

# Spring 2021 Graduate Course Descriptions

## **512 / The Art of Novel Writing**

**William Cobb**

**T & R / 9:04 a.m. – 10:20 a.m. / 075 Willard 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*, George Saunders’s *Lincoln in the Bardo*, 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 21<sup>st</sup> century novels, with emphasis on works in the last few years.

## **513 / Writing Poetry**

**Shara McCallum**

**R / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / ZOOM**

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 and engage in discussions &/or presentations of these collections, to write responsively to these collections (prose & ‘imitation’ poems), 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 or two 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.

**522 / Beowulf****Scott Smith****W / 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. / ZOOM**

This seminar is dedicated 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. 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.

**540 / Studies in Elizabethan Prose****Patrick Cheney****W / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / ZOOM**

This seminar examines the literary relation between the founding authors of the modern English canon: Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. While a large body of criticism, extending from the late sixteenth century to today, focuses on these authors' relation, no one has examined it in light of a topic central to today's critical conversation: ideas of authorship and literary career. According to the received wisdom, Spenser is the first figure in modern English to invent modern notions of both authorship and literary career, paving the way for Ben Jonson, John Milton, and their later heirs. In the most influential model, Spenser is "England's first laureate [or national] poet" (Helgerson), because he uses print to present himself as a leading theological voice for the nation, while Sidney is a mere amateur, because he does not print his work and subscribes to a youthful model of literary "repentance," leading him to eschew literature for statesmanship. The literary history of Sidney's connection to Spenser, however, is more complex than this, for it is intriguing to see how, from the 1590s to today, commentators pair Sidney with Spenser as the twin inventors of modern English literature (C.S. Lewis). Both figures, in fact, can be seen to engage with, and rewrite, the famed Virgilian progression of pastoral and epic that frames the Western idea of a literary career. As the canons of Sidney and Spenser testify, both authors remain committed to the Virgilian career program, albeit in ways that Virgil could not have imagined. For instance, both English authors structure the authorship of a literary career on the Virgilian progression, yet both complicate it by inserting two subsequent forms: the Petrarchan sonnet sequence and Davidian divine poetry. Genre, Sidney and Spenser make clear, forms the foundation of an English authorship of a literary career. Underexamined, as well, is the fact that both authors establish their national authority as England's "New Poet" in response to Chaucer, the "Old Poet." If, as Helgerson says, "The idea of the laureate was, in large measure, the idea of the Renaissance," we can witness Sidney and Spenser together using Chaucer and Virgil to author nothing less than the English Renaissance period concept itself. We will read selections of the canons of these two English authors. We will augment our readings of the authors' primary works with two other sets of readings: recent theories of authorship and literary career; and recent criticism on the two authors. Altogether, students should receive a thorough grounding in two major canonical authors in English important to modernity, as well as training in a critical methodology that scholars have come to classify as foundational to the history of English literature: authorship and literary career.

**545 / Chaucer****Robert Edwards****T / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / ZOOM**

*Troilus and Criseyde* is Geoffrey Chaucer's most accomplished poem in terms of craft, poetic invention, and literary ambition. Chaucer composes in the demanding form that he invents, the rhyme royal stanza, which becomes a signature for courtly poetry in succeeding generations. He translates and extensively reworks Giovanni Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, restructuring his source, adding materials, and foregrounding Boethian philosophy (his translation of Boethius was completed at roughly the same time in the early- and mid-1380s). In doing so, he claims a place for English poetry within the program of vernacular classicism launched by the writers of the Italian Trecento. This seminar will function as a workshop, focused on Chaucer's poem seen in three different frames. The first is Chaucer's use of sources (Benoît de Sainte-Maure, Guido delle Colonne, Boccaccio) that provide him both a narrative and a strong alignment with continental literature and proto-humanism. The second frame draws on work for the Cambridge University Press edition of Chaucer's works (in progress) in order to reconsider the text of the poem as a foundation for critical interpretation. The editorial tradition of *Troilus and Criseyde*, beginning in the nineteenth century, has produced a highly sophisticated, eclectic, curated version of the poem—one that sustains Chaucer's claim to be the "father of English poetry" (a claim he didn't make). We will draw on a renewed critical interest in the study of manuscripts and early prints to gauge the work that medieval and early modern readers encountered, sometimes with confusion. The third frame is the reception of Chaucer's poem in Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, the anonymous *Laste Epistle of Creseyd to Troyalus*, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, and Dryden's *Troilus and Cressida*, which is prefaced by Dryden's Essay on "The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy." The seminar will require active participation (it's a collaborative effort), several short papers and presentations, and a project that moves through the successive stages of an abstract, annotated bibliography, conference paper, and the draft of a journal article.

**549 / Shakespeare: Adaptation, Appropriation, Non-Adaptation****Garrett Sullivan****R / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / ZOOM**

This course will perform two main tasks. First, we will discuss six or seven Shakespeare plays in detail, with an eye to their engagement with early modern politics and culture. Second, we will study a number of films that exist in explicit or oblique relation to those plays, as adaptations, appropriations or non-adaptations.

The course will be divided into three sections, each of which will include plays and films. The first section will focus on adaptations (e.g., *Hamlet* and Grigori Kosintzev's movie of the same name; *Macbeth* and Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool*); the second will take up appropriations (e.g., *Othello* and Leslie Arliss's *The Man in Grey*); while the third will consider what Eric Mallin has termed non-adaptations: films that "unconsciously deploy and so do not merely repeat, produce, or aridly contest Shakespeare" and that "go about their business without constricting loyalty to or paralyzed reliance on canonical precedent." Each of the non-adaptations will be a movie by Alfred Hitchcock (e.g., *The Merchant of Venice* and *Strangers on a Train*). Throughout the semester, we will examine key texts for, and central issues within, the study of intertextuality and adaptation; these will include works by the likes of Walter Benjamin, Gérard Genette, Julia Kristeva, Julie Sanders, Thomas Leitch, Simone Murray and Timothy Corrigan.

The class will meet the requirement for a pre-1800 course in English literature.

## **564 / Nineteenth-Century American Poetry**

**John Marsh**

**M / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 067 Willard Building**

For decades, many Americanists, even those who specialize in the nineteenth century, believed that nineteenth-century American poetry started and stopped with Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Everyone else was—and, in some estimates, deserved to be—a cipher, a nonentity. Within the past few years, however, scholars have begun to recalibrate this standard account. In this seminar, we will read Whitman and Dickinson, but we will also survey who (and what) else there is to see: Edgar Allan Poe; the Fireside poets; Transcendentalist poets; women poets like Lydia Sigourney, Frances Sargent Osgood, and Sarah Piatt, among others; poems by Lowell mill girls; labor songs; songs from the rebarbative but grossly relevant world of minstrelsy; abolitionist poetry; poetry of the Civil War; African-American poets like Frances Harper and Paul Laurence Dunbar; American Indian poetry; and the proto-modernist poems of Stephen Crane. In addition, we will read some of the recent critical work that has sought to uncover and explain this expanded view of poetry in the nineteenth century.

The seminar is designed for those who plan to work in the field of nineteenth-century American literature, but it will also benefit those who study adjacent periods (including the twentieth century), or those whose area of research lies in the nineteenth century but on other continents. Students may write two short papers (10 pages each) or, for those in the field, a longer seminar paper (20 pages).

## **567 / Proseminar in African American Literature**

**Aldon Nielsen**

**W / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / ZOOM**

This seminar will offer an intensive and extensive exploration of the rhetorics, evolution and hermeneutics of African American writing. While no previous experience of the texts on the syllabus will be assumed, it will be expected that all participants in the seminar (including the instructor), no matter how widely read, will find something new here. We will engage the selected texts much more deliberately than is possible in a standard survey, yet we will cover more ground than would be possible in most graduate seminars. Beginning with texts from the era of colonialism and slavery, the readings will chart a course through Antebellum Abolitionism, through Reconstruction and the post-Reconstruction nadir marked by Plessy v. Ferguson, on to twentieth-century modernity and the Harlem Renaissance, the radical era of the Depression, mid-century Civil Rights era texts, the Black Arts Movement and eventually into the contemporaneity of African American writers sometimes considered postmodern. Though we clearly will not be able to consider all literary phenomena from Equiano to Tracie Morris, we will explore the critical implications of varied ways of periodizing our studies of black writings. The readings will include fiction, poetry, non-fiction and criticism. The course of our discussions will follow the lesson offered by such recent critics as Stephen Henderson, Cornel West, bell hooks and Hortense Spillers, whose works suggest that our subject is not so much a particular object of study as it is a series of vital questions. Our work will prepare us for broader discussions and explorations of African American cultural history but we will often, even when reading the best-known among the authors, take the path less traveled by reading the texts less frequently assigned. Seminar participants will make oral presentations to the group based on the readings, and each student will prepare two written exercises: (1) an annotated bibliography on an aspect of African American literature chosen by the student with the instructor's approval, and (2) a review of one critical text in the study of African American letters.

**574 / Studies in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Literature: Expatriate American Modernists**  
**Sandra Spanier**  
**W / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / ZOOM**

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 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 canonical writers as Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, along with their less widely known contemporaries, including Kay Boyle, Robert McAlmon, and Zelda Fitzgerald. 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 we will consider more broadly issues of expatriation and American identity. We will examine various writers' experiments in genre and form. And we will interrogate some of the long-held definitions and assumptions that have limited our thinking about modernism and excluded the work of some writers (many of them women) from serious critical consideration over the decades.

**584 / Crisis Rhetoric**  
**Debra Hawhee**  
**F / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 151 Willard Building**

The roots of the word crisis—from the Greek, *krisis*: decision, judgment, issue—thrum with urgency. Ancient medicine used it to designate a sudden change or turning point of a disease. Crisis names a moment as much as it does a feeling. And the same might be said for crisis rhetoric, the means by which dire conditions arrive and constitute a moment and constrain or enable possible responses. How can tools of rhetoric help us understand, frame, and/or intervene in contemporary crises? A unit on tools and concepts important for crisis rhetoric (e.g., temporality, scale, stasis theory, judgment, magnitude [*megethos*]) will be followed by a unit on disciplinary approaches ranging from presidential rhetoric to technical communication. The final unit will take on cases ranging from crises past (the Cuban Missile Crisis, 9/11, e.g.) to those we are living through now (police brutality crisis, the climate crisis). Student projects will identify and elucidate a particular crisis (current or past). Students will leave this seminar with a deeper awareness of how rhetorical tools, concepts, and practices can help us understand and respond to crises—and which tools, concepts, and practices need further development.

(Note that the class is likely to begin on Zoom, but Willard 151 is reserved for us as well.)

### **597.1 / Race, Capitalism, and Abolition**

**Oliver Baker**

**T / 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. / ZOOM**

This seminar examines how American literature represents the relationship between race and capitalism. What is the role of racialization, colonization, and gender domination in capitalism? How does capitalism depend on racism to accumulate wealth and reproduce itself? What is the relationship among settler colonialism, anti-Blackness and capitalism? What is the relationship between free or wage labor and unwaged forms of labor exploitation like enslavement and unpaid reproductive labor or care work? How is labor racialized and gendered? What role does whiteness play in maintaining racial capitalism? We will approach these and other questions by studying the works of Black, Indigenous, Chicanx, and other colonized writers and theorists from nineteenth century to the contemporary. Our study of racial capitalism will also focus on abolition as the movement that seeks not only to dismantle anti-Black dispossession and its role in upholding capitalism, but also build forms of social belonging and community premised on care and mutual aid. We will also examine how abolition relates to decolonization, labor struggles, and Queer and Trans liberation.

This seminar is designed for those preparing to work in the fields of American literature, Black studies, Indigenous studies, and Marxism. It also serves students interested in connecting university study to social movement building dedicated to the liberation of Black, Indigenous, Queer, Trans, and working-class people.

### **597.2 / Black Existentialism and Afro-pessimism**

**Claire Colebrook**

**T / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 067 Willard Building**

Rather than seeing Black existentialism and Afro-pessimism as philosophical movements that add the question of race to mainstream theory, this course will look at the ways in which writers such as Franz Fanon have been crucial for existentialism and post-structuralism. From Fanon to contemporary affirmations of the end of the world, this course will look at Afro-pessimism as a poetics and politics that challenges mainstream humanist and post-humanist traditions. One of the most provocative theoretical and aesthetic endeavors of the twenty-first century, Afro-pessimism is uniquely poised to make sense of post-apocalyptic culture: the current cinematic and novelistic fascination with the end of the world can be read both as the end of the world of white privilege, and as the possibility of another non-worldly mode of existence. N.K. Jemisin's novels, to take just one example, depict a cosmos and narrative arc that spans the ending and beginning of multiple worlds. This course will read the theory, philosophy, cinema and fiction of Afro-pessimism. Writers to be studied include Orlando Patterson, Franz Fanon, Jared Sexton, Fred Moten, Christina Sharpe, N.K. Jemisin, Calvin Warren, C. Riley Snorton and Frank Wilderson.

### **597.3 / "Whither Postcolonialism?"**

**Sean Goudie**

**T / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / ZOOM**

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 debates and 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 writers and scholars in the new millennium across a range of fields (e. g., migration studies, human rights discourse, Native American and Indigenous studies, object studies, hemispheric American studies, and postmodern geography, among many others). All course readings are in English.

### **597.5 / Rhetoric and Mobilities**

**Xiaoye You**

**M / 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. / ZOOM**

The centrality of movement in the modern era, experienced and enacted on a continuum from ease of passage to incarceration, provides the backdrop for a wide range of studies investigating how movements of people, objects, ideas, and information constitute social and material realities. In rhetorical studies, mobility has long been a concern because it deeply underpins and mediates everyday communication. In ancient Greece, for instance, the travel of the Sophists across city states shaped how the Greeks conceptualized and conducted public discourse. The itinerant strategists in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (771-221 BCE) helped to establish the parameters of political persuasion in early China. In imperial and colonial expeditions, the flows of people, products, and ideas across borders gave rise to contact zones where cross-cultural negotiation of meaning became imperative. This course will trace the connections between rhetoric and mobilities from ancient times to the present. We will try to understand how rhetoric facilitates, impedes, and moves along with the movement of people, objects, and ideas, and how rhetoricians have conceptualized and studied mobilities in their work. At the present, there is a growing demand among teachers and researchers for pedagogical and methodological approaches that account for the complexity of communication activities and practices across situations. In light of these converging concerns, this course will also examine the viability of mobile theories and research methods for understanding movements of people, things, texts, languages and literacies across time, media, educational and occupational institutions, material and digital spaces, and cultural and geopolitical borders.

### **597.6 / African Literature and its Theories**

**Cheryl Sterling**

**W / 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. / ZOOM**

In this seminar we will explore the African literary canon written in English (some text will be in translation). We will begin with the creation of the African novel and read different fictional works that characterize the development of this narrative tradition, including a film or two. We will also center these works within the theoretical debates coming from the continent, as writers and critics challenge western hegemony and generate their own theoretical paradigms in which to engage this literature. Themes in the texts will include the transformation from the oral to the written to the filmic narrative, the construction of the African novel and its response to colonialism, the quest for an “authentic” African voice, along with post-colonial shifts in expression. We will examine the historical and cultural contexts of the writings, with attention to their structures and their unique writing techniques, in exploring issues as diverse as cultural traditions, the impact of colonialism, the quest for national and Pan-African identity, female subjectivity, and African (Afropolitan) immigrant identity in the global world.