English Graduate Courses offered 2017-2018

Fall 2017

English 8100 – Proseminar: The Conflict of the Faculties
Scott Juengel

Among the final publications of Immanuel Kant's lifetime was a curious little assemblage of essays called The Conflict of the Faculties (1798). Ostensibly aimed at protecting what we would now call the 'academic freedom' of the philosophy faculty from the incursions by the Prussian state, the treatise proceeds to veer into discussions of the history of human progress, mysticism in religion, sleep disorders, and how best to refrain from "morbid feelings." Our proseminar derives its energies and some of its structure from Kant's treatise in order to consider the state of our discipline in 2017. As the gateway course into the Ph.D. program, it is designed to reflect on a range of questions that tacitly give contour to nearly everything we do in this profession: What is the status of criticism / critique within the contemporary university? How best to think freely within an increasingly corporatized institution? What are the genres of scholarly expression and professional comportment necessary for success? How does the study of what we still call "English" bear the traces of its institutional history? What does the future hold for some of the structuring keywords of our discipline--periodization, national literature, field of study, the humanities, the archive, the book? How do we read and write and teach despite it all? How do we avoid morbid thoughts?

As these questions suggest, this course aims to shuttle--somewhat restlessly, uneasily--between theory and practice, such that we will discuss both the hyper-professionalization of academic life and the conceptual logics of institutional histories that give it value. So, for instance, when we reflect on a crucial survival skill like "time management," we will do so by thinking about how the untimeliness of late capitalism and networked culture has eroded the familiar measures of the day-to-day. Similarly, when we discuss academic writing we will also explore how the matters of "style" not only quicken our critical arguments, but also have an effective life of their own that is crucial to our sense of professional self-fashioning. On occasion we will stop to reflect on recent disciplinary development that refigure some of those things we in English Departments take for granted: the primacy of "close reading," the organizing principle of periodization, the endurance of the book, the epistemological structure of the classroom, the givenness of community. Because this is a seminar limited to first-year graduate students, I've designed it to allow us the flexibility to improvise on, and respond to, the trajectory of our conversations and the concatenation of our interests (e.g. few books to purchase; a "floating week" built into the reading schedule to assemble new resources, etc.).

English 8440 – Studies in Comparative Literatures: Idioms of Servility; or, Teaching the Caribbean in the Time of Trump
Colin Dayan

With representations of Jean-Jacques Dessalines as guide, we will track the traces of political resistance in theoretical and real time through the call of spirits and in scenes of law with Haiti in our focus.

The stakes are high. We will consider a new approach to "theory" by testing the divide between "the West and the Rest," between the so-called "First" and "Third" worlds, between center and periphery. Michel-Rolph Trouillot's writings, especially Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History and "Adieu Culture: A New Duty Arises" are central to our endeavors.

Topics include: 1) the politics of the under-read; 2) the uses and misuses of such popular terms as "hybridity," "postcolonial," and "creolity"; 3) representations of women and the sacred; 4) questions of language: "nation language" (Kamau Brathwaite); the "absent master" (Derek Walcott); 5) re-evaluations of that literary genre called "gothic."

Ultimately, in approaching the theoretical demands of varied and complicated cultural, societal, and literary histories, we will try to articulate a methodology for the study of the Caribbean--a way of reading and learning--that breaks down and reconstitutes such abstract and inevitably neutralizing distinctions as literate/illiterate, developed/underdeveloped, historic/prehistoric, all of which oversimplify the nature of the encounter between the Caribbean and the rest of the world.

Later in the semester, if time permits, we will turn to Susan Buck-Morse's Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History, as well as my Haiti, History, and the Gods; and to more recent works such as Jared Hickman's Black Prometheus; Angela Naimou's Salvation Work; Nihad Farooq's Undisciplined; and Kate Ramsey's The Spirit and the Law.

Additionally, for those who are interested, there will be an opportunity to meet every two weeks to track the traces of Dessalines through the writings of Hegel, Walter Benjamin, Otto Kirchheimer, Frantz Neuman, Hannah Arendt, and Carl Schmitt.
English 8331 – Studies in Medieval and Early-Modern British Literature: Renaissance Lyric
Jessie Hock

This seminar is intended as an introduction to English lyric poetry from the mid-sixteenth through the mid-seventeenth century, as well as an exploration of contemporary theorizations of lyric poetry both around and beyond the Renaissance. While it is not a survey (Shakespeare and Spenser, for example, will get short shrift), we will cover most of the important poetic genres and movements of the period, including petrarchism, metaphysical poetry, cavalier poetry, pastoral, devotional lyric, and more. Furthermore, the seminar aims to support students' development not just as readers and critics of Renaissance literature and culture, but as readers, critics, and teachers of poetry in general; it will thus function as a practicum of sorts in reading, analyzing, and writing about verse. Throughout the course, we will look both backwards and forwards in time, attending on the one hand to the classical forerunners of Renaissance lyric, and on the other to the payoffs those lyrics have today, in terms of influence but also in terms of theories of lyric. Our focus on the latter will take us, in the final weeks of class, beyond the Renaissance to consider the poet who has come to be vital to contemporary theorizations of lyric, Emily Dickinson, and also into students' own fields of specialization in the form of presentations on final projects, which will hopefully combine what we have learned of Renaissance lyric with their own interests and fields. Primary readings will include works by Francesco Petrarca, Pierre de Ronsard, Gasparo Stampa, Mary Sidney, Philip Sidney, Mary Wroth, John Donne, Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, Aemelia Lanyer, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, and more, along with a broad range of secondary and theoretical readings.

English 8370 – Literatures of the 18th Century: Experiments in Narrative in the Long 18th Century
Jonathan Lamb

There was a great deal of experimentation in genre in the 18th century, of which the most obvious examples would be the mock-epics which overflowed from satire into novels such as Fielding's Joseph Andrews, and the blending of history and fiction in utopian and satirical writing such as Delarivier Manley's The New Atlantis and Aphra Behn's Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister. There are more arcane specimens, of which Erasmus Darwin's The Botanic Garden, a sort of Lucretian-Linnaean verse-excursus into the sexuality of flowers, is perhaps the most astonishing. Sterne called his Tristram Shandy 'a book apocryphal' and defied anyone positively to categorize it, although it is clear he believed that it had a great deal of dramatic potential, and would have liked to see it staged by Garrick. So the course will explore various hybridities in prose-writing of the century, and these will fall roughly into the following sections:

Supplements: The continuation or elaboration of narratives of voyages and exploration such as Diderot's supplement to Bougainville's voyage to Tahiti. Here I am particularly interested in the anonymous Adventures of Hildebrand Bowman, recently republished by Broadview, which improves upon a dramatic part of Cook's second voyage, when ten of his men were killed and partly eaten by Maori.

Orientalizations: The use of The Arabian Nights and other collections of such as Pilpay's Fables in pornographic writing: Diderot's Indiscreet Jewels and Crebillon's The Sofa. Darwin's Botanic Garden will find a place here.

Encyclopedic Fiction: The premier example will be Tristram Shandy, a center-piece of the course, looking at Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, Bayle's Dictionary, Chambers's Cyclopaedia and the Encyclopedie in order to identify three distinct modes of narrating knowledge and experience that may be briefly characterized as the elliptical, parabolical and hyperbolical. A reference text will be John Bender and Michael Marinnan's The Culture of Diagram.

Spring 2018

English 8138 – Seminar in Critical Theory and Methodology: Postcolonial Theory
Ben Tran

This course examines the emergence, transformations, and challenges posed to the field postcolonial studies. We will study foundational texts of postcolonial studies, while also investigating how postcolonial theory intersects with and opens up to other
discourses and fields of inquiry, including racial capitalism, posthumanism, the Anthropocene, and world literature. We will begin by tracing postcolonial studies’ relationship to Marxism and then poststructuralism. The seminar will move on to explore how, in the wake of the Cold War, the field has grappled with globalization and neoliberalism. In our engagements with postcolonial writing, we will dram out the connections between postcoloniality and the current Trump era. Readings will include works by Hannah Arendt, Pheng Cheah, Hamid Dabashi, Franz Fanon, Leela Gandhi, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, C.L.R. James, Achille Mbembe, Mahasweta Devi, Aamir Mufti, Aihwa Ong, and Edward Said.

English 8331 – Studies in Medieval and Early-Modern British Literature:
Ovid and Early Modern Masculinity
Lynn Enterline

For ever-increasing numbers of male writers in the sixteenth century, Latin grammar schools ensured that the texts of antiquity were woven into the fabric of everyday life, informing vertical as well as proximate, horizontal relationships. As the literary texts of many former schoolboys attest, the texts of antiquity took on a far more vivid—and personally complex—presence than we can gauge through literary history alone, whether that literary history be construed as a question of allusion or inter-textuality. Despite (or perhaps because of), Ovid’s deliberately provocative depictions of sexuality, his rhetorically self-conscious poetry exploded onto the literary scene in London in the 1590s and continued to play a disruptive part in early modern depictions of gender and desire through the Civil War. Running counter to the claims humanists made about the civilizing effects of their classical curriculum, poets and dramatists practiced what they had learned—to imitate ancient authors—only to deploy Ovidian poetics as a way to interrogate the school’s definition of masculinity and declared end-game of useful eloquence; estrange normative definitions of gender and desire; and ventriloquize "female" voices in new forms of dissent and social critique. In addition, many of these authors return to the idea of metamorphosis in order to push the boundaries of conventional distinctions drawn between human and animal, human and landscape, human and thing. Beginning with The Metamorphoses, The Heroïdes and Petrarch’s autobiographical rendition of “the loves of the gods,” we will study the work of Ovidian cross-voicing and interrogation in poetic and dramatic works by Marlowe, Shakespeare, Lyly, Spenser, Webster, and Marvell, as well as by a handful of poets from the Inns of Court (Beaumont, Lodge, Marston).

English 8351 – Studies in 20th and 21st Century American Literatures:
The Idea of Black Culture
Hortense Spillers

The idea of black culture provides a reading of conceptualizations of the subject across a historical timeline that begins with W.E.B. DuBois's Souls of Black Folk (1903) and proceeds through successive periods of black cultural apprenticeship: The Pan-African idea, pursued as a practice after the end of World War I; the era of African decolonization and the mounting of the Civil and human rights campaigns in the United States, which both share the global context of the "Cold War" (from the Marshall Plan to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, 1989, and the dismantling of the Soviet Union, 1991), the "birth" of Black Studies and the development of the new epistemologies of the post-sixties and beyond, and the emergence of Diaspora and the post-race / post-colonial subject of the latter twentieth century—the implications of the Obama Presidency. Each of these eras of human and social engagement has engendered its own distinctive work on the meaning(s) of black culture. This seminar will examine such readings in a selective manner by analyzing texts by, among others, C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, as well as contemporary scholars, including Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, Nahum Chandler, Ken Warren, and Brent Edwards.

English 8351 – studies in 20th and 21st Century American Literatures:
20th Century American Political Fictions
Cecelia Tichi

Spanning the century, US writers’ narratives map the sociopolitical contours of a nation state beset by inequities of race, gender, and material distribution, together with dislocations from one region to another. The chronicles emerged from social, economic, and cultural contexts of 1900s urbanization and immigration, from the 1930s Depression, World War II, mid-century suburbanization, the Sixties, the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam, the deindustrialization of the U.S. and rise of Big-Box America. Granted that any one of these afore-named historical moments could furnish ample space for graduate-level investigation, this course offers the opportunity to survey the last century, which Time Magazine founder Henry Luce termed “The American Century.” The twentieth-century fictional strategies we will encounter range from putative omniscience to personal memoir to “new journalism.” This is primarily a reading course, though all seminar members will undertake research into scholarly responses to our readings and will collaborate with the group members in sharing findings. For those students whose primary area of specialization lies far afield of North American literature, this course offers the opportunity to develop a secondary area that can augment the doctoral portfolio.
English Graduate Courses offered 2017-2018

Texts for this course range from Upton Sinclair's The Jungle to Jack London's The Iron Heel, Faulkner’s The Wild Palms, Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath, Edward Abbey’s The Monkey Wrench Gang, Ellison’s Invisible Man, Ann Patchett’s Bel Canto, Joan Didion’s Political Fictions, Norman Mailer’s Armies of the Night, Baldwin’s The Fire Next Time, Morrison’s Song of Solomon.

English 8370 – Literature of the 18th Century:
Performing Persons and Places in the Long Eighteenth Century
Bridget Orr

The traditional literary historical account of the eighteenth century identifies the rise of the novel as the period’s main event. Both poetry and drama suffer by comparison, with the theatre in particular regarded as a scene of decline, important only in regard to the recuperation of Shakespeare and the development of naturalistic acting styles. Modifying these pejorative assessments, David Marshall pointed to the centrality of theatrical metaphors in the philosophical characterizations of sympathy while Jean-Christophe Agnew (extending work by Richard Sennett on public culture) suggested that rather than representative figures enacting conflicts on stage as in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, a theatricalized understanding of the self became general in the eighteenth century, rendering drama more marginal. In the last ten or fifteen years however, the cultural and political centrality of eighteenth century theatre has become more and more visible, radically revising the traditional and revisionist narratives. The theatre is understood as a privileged site for the performance of cultural, ethnic and racial difference (Roach; Ragussis; Gibbs); for the creation of modern celebrity culture (Roach; Nussbaum; McGirr); for the related development of new models of gendered identity (Freeman; Nussbaum) and for the creation of genres which form cinematic narrative and scenography (Williams; Marsden; Diamond). In addition, it is now understood that dramatic and novelistic forms are entangled rather than distinct, with modes of characterization, narrative management, scenic presentation and affective economies migrating from one genre to the other (Festa; Ballaster). This course will review classic scholarly accounts of novelistic emergence/dramatic decline and the recent revision of such arguments while reading paired sets of plays and novels from the Restoration through to the late eighteenth century. Each pairing will engage with issues including the performance of racial/ethnic/gendered/classed selfhood and the roles of celebrity performers as well as writers in reshaping genres and cultural institutions in this period.