

English Graduate Courses Spring 2018

497.001 / Beowulf

Scott Smith

W & F / 8:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. / N205 Millennium Science Complex

This seminar is devoted to the Old English poem *Beowulf*. Surviving in a single damaged manuscript dated approximately to the year 1000, the poem has become a canonical text since its first full translation into modern English prose by J. M. Kemble in 1837. *Beowulf* has also maintained a presence in modern culture, inspiring films, novels, comics, and games, while Seamus Heaney's translation (2000) earned the poem renewed attention in the new millennium. We will read this complex and rewarding Old English poem in full, considering points of language, style, and interpretation. The course addresses key critical issues surrounding the poem: manuscript, dating, sources and analogues, structure, style, and reception. ENGL 521 Old English Language (or its equivalent) is a prerequisite for the course.

512 / The Art of Novel Writing

William J. Cobb

T / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This graduate-level creative writing course will be focused primarily on the art of novel writing. As far as technique goes, we will try to understand and master the demands of sustaining longer narratives: the need for organic, multifaceted characters, captivating locations for the action, dramatic event as the cornerstone of plot, and the role of scintillating detail in conveying a vision—part of the dynamic that Vladimir Nabokov describes as “combination and inspiration.” On a less analytical level, it will also focus on the kaleidoscopic possibilities (and magic) of the world, a chaotic place peopled with fossil collectors, angry dental hygienists, suspicious DirecTV repairmen, morbid elementary school teachers, convenience store artists, perverted bankers, bad grandmothers, good cousins, and that high school coach who scared the bejesus out of everyone. With nothing more than a collection of highly charged words we will attempt to create new worlds and identify new wrinkles and new understandings of our own. Students will be required to write several pieces of fiction during the semester, which should culminate in three short stories or chapters, and to give it their all. The guiding principle will be Have Fun With It. Create a world that surprises you, and your readers. Put everything you have into it, and make it strange. You will be encouraged, but not required, to work on a novel—a short story is often the fetus of a novel, and a good place to cut one's teeth on narrative. Readings will be a selection of three (or more) recently published novels to be decided at a later date, but student favorites in recent years have been Per Petterson's *Out Stealing Horses*, Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, Dave Eggers's *The Circle*, Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* and *Lila*, Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. I'll likely go “Old School” and require a classic as well, for a nice touch of *Where Are We Going, Where Have We Been*. All but the classic choice will most likely be 21st century novels, with emphasis on works in the last few years.

513 / The Writing of Poetry

Shara McCallum

R / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 159 Burrowes Building

This seminar is designed for students seeking to push themselves as poets, practicing in the art—students in the BA/MA program, students working on theses, and other students interested in developing their knowledge of and facility with poetic craft. Across the semester, students can expect to read 6-8 collections of contemporary poetry, to offer a presentation on one of these collections, to write responsively to each collection, to draft at least one poem per week, to be continuously engaged in revision of their own poems, to provide written and oral critiques of their classmates' poems, and to memorize a poem of their own choosing. Final assessment will be based on participation in the seminar and a portfolio of revised poems, which will include a prefatory artist's statement.

545 / Chaucer: Chaucer's Writers

Robert Edwards

W / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This seminar will examine the sources and reception of key texts in the Chaucer canon such as *Troilus and Criseyde*, the Knight's Tale, the Clerk's Tale, and *The Legend of Good Women*. We will look at writers that Chaucer draws on in classical and vernacular literary culture (Vergil, Ovid, Statius, Boccaccio, Petrarch) in order to assess his adaptation and rewriting of their works. We will also trace the reception of Chaucer's poems in late-medieval and early modern writers such as Lydgate, Spenser, Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Dekker. The aim of the seminar is to delineate not just what later writers did to Chaucer (a topic for scholars like Ann Thompson, E. Talbot Donaldson, and Alice Miskimin) but also what the broader cultural reformulations of early modern writers (a topic for Sylvia Federico, Patricia Ingham, James Simpson, Brian Cummings, David Wallace, and others) potentially tell us about Chaucer's works. Besides the Chaucer texts, we will be focusing on contemporary debates over periodization and hermeneutics, about the shifting makeup and boundaries of medieval, early modern, and beyond (or back). We seminar will require several in-class reports, a conference-style presentation, and a final seminar paper. There is no expectation of previous work in Chaucer or Middle English (this is a good place to start); medieval Romance and Latin texts can be read in the original or English translation as seminar members prefer.

548 / Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama: Subject and Society in English Renaissance Tragedy

Garrett Sullivan

W / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This course will focus on the tragic hero's relationship to his or her society in order to consider a series of questions central to early modern English culture and our understanding of it: how does one reconcile an emergent individualism with the demands of a hierarchical society? Is resistance to tyrannical rule ever acceptable, and, if so, what forms should such resistance take? How far should the monarch's authority extend into the lives of his or her subjects? Is there such a thing as a "private sphere" in early modern society? To what extent and / or under what circumstances was religious, ethnic or racial difference tolerated? How does the female tragic hero conform to and diverge from Renaissance conceptions of female behavior? Finally, how do tragedies represent their own impact on society? Do they purge bad behavior or provoke it?

549 / Shakespeare

Claire Bourne

R / 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

"If the play is a book, it's not a play." Stephen Orgel's famous adage exemplifies the once and future tension between page- and stage-based critical approaches to the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In this seminar, we will examine the critical genealogies of this tension, some of which were instrumental in the foundation of English as a discipline. We will put these histories in conversation with the range of contemporary—early modern—documents that testify to the multi-modal status of plays—manuscript, print, performance, &c. Through a series of case studies drawn from the Shakespearean canon (and one or two from outside of it), we will study the range of material processes by which early modern plays were "published" on both stage and page during and after Shakespeare's career. Our focus will be the documents used to facilitate performance; evidence of the varied relationships between playhouse and print-house in early modern England; and strategies used by playwrights, printers, and publishers—and, later, editors, typographers, and book designers—to remediate performance texts into matter fit for reading.

This seminar will familiarize students with foundational and current scholarship in bibliography, book history, performance studies, and theater history. Together, we will engage with a variety of methods for studying performance and books via textual archives (including Penn State Libraries' Special Collections and a number of key digital repositories), and ask how these methods have shaped media history, editorial theory, pedagogy, and our sense of "the literary." The methods we practice in this course are portable—applicable to earlier and later materials—and therefore useful to students who do not work on drama or the early modern period. Students working on earlier or later periods are therefore encouraged to enroll.

568 / Gender Issues in African-American Literature: Black Women's Writing and African American Cultures of Print

Shirley Moody-Turner

R / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This course will consider the innovative strategies black women writers have employed to participate in and shape national and transnational cultures of print. We will consider new ways of reading black women's writings, in particular by examining how we define literary production, by re-thinking the social geographies of print production, by visiting or re-visiting both print and digital archives, and by focusing on networks of literary actors and agents who have facilitated black women's literary production and the construction of black women's intellectual histories. We will read a range of primary texts by black women writers, including newspapers, magazines, letters, speeches, religious and political tracts, published narratives and novels, engravings, poetry and personal journals. While our readings will be rooted in the nineteenth century, students will have opportunities to work in earlier and later periods.

574 / Studies in 20th-Century American Literature: Expatriate American Modernists

Sandra Spanier

W / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 159 Burrowes Building

This course will focus on American expatriate writers between the World Wars. Many were born around the turn of the century and came of age during the Great War, which Malcolm Cowley described as "a watershed" that gave young writers "the feeling of having lived in two eras, almost on two different planets." Gertrude Stein called them a "lost generation"—a label that most of its members contested. It was a time that engendered searching for values (many of the old ones having been shattered), acts of rebellion against social and literary complacency and conventions, and movements like the "Revolution of the Word" (dedicated, in Kay Boyle's words, to creating a "lively, wholly American, grandly experimental and furiously disrespectful school of writing"). We will revisit Paris in the Twenties, examining the fiction of such famous modernists as Hemingway, Dos Passos, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, along with their lesser known contemporaries, including Boyle, Robert McAlmon, Zelda Fitzgerald, Ernest Walsh, and others publishing in the avant-garde "little magazines." We will look at other sites of expatriation between the World Wars as well (Katherine Anne Porter went to Mexico and Germany, Kay Boyle from Paris to Austria to England to Vichy France) and will consider more broadly the issues of expatriation and American identity. We will examine various writers' experiments in genre and form, including memoirs, as well as what happens when avant-garde sensibilities of the Twenties meet the rise of Fascism and other social realities of the Thirties. And we will interrogate some of the long-held definitions and assumptions about modernism that have excluded the work of some writers from serious critical consideration over the decades by dismissing it as "sentimental," "popular," or "political."

583.001 / Aesthetics and Materiality

Claire Colebrook

T / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

In the wake of various new materialisms and new aestheticisms this course offers a genealogy of contemporary theories of art, matter and affect. Beginning with Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* a series of readings will explore the following questions: does the very concept of the aesthetic already presuppose a normative and racially/sexually specified subject? What is the relation between aesthetics and politics? Is the question of that relation itself problematic? Does it make sense to talk about feminist, queer, indigenous, black, queer or disability aesthetics, or is 'the aesthetic' a transcendental category that allows for a more profound questioning of such political identities?

Reading:

Theodor Adorno, from *Aesthetic Theory*

Paul de Man, 'Kant's Materiality'

Deleuze and Guattari, from *What is Philosophy?*

Deleuze and Guattari from *A Thousand Plateaus*

Bernard Stiegler, 'Kant, Art, and Time.'

Bernard Stiegler 'The Quarrel of the Amateurs'

Rita Felski, from *Beyond Feminist Aesthetic*

Fred Moten, from *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*

Eric Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art*

Tobin Siebers from *Disability Aesthetics*

583.002 / Disability Studies in the Humanities

Michael Bérubé

M / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 159 Burrowes Building

Disability is a complex feature of human bodies and minds; disability is perceptible and imperceptible, acquired and congenital; disability has widely misunderstood relations to identity, to citizenship, to temporality, and to narrative. It is a fundamental part of who are we as a species— though we don't always want to acknowledge that. In this seminar, we will examine disability from the disciplinary perspectives of literature, history, and philosophy. We will compare disability studies to the other major "identity-based" intellectual formations of recent decades, such as feminist theory, critical race theory, and queer theory. And we will try to get some adequate sense of what it means to be human.

584 / Studies in Rhetoric, Rhetorics and Technology

Stuart Selber

M / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This seminar focuses on the rhetorical nature of literacy technologies, especially digital environments and contexts, in an effort to map this complex terrain for scholars and teachers in English and communication studies. We will consider the ways in which people discuss and represent technological activities and spaces: Language is constitutive of human enterprises. But we will also investigate digital environments and contexts as an aspect of the rhetorical situation that must be engineered and addressed in a conscious manner. The course will not overstate the autonomous powers of literacy technologies, but situate their tendencies, biases, and affordances in ways that are productive and meaningful for the field. We will frame these plans with a series of key questions: How do literacy technologies organize and mediate work, especially in academic settings? In what ways are they socially and politically organized? Institutionally organized? What is at stake in the contexts in which literacy technologies are developed and used? What are the implications for rhetoric and writing studies? And for English and communication studies more generally? What are productive uses to which literacy technologies can be put? We will investigate these questions (and others) through texts that situate technology historically, critically, and contextually. Students will read an array of perspectives on rhetorics and technologies, write about those readings, lead class discussions, and prepare a paper and technology demo. Students from all fields are invited to enroll.

597.001 / Paperwork and Protest: A Course on Methods

Ebony Coletu

W / 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This course surveys methods that challenge the logics of bureaucratic control. In the process, students will learn about the significance of writing and argument within institutions, specifically how they gain and lose legitimacy. Using case studies as prompts, the course scaffolds theory and method to investigate when and why paperwork inspires protest: from activist interventions in surveillance, to critiques of voter disenfranchisement, and the undocumented youth movement. At the same time, we will ask what the dynamics of writing and submitting or resisting paperwork have to teach us about methods of research and advocacy? Students will investigate activist, journalistic, and legal interventions in the archive by learning how to do FOIA requests while reading about cases that used such requests to challenge the legitimacy of procedures. Each of the cases discussed will offer an opportunity to engage interdisciplinary approaches to the study of writing, rhetoric, and institutional critique, as well as the emerging field of paperwork studies.

597.002 / Whither Postcolonialism?

Sean Goudie

T / 11:15 – 2:15 p.m. / 159 Burrowes Building

Postcolonialism was one of the most influential areas of scholarly critique in the 1990s and 2000s. At its outset, this course will introduce students to some of the more (and less) recognizable postcolonial approaches while suggesting diverse and, at times, competing genealogies to a field renowned for its multiplicity of responses to the global history of colonialism and imperialism. We will then consider the half lives of postcolonialism—when, where, and how the practices, concepts, and central concerns of postcolonialism have been taken up, adapted, and/or transformed by scholars and writers in the new millennium across a range of fields (e. g., Ecocriticism, the New Materialism, Native American and Indigenous Studies, Human Rights Discourse, Migration Studies, Postmodern Geography, and International Political Economy, among many others). All along the way we shall see how the Caribbean has been a pivotal site for critique and artistic and literary production. All course readings will be in English.

597.003 / Studies in Race and Ethnicity

Aldon Nielsen

W / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 159 Burrowes Building

"One evening an actor asked me to write a play for an all-black cast. But what exactly is a black? First of all, what's his color?" Jean Genet, *The Blacks* "I want one ethnic thing here right from the start. Disorientation." Fred Wah, "Scree-Sure Dancing" American discussions of race and ethnicity seem perpetually marked by rhetorical questions, questions much like those asked by Jean Genet in his explanation of how he came to write his play *The Blacks*, a New York production of which holds a crucial place in the development of American theater. Genet's questions would seem commonsensical, and in that sense, quintessentially American. Artists from Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) to Cicely Tyson seized upon the American production of this French play of race and violence as a means by which to point up essential questions of race and color in American culture. Among their questions, why is it that after centuries of bloody history we remain haunted by these same questions? Despite a plethora of appeals to "diversity" and "multiculturalism," both diversity and multiculturalism remain highly fraught and contested domains within American politics, education and art. The web site of the National Association of Scholars once denounced "inappropriate use of sexual, racial, and other nonscholarly criteria in selecting works to be studied." Note the rhetoric at work in this formulation. The attack is not simply upon the inappropriate use of criteria; this statement assumes that race simply falls into the category of the nonscholarly criteria. In the best spirit of scholarly inquiry, then, this seminar will be a critical examination and discussion of the multitudinous ways in which race and ethnicity are constantly recreated, questioned and reappropriated in American writing. No common sense will be left intact. Our readings will include both literary texts and works in the criticism and theory of racial and ethnic rhetorics.

597.004 / Proseminar in Queer Theory

Christopher Reed

T / 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This proseminar examines "queer theory" and its sources, raising questions of embodiment, sexuality, power, normativity, intimacy, and representation. Students will explore queer theorizing before "queer theory" in the form of texts associated with the sexual revolution and with lesbian feminisms before turning to theorists who embraced the term "queer," such as Leo Bersani, Judith Butler, Douglas Crimp, Sharon Holland, José Muñoz, Heather Love, Eve Sedgwick, and Michael Warner.

Students will be asked to consider queer theory as both a body of knowledge and a style -- or range of styles -- of inquiry and exposition that both draws from and critiques essentialist forms of identity politics. We will address issues of the relationship of "theory" to "practice" in terms of queer theory's role in LGBT politics; its relationship to other forms of analysis of sexual identity in the academy, including the social and "bench" sciences; and strategies for teaching this material to undergraduates.

597.005 / Sub-Saharan Literatures studied in English (with CMLIT 523)

Rosemary Jolly

W / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 463 Burrowes Building

This course introduces the "big books" of sub-Saharan African Literature (Bessie Head, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, J.M. Coetzee, Marachera, Mda) alongside their more contemporary counterparts (Fiston Mujila; Ntshanga, NoViolet Bulawayo). We will also traverse the key critical essays on African literatures, giving a series of theoretical frameworks for the literature from post-colonial theory located in sub-Saharan African through lenses of racial theory, of Afro-futurism; of Afro-pessimism and popular genres that have their origins in market literature, horror literature and romance tales from within a definitively southern African set of material cultures. Students interested in links between African literatures and the Caribbean and African and African American literatures will be able to pursue these interests; all will, I hope, come away with a strong understanding of the genres, possibilities and intense ingenuity presented by the literatures of sub-Saharan Africa, making their relations to their counterpart literatures in the New World exceptionally evident.

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