

Spring 2024 Graduate Course Descriptions

512 / The Writing of Fiction

Elizabeth Kadetsky

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

In this offering of the graduate fiction workshop geared toward members of the BAMA program in creative writing, students will continue to pursue their creative projects through a focus on craft and technique. In fine tuning their short story submissions or novel chapters, students will place special emphasis this semester upon creating a pleasing whole –balancing scene, description, and reflection and aiming for structural integrity. Through close reading of assigned texts, peer workshop, process- and revision-driven submitting, and trial-and-error immersion in the practice of selected techniques, students will hone their intuitive recall of the craft. Assigned texts by visiting authors Matthew Salesses and Julianna Baggott will encourage students' engagement with the creative writing reading series and its visitors. In-class writing assignments will provide students an opportunity to practice new techniques.

513 / The Writing of Poetry

Camille Welsch

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

In this course, students will engage with contemporary poets writing chapbooks. They will study a new chapbook every week, studying the ways writers create cohesion through style, image systems, voice, narrative, formal structure and invention, symbology and more. Students will also read craft essays on the compiling, organizing, envisioning, and crafting of book length manuscripts to help them better conceive of their final thesis projects. The semester will culminate with chapbooks written, edited, formatted, and hand-sewn by students. Students will also meet editors from contemporary chapbook presses as well as poets to further discuss the form, its opportunities, and its limitations.

515 / The Non-fiction Workshop

Toby Thompson

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

English 515, the nonfiction workshop, will concentrate on creative nonfiction and how we, as nonfiction writers, create. Techniques for mining memory, as well as for creating memorable stories, will be taught. Rites of passage, such as love affairs, family deaths, interesting jobs, great trips, various disorders, and assets are possible topics. The line between nonfiction and fiction in creative nonfiction will be discussed. Various contemporary or near-contemporary texts will be read. One five-thousand-word piece, due at the middle of the semester, and revised by the end, will be required. Or the student may choose to write a completely new piece for the second due date. Writing samples will be submitted and discussed on a bi- or tri-weekly basis.

Since this is a writing, not a literature course, readings will be assigned as the subjects they cover emerge in class; a rigid time frame for required readings is not practical.

There will be no examinations. Grades will be based on writing assignments, readings (short written reactions to texts will be required), and class participation.

535 (cross-listed with JST) / Israel / Palestine / America
Benjamin Schreier
T / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This course will examine the Israel-Palestine conflict through literary, cultural-political, and theoretical lenses. We will focus mostly on US-based English-language writing about Israel-Palestine, with an eye to how literature at once serves national-political projects and criticizes the cultural politics of representation. We'll analyze the role of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the history of the Jewish American and Arab American literary fields, paying special attention to the advantages and disadvantages of institutional categories such as Ethnic Literature, Americanism, and Historicism for thinking critically about identity in cultural and theoretical context. We will pay attention to the ways in which literature coordinates identity, intellectual-political affiliation, and geography against the backdrop of histories of colonial, neo-imperial, and Zionist involvement in the MENA region, and we will elaborate identity as a critical tool rather than presume it as a representational origin. Authors will likely include many of the following: Susan Abulhawa, Hala Alyan, Suad Amiry, Saul Bellow, Randa Jarrar, Amy Kaplan, Saree Makdisi, Tova Reich, Philip Roth, Etan Rum, Joe Sacco, Edward Said, Raja Shehadeh, I. F. Stone, and Zahi Zalloua. This course fulfills the post-1800 requirement. Writing assignments will include a handful of short response papers and a longish project which can either be a traditional (~20-25pp) seminar paper or something less traditional.

545 / Chaucer, Rhetoric, and the Art of Language
Caroline Eckhardt
F / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 132 Burrowes Building

This seminar is intended for students interested in becoming acquainted with major forms and themes of premodern English literature, and students who are preparing to teach or conduct research especially on Chaucer and other late medieval writers. For a glance at how literary cultures have been transformed over the centuries, we will look at critical responses to Chaucer from the fourteenth century until very recently (2023). We'll consider a variety of Chaucerian contexts, such as medieval rhetoric; the many genres evident in his works; questions of authorship and book history (in what sense could one argue that Petrarch and scribes such as Adam Pinkhurst helped to "write" Chaucer's works?); Chaucerian themes of social criticism, economic disparities, and political ethics; gender, ethnic, or racial bias in his works; the recent resurgence of interest in Chaucer's life (was he the rapist, or the protector, of a servant named Cecily Chaumpaigne?); and the problematics of teaching Chaucer and other medieval writers at the present time, when the term "medieval" carries a lot of baggage.

We will share the joys and challenges of working with Chaucer manuscripts, but no prior preparation in Middle English or manuscript studies is needed. The course will also consider publication opportunities and job placement in medieval fields; logistics permitting, we'll Zoom with recent Penn State medievalist Ph.D.'s who now hold academic and related jobs elsewhere.

Course Expectations: Class participation (30%); a brief proposal for the final project, in the format of a conference abstract (10%); a 15-20 minute end-of-semester presentation, in the format of a conference paper (25%); and a final project (35%) due during exam week. For the final project there are three options: (a) a research paper that might later become a journal article; (b) a pedagogical option, such as a course design and analysis, a media project, or an Open Educational Resources (OER) teaching module; or (c) a self-designed project that you can suggest for approval. Expectations for auditors are regular attendance and contributions to class discussion.

549 / Shakespeare: The Renaissance Concept of the Divine Human

Patrick Cheney

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

This seminar reads Shakespeare's poems and plays in terms of a neglected topic in Renaissance studies: the concept of the *divine human*. The concept originates in classical culture—Homer and Virgil speak of the epic hero as a “godlike man”—and it recurs during the Middle Ages—in Hildegard von Bingen, for example, or Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. During the Renaissance, the concept becomes a major preoccupation. In English Renaissance studies today, however, the *human as a human* (along with the sub-human) has become a major topic: the divine human has largely given us the slip. Nonetheless, in the Shakespeare canon, character after character gives voice to the concept, sometimes comically, sometimes tragically, sometimes romantically: genre tends to shape the form that the divine human takes. Early in his career, for instance, in the comedy *Love's Labor's Lost* Berowne criticizes Longaville for valorizing his beloved as divine: “This is the liver vein which makes flesh a deity, / A green goose a goddess,” yet he goes on to imagine himself a deity, in a self-conscious moment of Shakespearean authorship: “All hid, all hid, an old infant play. / Like a demigod here sit I in the sky, / And wretched fools' secrets headfully o'er-eye.” Shakespeare's recurrent story about a human taking on the divine speaks to the heart of the Renaissance, and we might hypothesize that it qualifies as a Shakespearean signature-- what W.H. Auden helps us classify as Shakespeare's contribution to Western art: in the *Sonnets*, Will perceives the Young Man as “a single person . . . of infinite sacred importance.” In such a model, Shakespeare pushes back against the premier models of his day: Christianity's godly person; Neoplatonism's lover of Ideal Form; Lucretius' faith in the divine atom; and especially Marlowe's Faustus, who longs to “make man to live eternally.” For Shakespeare, in contrast, the divine human emerges as a civic aspiration for “godly” excellence and achievement. The seminar, then, aims to demonstrate that the topic is rich for innovative research, in literature, philosophy, religion, history, and the humanities at large. We will read such works as *The Rape of Lucrece*, *As You Like It*, *1 Henry IV*, *Hamlet*, the *Sonnets*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Tempest*. The goal will be to examine Shakespeare's plays and poems in terms of the Renaissance figure of the ‘divine human’. To augment the primary readings, we will read two sets of secondary works: 1) studies of both the human and the divine human; and 2) studies of Shakespeare and of individual works. Weekly response papers to the primary readings; an in-class presentation on one Shakespearean work; an in-class presentation on a critical work; and a final research project that consists of an abstract and bibliography, conference paper, and professional essay.

564 / Studies in 19th Century American Literature

Christopher Castiglia

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

This course builds from the “postcritique” (Rita Felski) turn in literary studies to examine what it means to attach positively to the human and nonhuman worlds. We will examine concepts such as “the commons” (Dana Nelson), “radical democracy” (Douglas Lummis), “black aliveness” (Kevin Quashie), “queer utopia” (Jose Munoz), “reparative reading” (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick), “fugitivity” (Fred Moten), “friendship as a way of life” (Michel Foucault), “the force of fantasy” (Judith Butler), “critical fabulation” (Saidiya Hartman), “social reassemblage” (Bruno Latour), and “vibrant matter” (Jane Bennett) in literary works by nineteenth-century US authors such as Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Martin Delany, Henry David Thoreau, Hannah Crafts, Rebecca Harding Davis, Walt Whitman, and Sarah Orne Jewett.

584/ Studies in Rhetoric: Technical, Professional, and Digital Writing: A Survey

Stuart Selber

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

This seminar will investigate the landscape of professional, technical, and digital writing as both an academic enterprise and workplace practice. In 2017-18 (the pre-pandemic job market) there were over

100 jobs in this ever-growing area in English studies, which encompasses technical writing, business writing, computers and writing, and more. What do jobs in professional writing entail? What are the theories and practices that inform research and teaching? What approaches do people use to produce knowledge? We will answer these questions and others by considering histories, rhetorical perspectives, ethical and power issues, research methods, workplace studies, online environments, and pedagogical directions. We will also discuss career options in professional writing outside of academia.

597.1 / Writing Lives by Hand in 18th-Century England

Julie Park

T / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / E103 Paterno Library, Mann Assembly Room

Life writing has traditionally been viewed as encompassing such genres as diaries, memoirs, personal letters and autobiographies. But life writing in eighteenth-century England also emerged in mixed media formats too, such as extra-illustrated books, friendship albums, commonplace books, family recipe books, miscellanies, almanacs, and handwritten annotations in printed books. We will engage with excerpts from traditional literary sites of eighteenth-century life writing, from Boswell's *Life of Johnson* to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*. But this seminar will be mainly devoted to realizing through direct material analysis of eighteenth-century bibliographical artifacts how life writing and the life it both records and creates is inseparable from the materials, tools, methods and formats used to produce it.

Class sessions will be held in the Eberly Family Special Collections Library, and the final project will require the use of their collection. This project will include the curation of a class exhibition based on an eighteenth-century life writing item you adopt from the collection, and the writing of its biography as a critical essay. As a result of taking this seminar, you will fulfill the pre-1800 distribution requirement, acquire skills and experience in the material analysis of rare books and manuscripts, practice public humanities by communicating scholarly ideas, historical information and specialist concepts to a non-academic audience, and produce knowledge and original arguments that contribute to the scholarly fields of book history, bibliography studies, and literary studies.

The assigned classroom is the Mann Assembly Room, Room E103 Paterno Library (next to the Special Collections Library).

597.2 / Whither Postcolonialism?

Sean Goudie

M / 11:15 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. / 132 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 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. All along the way we shall see how the Caribbean has been a pivotal site for critique and literary and cultural production. All course readings are in English.

597.3 / Cultural Critique and High-Tech Capitalism

Matthew Tierney

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

What kinds of critique are appropriate to cultural production in a political economy centered on computers and computation? The fate of human lives has increasingly, some say fully, been determined

by actions taken in the tech industries; even as, at the same time, the tech industries themselves have lately become unpredictable, even unstable. The term "high-tech capitalism" was coined by late Frankfurt School thinker W.F. Haug to show, among other things, that the digital present is defined by conditions both new and old: on one hand, centuries-established industrial and mercantile conditions for procedures of labor and knowledge; and on the other hand, persistently newer machines for accelerating those same procedures. An array of new-but-old developments (e.g. automation, financialization, algorithmic prediction, component material extraction, military and carceral surveillance, union-busting of service and knowledge work, tech gentrification, greenwashing, and social media manipulation) has conjoined to mark, if unevenly, how any conceivable "we" might learn to describe "our" world with wisdom and consequent action. But which such developments, how many of them and how deeply, are cultural critics obliged to understand? Which mediations or methods might best suit a useful understanding? Following the successes of accountability journalism, might we learn to write and read a sort of "accountability criticism"? Or have opportunities for accountability criticism already passed from the institutions, such as they still are, of humanist pedagogy and print? Readings in theory as well as history, reportage, and possibly some literary and visual texts.

597.4 (cross-listed with APLING 597.2) / Disability, Rhetoric, and Language

Suresh Canagarajah

W / 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. / 171 Willard Building

Despite the prominent status of transdisciplinarity and intersectionality as buzz words in academia, language scholars haven't seriously engaged with disability. While diverse race and gender identities are beginning to be addressed, disability has been overlooked in communication sciences for many understandable reasons. Language studies are founded on the notion of humans as endowed with "linguistic agency," treated as the threshold capacity for inclusive citizenship and rights in the Global North. The dominant logocentrism in European epistemologies motivates the assumption that those without the capacity to speak can neither think nor convey their aspirations to claim their rights. Individuals whose communicative capacities are non-linguistic are deemed deficient and dependent on the care of specialized professions and institutions, such as medicine. Therefore, language scholars haven't faced the motivation or urgency to engage with disabled people or disability studies as centrally integrated in the concerns of their profession.

This course will review recent theoretical developments in disability studies and apply them to concerns in rhetoric, composition, and language studies. The course will trace the shifting paradigms from social constructionism to critical disability studies; identity politics to posthumanism; and rights to ethics. We will survey publications in rhetoric and composition, such as Jay Dolmage's *Disability Rhetoric* (2014) and Remi Yergeau's *Authoring Autism* (2018). We will explore orientations from linguistics in Ramanathan's *Bodies and Language* (2009) and Grue's *Disability and Discourse Analysis* (2015). We will discuss these texts in the context of theoretical contributions by Jasbir Puar (*The Right to Maim*, 2017), Tobin Siebers (*Disability Theory*, 2008), Shelley Lynn Tremain (*Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability*, 2017), and Nirmala Erevelles (*Disability and Difference in Global Contexts*, 2011). The course will explore how disability studies goes beyond the concerns of a special group of people defined as "disabled," to address questions central to life on what it means to be human, able, and communicative. These questions impinge on definitions critical for communication relating to norms, competence, coherence, and meaning. Throughout the course, we will consider the implications for disability access in educational policies and pedagogical practices through works such as *Mad at School* (Price, 2011) and *Dis-Crit: Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education* (Connor et al, 2015).

597.5 (cross-listed with CMLIT 504.1) / Global Surrealisms

Jonathan Eburne

W / 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. / 006 Sparks Building

Coinciding with the 2024 centenary of André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism*, this course explores the poetic practices, cultural exchanges, and political thinking of surrealist movements and their repercussions around the world.

Founded in Paris soon after the First World War, the surrealist movement strove—according to the group’s earliest manifestos—to “change life” and “transform the world,” claims adopted from Arthur Rimbaud and Karl Marx, respectively. Yet there is far more to surrealism than its historical point of origin; this course highlights contemporary approaches to the study of experimental literature and thought that highlight anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and counterhegemonic culture workers. From the early 1920s through the contemporary era, surrealism designates an explicitly international—and indeed, anti-nationalist—movement, gaining adherents in Brazil, Mexico, Haiti, Martinique, Cuba, the United States, Egypt, Senegal, Japan, Argentina, Chile, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Spain, and England, among other geopolitical sites. In turn, the anticolonial politics and non-national forms of surrealist artistic and political experimentation have been variously taken up, debated, contested, or otherwise adapted by artists, writers, organizers, and activists on every continent.

This course is, in sum, a course in global poetics and the politics of cultural transmission. Students in the course will be encouraged to draw from primary sources in surrealist (or anti- or para-surrealist) poetry, essays, discourse, periodical writings, and political tracts, as well as from secondary readings in cultural

criticism, in pursuing new research on global incarnations of surrealism: North Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, etc. In addition to providing an introduction to the study of global surrealism, this course will study the movement’s adaptations and transformations as a case study in cultural transmission.

VSTUD 502 / Visual Studies in Digitality

Tara Ward

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

Despite the fact that most of us spend an inordinate amount of time staring at screens, we rarely pause to think about how we look at digital media and what we see when we do. This seminar will investigate the visual aspects of our digital worlds.

Questions include:

- Can and should we distinguish digital from non-digital visual media?
- Are social media a special case?
- What forms of attention to digital media require?
- What are the contexts of its reception?
- Is there a high/low distinction in the digital?
- Does the text-image relation shift in the digital?
- Does digitality change the relationship between images and politics? Images and economics?
- Can and should we distinguish the digital from the “real” world?

In addition to theoretical readings from digital studies, communications, cultural studies, and art history, we will work with student-chosen examples. Come ready for sustained, critical, and close looking as we interrogate pictures made of 0s and 1s.