Fall 2016

English 8155 – Special Topics in English and American Literature: Proseimnar
Teresa Goddu

The Proseminar, the only course required in the English graduate curriculum, is designed for each year’s incoming class to provide and introduction to graduate studies, with attention to both practical and theoretical issues fundamental to graduate studies in literature in the 21st century. This year it will be taught by Professor Teresa Goddu. The Proseminar is limited to first-year graduate students only.

English 8155 – Special Topics in English and American Literature: Performance and Precarity in the Neoliberal Americas
Candice Amich

This course will serve as an introduction to hemispheric performance studies and will explore the growing archive of “precarity” theory coming out of feminist and affect studies, as well as international left movements in Latin American and Europe. Primary texts will include a diverse array of contemporary poems, plays, and performance from across the Americas. Theoretical readings will prepare students to write final papers that examine issues of performance, embodiment, and precarity across a variety of geographic and historic contexts. Drawing on my participation in the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics “Encuentro” in Santiago, Chile this summer, I will share with students the unique methods of scholarly collaboration and practice-based research that the interdisciplinary field of performance studies enables. Guatemalan poet and leading performance artist Regina José Galindo will be visiting the seminar to discuss the relationship between politics and aesthetics during her ten-day residency at Vanderbilt in late September.

English 8155 – Special Topics in English and American Literature: On Sincerity and the Media of Appearance
Jennifer Fay

Sincerity is the promise that we know what we think and mean what we say. It names an encounter with a speaker whose exteriority faithfully expresses her interiority, whose outer and inner natures are the same. Often a synonym for truthfulness and authenticity, sincerity is predicated on the body as a reliable image that can be acknowledged, and it is pinned on the hope that there is an autonomous and knowable self at the heart of language. Given widespread challenges to ascertaining the sincerity of speech as an act of performance, how can we approach the sincerity of such disembodied forms as photography, film, and the digital image? Any why should the sincerity of media concern us at all? For some, words and images help us to believe in the world and act in politically meaningful ways. For others, the truth claims of images and bodies are a gateway to a violent form of knowledge. This course aims to excavate theories of sincerity in relation to theories of photographic and digital media in order to understand what it means to "mean what you say" across different platforms and against the exigencies of a cynical political culture which both fetishizes and fundamentally undercuts seriousness.

The course unfolds in three non-chronological and unequal parts:

1. Philosophical / literary meditations on sincerity and its related terms of subjectivity, theatricality, and the body as a medium of affect and affectation; speech act theory; and the "ordinary language" philosophy.
2. Select film and photographic theory struggles with the truth claims of the cinematic image and the political necessity of performance, masquerade, and dissimulation as not only a mode of world critique but bodily survival.
3. The politics and poetics of hypocrisy and lying.

Digital world-making and sincere affects that circulate independent of subjects and bodies. What does it mean to "appear" on a digital platform? How may virtual and even virtuous digital-being recommit us to some kind of world belief? How may it betray the truth of the very bodies whose affects are now free floating?
Readings may include:

- Alphen, M. Bal, C. Smith (eds). *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*
- Groys, *Under Suspicion: A Phenomenology of Media*
- Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*
- Arendt, "Lying in Politics", selections from *Life of the Mind*
- Cavell, *The World Viewed*, selections from *Must We Mean What We Say?*
- Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*
- L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*
- Ellis and M. Kent, *Disability and New Media*
- N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* and selections from *The Crisis of Political Modernism*
- Lui, *The Freudian Robot*
- Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media*
- Doane, selections from *Desire to Desire* and *Femme Fatales*
- Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*
- A few novels, a few films, maybe a video game

**English 8155 - Special Topics in English and American Literature:**

**African American Poetry and Poetics, 1950s to the Present**

Vera Kutzinski

This seminar focuses on the poetic practices and theoretical propositions that have sprung from diverse twentieth-century African American poets' formal and thematic engagement with both the limitations and the possibilities of (artistic) freedom - freedom in relation to memory, witnessing, historical ruptures, and (in)voluntary movement (exile, travel, homecoming).

What visions have such poets to offer of survival, belonging, and living-together in the face of racialized difference, persistent misrecognition, and antiblack violence? As the vast majority of critical-theoretical pronouncements about African American literature have been and continue to be based on readings of narrative, it is well worth asking what poetry contributes to such formulations. What new or different questions does poetry raise? What "unspeakable" things to poets put into words? What are the poetics and the politics - if indeed they are different - that come into view when we read this body of work?

A major initial question is, of course: which or whose body of work? To address questions of academic canon formation, we will begin by comparing two recent and very different anthologies (available new at Barnes and Noble, but used copies available online):


From there, we will read select poems included in these anthologies in the context of the poetry books from which they were culled, asking what difference these historical and formal contexts make and how we engage with particular poems:


(Used copies of all of these editions are available online)

Finally, if we have time to do this, we will turn to the work of two poems rarely included in any anthologies and ponder why this might be so:

For practical reasons, this course is limited to poets from the USA. Because this is a survey, we will not be able to treat each work as exhaustively as we might like. This does not, however, mean that we will eschew detailed analytical readings of individual poems, only that we will be able to consider fewer poems closely. In addition to engaging in textual analysis, we will also read and discuss selections from scholarship about African American poetry in relation to our primary texts.

Procedures and Requirements: We will divide our time by spending 1:45 hours on discussing the texts. After a 15-minute break, we will then use the final hour to tackle concrete pedagogical questions, notably: what and how would you teach a given poem or set up poems in an undergraduate class? To facilitate this conversation, each of you will be asked to prepare a brief lesson plan for a poem (or poems) of your choice and model how you would teach this material. During the course of the term, you will write a short weekly paper (about 500 words) about the poetry and the theoretical issues at hand. Ideally, these short papers will become an interconnected series of writings. Your final project will be a detailed lesson plan or even a syllabus. I am also open to other options.

English 8155 - Special Topics in English and American Literature: Narrative/Theory
Kathryn Schwarz

This course revolves around a two-part question: How might we read narrative fictions as theoretical arguments? And how might we read theoretical arguments as narrative fictions? Pushing back against the distinction between paradigmatic texts and primary texts - or between master narratives and the raw materials onto which they can be mapped - we will take seriously the idea that "theory" not only elucidates fiction but also participates in and emerges from it. Our collective goal, then, is to recognize intersections rather than presume distinctions, and to pursue productive, reciprocal conversations between texts too often held apart by taxonomies of kind. We will begin with some of the earliest prose fictions in English, taking up the wildly experimental forms that proliferated in the 16th and 17th centuries. How might The Unfortunate Traveller, as an early instance of first-person narration, constitute an idea of the imperfectly interpellated (or "hailed") social subject? How might A Margaret of America address the postcolonial question of the subaltern's speech in a period when colonialism was an emergent ideology? How might Don Quixote, which was translated into English soon after its publication in Spanish, construct a paradigm for our relationship to metafiction? How might Assaulted and Pursued Chastity theorize both the conditions and the stakes of gender performativity? And - to approach the question from the other direction - how do the texts we tend to categorize as "theoretical" ground their logic in narrative conventions? From Althusser's anecdote of being hailed by the police to Anzaldua's meditations on being asked to write "as" a lesbian, theorists tell stories as a way of making connections and making sense. What creative, interpretive possibilities might this recognition of the familiar within the difficult or arcane generate for us? We have built some foundations for our inquiry, I will open up the syllabus to you, and invite you to select narrative fictions and theoretical issues from your own areas of interest to share with the rest of us. The project of the course is collaborative, and should range widely across historical periods and cultural fields. Texts will include four or five short prose fictions from the early modern period, Don Quixote, theoretical essays that resonate with these narratives, and whatever fictional texts you choose to share.

Spring 2017

English 8138.01 - Introduction to Literary Theory
Lynn Enterline

"Literary Theory" has made its way into the DNA of academic literary criticism, so this course will not attempt to chart all lines of dissemination and influence. Rather, it will go back to basics. Our primary aim will be to survey the classic texts by Freud, Marx, and de Saussure that give rise to what we have traditionally called "literary theory": we will investigate how their distinctive ideas about psychic life, capitalism, exchange, and the "semiotic turn" have influenced the texts of their mid-20th century inheritors - writers such as Derrida, Lacan, Althusser, Bourdieu, Goux, Kristeva, de Man -- and became, by that route, foundational for the theory canon that continues to grow today. This part of our course will involve studying the role "close reading" plays in generating theoretical insight, particularly close readings of ancient texts (e.g., Oedipus Rex, Platonic dialogues). This course's second, related aim is to survey and discuss the way that the status and significant of theory that has been renegotiated since the late 1960's as a result of interventions made by scholars working on questions of gender, sexuality, race, and nation. As part of this second aim, the seminar will involve guest appearances by a number of other faculty in our department; on those occasions, we will focus on reading around their selected texts, investigation the ways they engage literary theory in their own current work. It is likely that these sessions will involve thinking through issues such as tragedy, catastrophe, materialism, and queerness in relation to the theoretical texts we'll have read earlier in the semester.
English Graduate Courses offered 2016-2017

English 8155.01 – Special Topics in English and American Literature: Teaching as Text
Vera Kutzinski

Why is it so important that college students learn to write? What do they need to be able to do as writers and readers? How can analyzing literature help them write more effectively? What is literacy in the 21st century? How can we bridge the gap between training in literary studies and a career spent teaching students to write? How can we connect theory and practice?

In this graduate workshop-seminar, we will explore a range of possible answers to these questions. We will read about theory and practice in the field of writing studies, including articles from the journals College English and College Composition and Communication, and selections from anthologies and pedagogy handbooks such as Cross-Talk in Comp Theory, 3rd Edition (Villanueva 2011) and Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom (Bean 2011). (The latter two are the only two texts we ask you to purchase. Other readings will be supplied or on reserve at Central Library.) Student participants will develop a rich terminology for teaching; understand central issues and debates in writing studies, composition, and rhetoric; compare practices from a range of institutional settings; and define their own pedagogical positions as teachers of writing and literature. While readings will provide general overview of the fields of theories of writing and writing pedagogy, the course will also address practical topics. Among them are: how to teach writing in a literature class; how to teach writing with technology; how to design a course that supports a wide range of students including students with disabilities, first-generation college students, international students, and students for whom English is not a first language; and how to teach the topic-based writing courses that are typically offered in elite universities, liberal arts colleges, and first-year seminar programs. As their final project, students will draft and revise their own syllabi, assignments, and modes of evaluation for the courses they will teach in the fall. More specifics, including a detailed syllabus, to come by the end of this term.

English 8155.01 – Special Topics in English and American Literature: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines
Marzia Milazzo

It is easy for men to discount and misunderstand the suffering or harm done others. Once accustomed to poverty, to the sight of toil or degradation, it easily seems normal and natural; once it is hidden beneath a different color of skin, a different stature or a different habit of action and speech, and all consciousness of inflicting ill disappears. -- W.E.B. Du Bois

This course examines how the practices and paradigms of scholarly disciplines function to privilege colorblind solutions as responses to color-bound problems. Of course, denial and disavowal of racial power in our society protects privilege and serves a variety of political purposes. But in this course we will more specifically examine the ideal of colorblindness as a stance with embedded epistemological causes and consequences by uncovering and aggregating the existing knowledge that bears on this ideology and by putting this knowledge into conversation across disciplines and between institutions. As such, the seminar will be located in two overlapping arenas: the public policy / social justice arena in which colorblindness functions as a laissez-faire intervention against racial reform and redistribution, and the academic arena in which colorblindness characterizes the dominant stance of most disciplines with respect to race. Our goals in this course are to 1) Identify how the disciplines enable and inhibit understanding of race and racism because of colorblindness 2) Acquire an inventory of exemplary interdisciplinary works, methods, and theories 3) Stage creative conversations across disciplines 4) Identify how tropes like merit, market, and choice occlude racial power and 5) Demonstrate the migration of concepts across academic disciplines, journalism, philanthropy, public policy, and popular culture.

Rather than a traditional final paper, at the end of the semester students will be required to create a "colorblindness toolkit" that they can productively use to advance their own research projects.

Required books*
1. Robert Guthrie, Even the Rat Was White: A Historical View of Psychology
2. Claire Jean Kim, Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York
4. Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination
5. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People
6. Immanuel Wallerstein et al. Open the Social Sciences
* (additional readings will be posted on Blackboard)
English 8346.01 - Seminar in Seventeenth-Century Literature: Ecocritical/Early Modern
Leah Marcus

This course will survey the present status of environmental studies and ecocriticism with an emphasis on New Materialism, ecocritical theory, and English Renaissance literature. Topics to be included will be the ecocritical dimensions of pastoral literature from Virgil through Milton, Renaissance Utopias from Sir Thomas More to Margaret Cavendish, and ecocriticism and the drama, especially Shakespeare (King Lear and As You Like It), and Jacobean tragedy. We will continue with ecocritical approaches to Milton's Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained.

English 8420 - Seminar in Victorian Prose and Poetry: Race, Embodiment, and Victorian Aesthetics
Rachel Teukolsky

How did notions of race and human difference inflect Victorian aesthetic forms? The course begins with the truism that the British empire established contact zones in India, Africa, and the Caribbean islands (among others) where encounters with foreign peoples contributed to racist hierarchies of self and other. Yet British aesthetic embodiments are complicated and at times unpredictable. This course will pursue the question with an open-ended and multiform approach. We will explore how "race" itself was an unstable notion in the nineteenth century in ways that differ from our own moment (for example, Victorian writers imagined that works of art had bodies; that weather and environment affected one's race; and that German, French, and Irish people all belonged to different races). The course will explore the aesthetic effects of the complicated diaspora of African peoples around the world during an era of mass enslavement - particularizing the issue of American slavery, which dominated British cultural forums. We will also look to questions of embodiment and difference in more unusual places, such as the British Aesthetic Movement, when avant-garde writers and artists depicted bodies with a racialized whiteness in order to thematize deviance and sexual dissidence. The syllabus will be especially alert to instances of rewriting and adaptation, as successive writers take up previous forms to critique and remake them. The course welcomes both novices and experts in Victorian literature.

A provisional reading list includes: Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre; Charles Darwin, from The Descent of Man; Charles Dickens, Bleak House, and its rewriting as an American slave narrative in Hannah Crafts's Bondwoman's Narrative; Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"; essays on slavery by Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill; Dion Boucicault's stage melodrama The Octoroon (1859), with its contemporary rewriting in Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's play An Octoroon (2014); John Ruskin and D.G. Rosetti on bodies in art; Mary Seacole, The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands, alongside Crimean War poetry by Alfred Tennyson; and a section on 'imperial romance' with the adventure fiction of H. Rider Haggard (King Solomon's Mines), travel writing by Henry Morton Stanley (In Darkest Africa), Olive Schreiner's Story of an African Farm, and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. The course will likely conclude with Suzan Lori-Parks's contemporary stage play Venus (1996).

* Please note that, in order to lessen the reading load during the semester, the course will probably ask students to arrive on the first day having read Jane Eyre, a six-hundred-page novel.