cultural Receptions: Akira Kurosawa's Shakespeare and the Nō Plays of W.B. Yeats

This course considers Kurosawa's transformation of Shakespearean tragedy and Yeats's reception of Japanese drama. The class bridges the disciplines of early modern drama, Asian studies, film studies, and modern poetry and drama, with an emphasis on the crosscultural reception of dramatic tradition. While 'influence' is often considered a one-way phenomenon, this class will scrutinize cultural preconceptions and analyze the bidirectional dynamics of reception from both Asian and European perspectives. Students will learn to think and write critically about such cross-cultural interactions through multidisciplinary engagement with film, plays, poetry, and appropriate theory and research. Considering cross-cultural reception from two different cultural perspectives leads to a fuller understanding of both, as well as to a more thorough understanding of the processes of translating, adapting, and transforming foreign traditions

H. Bernard Hall: Nas, Jay-Z, and the Culture and Politics of Hip-hop

This course explores the culture and politics of hip-hop through the artistic and personal lives of Nas and Jay-Z. Through a variety of texts (books, film, music, etc.) students will examine hip-hop's negotiation of geography, race, class, sexuality, and gender. Students will also engage in close examinations of both rappers' extensive musical corpuses. Particular areas of focus will include: the political-economics of the projects, African-American literary traditions, the politics of "realness", the aesthetics of the MC battle, postmodern religious expression, constructions of masculinity and femininity, and hip-hop as a cultural industry.

Jane Jeffrey: Film Noir

This seminar will explore American film noir, its antecedents, development, and influence on American culture. The course will discuss its definition, its place in film history, and its place in film today. Specific topics include backgrounds, production and reception, noir style, narrative strategies, gender, themes, and neo noir. In addition to studying some of the defining films, such as *Double Indemnity*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Out of the Past*, *Hitch-Hiker*, and *Chinatown*, we will look at filmmakers, actors, and the cinematic properties of film noir. The major theoretical approach will be Cultural Studies, specifically the culture's impact on the development and these films' impact on their culture. Course work includes student presentations, response papers, and one research paper.

Graham MacPhee: Arendt and Benjamin: Culture, Genocide, and Human Rights

The German Jewish intellectuals Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin were both deeply affected by the rise of the genocidal Nazi regime. In different ways, their work focused on the connection between the Nazi's genocidal program and the deep structures of modern culture. Their philosophical writings ask how the dislocations of modernity blunted popular objections to the Nazi's policies and enabled a logic of accommodation with what should have been unthinkable. For Benjamin, technological modes of representation played an important role in allowing us to view violence aesthetically or as spectacle; for Arendt, bureaucracy, racism, and the precedence of colonial violence all contributed to naturalizing genocidal violence and removing our sense of responsibility. This seminar will look at primary texts by Benjamin and Arendt alongside a number of literary works and narrative testimony by those involved in genocidal violence (as both victims and perpetrators). It will encourage students to examine the relationship between culture and political violence, and consider the ways in which literary and other texts represent such violence in ways that restore our sense of responsibility.

Paul Maltby: Postmodern Aesthetics

This course will explore the aesthetics of postmodern culture from the interdisciplinary and conjunctural perspectives opened up by cultural studies. Attention will focus on artistic innovation, the social conditions that have enabled the emergence of postmodern art, the status of art and artists in the postmodern period, the relationships between postmodern art and postmodern theory, and the political and ideological implications of postmodern aesthetics and lifestyle. Part I of the course will examine postmodern fiction: avant-pop writing in the postmodern media culture (Mark Leyner); postmodern strategies of self-reflexiveness (Grace Paley, Tim O'Brien, Donald Barthelme); postmodern detective fiction (Paul Auster); postmodern feminist autobiography (Carol Shields); black postmodernism (Ishmael Reed). Part II of the course will examine the aesthetics of postmodern film (e.g. self-reflexiveness, genre-splicing, parodic intertextuality) with a view to reading this mode of film-making as: a critical and ironic response to mass-media fabrications of the past (e.g. Woody Allen's mockumentary *Zelig* and retro-movies such as *L.A. Confidential* and *Boogie Nights*); a recoding of the conventions of classic film noir (*Blue Velvet*, *Memento*); a medium of critique and resistance to prime-time TV genres (*Natural Born Killers*, *The Icicle Thief*); a medium of critique and resistance to sexist, racist, and homophobic attitudes (*Orlando*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Far from Heaven*). We shall also look at how postmodern film theory problematizes the modernist concepts of auteurism and avantgardism. Part III of the course will examine other postmodern aesthetic tendencies, namely: conceptual art (Kosuth, Hammons, Banksy, Christo, Holzer), postmodern camp and kitsch (Pierre et Gilles, Murakami, Koons); the nostalgic sensibility (e.g. the heritage industry and retrochic fashion); the aestheticization of everyday life (e.g. commodity aesthetics, promotional culture, and lifestyle).

Merry Perry: Zombie Narratives

ENG400: Zombie Narratives is a writing emphasis course designed for the advanced study of zombie narratives, specifically in film, television shows, and novels. Zombie narratives initially became popular in American culture with George Romero's 1968 horror film *Night of the Living Dead*. Since that time, a variety of texts have been created which feature zombies as mindless, monstrous, "resurrected" humans who devour flesh. In the last ten years, zombies have become increasingly popular as authors and directors have imagined new ways to use genre-mixing to incorporate zombies into imaginative narratives. In this course, we will begin by considering the history of the zombie narrative from its earliest days in West Indian "Vodoun" culture and written accounts by ethnobiologists, explorers, and journalists. Then, we will study some of the major zombie narratives of the last century, paying particular attention to those which followed Romero's 1968 film. We will consider how zombies have been rhetorically framed and represented in these texts, while also considering the historical and ideological context in which they were created. The main theoretical focus of the course will be Rhetorical Analysis (visual and verbal) and Cultural Studies; however, we will also review and consider other important contemporary critical theories and approaches. By the end of the course, students will be familiar with a variety of zombie narratives and representations of zombies and better understand how to apply contemporary theory to these texts.

Cherise Pollard: Investigating Race

In ENG 400: Investigating Race, we will explore the genre of the passing novel written by Twentieth Century African American authors. We will focus on the plight of mixed-race characters, using an African Americanist critical lens that will be sharpened with Feminist and New Historicist theoretical approaches. In particular, we will analyze the ways that the passing protagonists' struggle for equality challenges Twentieth Century definitions of race, class and gender and, in doing so, highlights deeply American racial and sexual anxieties. Students will be pursuing these lines of critical inquiry as they write three research papers (two short 5 page research papers and one long final research paper). One of the goals of the course is to give students practice with writing in the genre of the literary research paper, especially the process of finding and incorporating appropriate secondary sources into their analysis of the texts. To this end, the professor has planned for several writing workshops.

Andrew Sargent: Literature of the Civil Rights Era

The Civil Rights/Black Power era of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s was a watershed period in US history. While key figures and events from these movements have long been fixtures in the American popular imagination, our task in ENG 400: Literature of the Civil Rights Era will be to examine the many forms of literature—novels, plays, short stories, poems, memoirs, speeches, photographs, films, and the like—that sought to shape the struggle for racial justice as it unfolded and/or to assess the movement's aims, achievements, and shortcomings after the fact. In exploring texts by, among others, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Harper Lee, William Melvin Kelley, John Howard Griffin, Anne Moody, Amiri Baraka, Alice Walker, Richard Hall, Katori Hall, and Tracey Scott Wilson, we will read works produced by the struggle's iconic race leaders and bit players, movement activists and passive observers, men and women, blacks and whites, and creative writers, historians, and photojournalists. Our critical approach will blend cultural studies, critical race theory, whiteness studies, and other contemporary theories of race and gender, along with sustained close readings of the politics of racial representation—that is, the complex tension between the racial justice that our texts seek and the sometimes contradictory rhetorical and narrative strategies that they use to tell their stories.

Pauline Schmidt: Teaching Shakespeare in the Secondary Classroom and Beyond

This Writing Emphasis course, designed for English majors and minors, will explore five of Shakespeare's most popular plays: Hamlet; Henry IV, Part One; Romeo and Juliet; Macbeth; and A Midsummer Night's Dream. Shakespeare is an essential, yet challenging, author, particularly when he is introduced in various middle and high schools. We will focus on the plays themselves, but also examine the ways in which these plays are taught at different levels of education. By examining cutting edge research on multimodality, critical pedagogy, and new literacies, you will design and craft your research paper for the course.

Jeff Sommers: Reading History: The Boundaries of Nonfiction/Fiction/Poetry

Author's Notes that offer disclaimers about the contents of an historical novel are not at all unusual in contemporary historical fiction. The challenge presented to readers is how to answer the question: "When reading a book set in the past, how are readers supposed to know what to trust or believe?" Another way to phrase the question is "What is the boundary between nonfiction and fiction?" A naïve reader will accept the story as historical fact; a cynical reader will reject the story as entirely imaginary. Our goal in this seminar will be to devise more sophisticated reading strategies that acknowledge the statement "based on a true story" to be an authorial warning designed to influence our reading. By reading historical fiction, both short stories and novels, and historically-based poetry along with commentary by historians on their work and by literary critics on the literature, students in this seminar will attempt to construct those sophisticated reading strategies.

Carolyn Sorisio: 19th Century American Indian Literature

While much attention is paid to twentieth-century American Indian Literary expression, the nineteenth-century was a time of significant literary productivity for many American Indian authors. The canon of American Indian literature from this century is changing, as scholars recover texts remarkable for their diversity of genre and styles. By focusing on American Indian authors in the contexts of non-Native representations of American Indians (literary and cultural), US-American Indian relations, colonialism and nationalisms, we will be able to explore the rhetorically savvy works of diverse authors. Authors we will study include: Black Hawk, William Apess, George Copway, Elias Boudinot, John Rollin Ridge, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Zitkala-Sa. We will also analyze many of the pre-twentieth century poets recently recovered by Robert Dale Parker in his collection, *Changing is not Vanishing: A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930*. When interpreting these works, readers encounter a number of complex interpretive questions about authorship, print culture, translation, identity and cross-cultural rhetorical appeals. To address these questions, we will draw upon American Indian literary and cultural criticism as well as theories you may have encountered in ENG 194, ENG 295 or ENG 296. We will focus, in particular, on the concept of the author and the importance of the material conditions of production and reception.