English Graduate Courses offered in 2011

Fall 2011

English 303 (7430): Graduate Fiction Workshop: Narrative and Craft—Linked Story Collections  
Lorraine Lopez

This is a graduate workshop in fiction writing with an emphasis on narrative craft. As such, the workshop undertakes more complex and advanced consideration of elements of fiction and presumes members are already familiar with basic techniques of characterization, scene and narrative structure, and development of story. The function of this workshop is to help writers develop fiction they are actively engaged in creating, new work—published work, writing samples submitted for admission to the program, and work that has been turned in for other workshops may not be submitted for workshop—that will likely become part of the final thesis. This particular workshop will focus on the linked-story collection, as such, participants will read, present, discuss, and critique published linked-story collections by various authors, including Alice Munro, Anthony Doerr, Sarah Shun-lien Bynum, Daniel Bezmozgis, Barbara Johnson, and Daniel Mueenuddin. Additionally, workshop members will read articles on craft in Curious Attractions by Debra Spark, as well as attend literary events and participate in question-answer sessions with visiting fiction writers. Finally, being a responsible member of the writing community means promoting contemporary literature. Thus, workshop members will also compose a review of a newly released work of fiction for publication in an online or print venue during the semester.

English 304 (7440): Graduate Poetry Workshop  
Mark Jarman

English 307 (7460): Graduate Seminar: Literature and the Craft of Writing: Ma and Pa Poetry: Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman  
Kate Daniels

In this M.F.A seminar, we will read the complete poetry of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, along with several biographies and critical articles, addressing various aspects of each poet’s work. Our goal will be to understand something about the startling emergence of the first original voices in American poetry, to trace the critical reception of both poets over time, to explore their influence on twentieth century poets, and to read them as writers ourselves, examining closely selected technical aspects of their verse. We will begin with Dickinson. Over the summer, please read The Complete Poems of E.D. and the Sewell biography so that we can get right to work. During the second week of September, former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins will give a guest lecture on Dickinson and her poetry.

English 307 (7460): Graduate Seminar: Literature and the Craft of Writing: Where the Girls Are: Contemporary Women Short Story Writers and their Influences  
Nancy Reisman

In this course, we’ll explore the work of several late twentieth and twenty-first century women short story writers, delve into their various aesthetics, influences, and formal and thematic concerns. We’ll consider generational and cultural moments (with an eye on the intergenerational links and divergences); the sense of relationship, desire, and place within writers’ works; their visions of the short story form and uses of language; their representations of power and the power dynamics within forms; and their non-literary as well as their literary influences. Among the writers we’ll read and discuss: Grace Paley, Alice Munro, Angela Carter, Lorrie Moore, Deborah Eisenberg, Lydia Davis, Clarice Lispector, Aimee Bender, Jhumpa Lahiri, and several newly emerging story writers. Course projects will include engagement with art-making process and oral and written discussion of formal and cultural concerns.

English 355 (8155): Special Topics in English and American Literature: British Romanticism: Re-Orienting British Romanticism  
Humberto Garcia

This graduate seminar explores the complex ways in which Romantic poetry and fiction were enabled, in major part, by cross-cultural, political, and economic engagements with the Orient, defined (for the purpose of this course) as Muslim Afro-Eurasia with a particular focus on late eighteenth-century British India. In order to historically situate the Romantic fascination with the Orient, the first half of this seminar examines two formative periods: (i) George Sale’s English translation of the Koran (1734, rpt. in 1795) and the various "Lives of
Mahomet” that portrayed Islam sympathetically. (ii) Sir William Jones’ groundbreaking linguistic work on Sanskrit and Persian literature and the influential role of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta (established in 1784) for the discovery/construction of Hindu and Buddhist Enlightenments. The second half of the course examines the orientalist works of Edmund Burke, Elizabeth Hamilton, Sake Dean Mahomet, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and others. The primary goal is to rethink British Romantic literature in a global and transnational context, understanding the codes, rhetoric, and genres of Romantic Orientalism in relation to literary experimentation, revolutionary politics, British nationalism, and the colonial enterprise at home and abroad. Various theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches (in history, economics, religious studies, etc.) will be paramount, but revisionist scholarship in postcolonial studies will receive the most sustained attention. Hence, the first two weeks of class are dedicated to a reappraisal and reexamination of a much-disputed but seminal theoretical text: Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978).

Because this seminar is designed for specialists and non-specialists alike, the required 20-30 page seminar paper (50% of your total grade) could reflect related literary and theoretical issues in other fields and periods of interest. Class participation (10%), a formal presentation on assigned secondary readings (10%), and a seminar paper abstract (10%) are also required. The semester culminates in a conference-style oral presentation based on your revised abstract (20%).


**Teresa Goddu**

This course will focus on the emergence of a national literary marketplace in the U.S. antebellum period by examining how the market revolution structured the trade to print.

In examining print as both a cultural form and a marketable commodity, it will situate texts within a variety of distributional, technological, consumerist and discursive networks. It will historicize and theorize modes of antebellum authorship, circulation, and readership as well as attend to particular genres and forms. Our specific case studies will be drawn from early African American print culture. Indeed, we will use African American literature as our lens through which to understand the antebellum period.

This course will introduce students to archival research methods as well as to the interdisciplinary methodology of print culture studies which maps the relationships between the materiality of the text (its publication history or status as a commercial commodity) and its meaning. While the course will be focused on the U.S. antebellum period for its historical frame and African American literature for its case studies, its methodology is transferable to all literary fields. All students with an interest in print culture studies are encouraged to take this class. The class will consist of weekly archival exercises and several mid-sized papers that synthesize the class’s methodologies.

**English 355(8155): Special Topics in English and American Literature: Poetry**

**Vereen Bell**

Up to a point this seminar will be experimental in that the texts we use and approaches we take will be determined by the needs of the students enrolled. The long-range plan is to create a model for future seminars like it that other instructors can teach. The seminar will have two objectives. The first objective is to refresh and calibrate our close-reading skills (which apply, of course, to other texts as well as to poetry) and to form an understanding of the formal strategies by means of which poetry addresses its audience, both in the present and in its original historical moment. The second objective is to examine representative longer poems as they are contextualized and interpreted by the different critical approaches which currently prevail in our profession. The first three weeks of the seminar will be devoted to poetry reading boot camp, involving reading and discussing a variety of poems—both canonical and contemporary selected to represent the range of possibilities of poetic expression. After that stage—for the next twelve weeks—we will examine at two or three week intervals major poems or clusters of poems selected (by the class, more or less) from a group which will include Shakespeare’s sonnets; Keats’s odes, Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Tennyson’s In Memoriam, Yeats’s “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” Eliot’s The Wasteland, Frost’s North of Boston, Plath’s Ariel, Adrienne Rich’s Twenty-One Love Poems, and Yusef Komunyakaa’s Dien Cai Dau. The procedure with the longer poems will be first to discuss the poems themselves (without outside help, so to speak) and then to discuss and evaluate critical and scholarly writings about those poems. Where it is possible, expert visitors will be invited in to guide our discussions at relevant points and walk us through the hard parts, giving us the benefits of their training and special interests.

At the end of the boot camp phase, students will be required to submit at least one close-reading analysis of a specific poem. At the end of the second phase, students will submit a longer paper on a more substantial single poem or cluster of poems, by a poet of the student’s choosing that replicates the methodologies and the research-based analysis we will have used in the second phase.
English Graduate Courses offered in 2011

English 355 (8155): Special Topics in English and American Literature: Maladies of Attention: The Distracted Subject of Cinema
Jennifer Fay

As Jonathan Crary argues, the norms of attention have arisen in relation to the reciprocal and inseparable phenomena of modern distraction. Paradoxically, distraction may be a tool of attention, and thus attention, as a discrete category of perception, poses several challenges to theorization. Beginning in the 19th century and working towards more contemporary cinematic practices, this course queries the tension between various modes of distraction that are intricated in absorbed perception, specifically cinematic perception. It proposes to reassess some of the canonical films and texts of film theory (realist, surrealist, feminist, Marxist…) that are predicated on distinctions between spectacle and narrative, shock and absorption, fragmentation and totality, and masculine and feminine feeling. The course will also engage films and readings that are not typically theorized together. By pairing theory/criticism and primary texts across a range of media, we will probe the thresholds of modern perceptual, affective, and political states of mind.

To give but two examples: we will read Gustav Flaubert’s 1857 Madame Bovary with Chantal Akerman’s 1975 experimental film Jeanne Dielman while reading excerpts from Lars Svendsen’s A Philosophy of Boredom (2005) and Elizabeth S. Goodstein’s Experience without Qualities, at the interstices of attention and commitment, we will ponder the emaciated body as a spectacle of suffering, a narrative of virtuosic self-mastery, an index of oppression, as well as a sign of political withdrawal (in both sense of that word). We will pair such texts as Steve McQueen’s Hunger (2008), Franz Kafka’s “Hunger Artist” and the writing and films of Brazilian Cinema Nova’s most outspoken theorist, Glauber Rocha (“An Esthetic of Hunger,” 1965) for whom the depleated body finds its revolutionary representation in the “sad, ugly…screaming, desperate” films of underdevelopment. This class takes seriously such attentive diversions as forgetfulness, indifference, boredom, repetition, disgust, and obsession, and it will attempt to connect them to a range of modern conditions and affectations.

There will be mandatory screening outside of class every week at a time and place to be determined.

English 355 (8155): Special Topics in English and American Literature: Proseminar: Bodies and Subjects: The Violence of Social Contract
Kathryn Schwarz

In this course, we will think about the costs and rewards of social subjectivity. The costs are familiar elements of our analytical vocabulary, from interpellation and false consciousness to abjection and ideological joissance. For that very reason, it is worth looking closely at the privileges conferred on the social subject. However illusory those privileges may be, they defend against the immanent capacities of the body: to nurture disease, to succumb to desire, to be in peril or out of place, to die. Those capacities exceed the reach of agency or intention, and locate the body in a transactional, mutable, and dangerous intimacy with the world.

Of course we know this; here we will concentrate on the stories told to manage that knowledge. One of those stories involves a notion of contract that upholds social integrity regardless of individual costs. If such contracts produce the hierarchies and exclusions that motive ideological critique, they also rewrite the meaning of transience: temporary bodies sustain social permanence, and self-loss is always someone else’s problem. Collective priorities thus have a peculiarly protective effect, even in their most oppressive forms. This perhaps sheds some light on the difficulty of radical change, even when we possess an articulate awareness of the coercions and seductions that shape social life.

We will build an archive that gives us tools for thinking about ideology in its various guises—language, labor, and history, consent, desire, discipline, and law—drawing on such theorists as Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Carla Freccero, Jacques Lacan, Elaine Scarry, and Slavoj Zizek. We will spend a few weeks with Renaissance texts to consider the significance of assigning a “birth” to the modern subject: what happens, for example, if we set the “subject” of Foucault’s discipline beside the “subject” of Jacob Burkhardt’s individualism, and look at a play by Marlowe or Shakespeare through both lenses at once? As we move though the semester, students will have opportunities to assign texts—literary, historical, critical, and theoretical—that represents the periods, forms and methodologies with which they are most concerned.
English Graduate Courses offered in 2011

Spring 2011

English 303 (7430): Graduate Fiction Workshop
Tony Earley

English 304 (7440): Graduate Poetry Workshop
Kate Daniels
This is an intensive workshop in poetry writing. Students are expected to complete 10-12 new poems (or the equivalent) over the course of the semester, or to engage in extensive revision of the poems in the thesis. Reading list: individual volumes of poetry by the poets who will visit campus as part of the Visiting Writers Series, including Frank Bidart, Jericho Brown, Ciaran Carson, Mark Jarman, and Bobby Rogers. Several of these writers will visit the class. In addition, we will read several essays on relevant issues in contemporary poetry and poetics, as they arise from the work under examination in the workshop. Extensive revision and regular conferencing within the instructor are expected.
For National Poetry Month in April, students (working individually or together) will devise projects that are campus or community-based. Documentation of these projects will be part of the portfolio due at semester’s end. Finally, collaborating with the Art Department, M.F.A. poets will be asked to create brief texts for an on-campus art installation that will be directed by Professor Mel Ziegler.

English 305 (7450): Graduate Nonfiction Workshop
Peter Guralnick
This is a workshop on creative nonfiction, which revolves around the writing of the participants, with additional readings in work by such writers as Gay Talese, Gary Smith, Jack Kerouac, Wil Haygood, Rosanne Cash, and Alice Munro. It will focus on issues of characterization, narrative technique, selectivity of details, and angle of perception, with special emphasis on the profile—in other words, how to make a real-life story come alive in the same way that fictional narrative can. This is a workshop in which we are all interdependent on each other’s efforts. Three major pieces of 2,500-3,000 words will be required, along with the possibility of some brief additional exercises. Every student in the course will critique each of the other students’ papers in writing, and the class will consist primarily of constructive discussion of the work. Class participation is the second most important element of the class (after the writing itself), so attendance is of the highest importance. Most of all, the workshop is a kind of shared enterprise in which a mutual enthusiasm for writing (irrespective of the level of achievement) should make it engaging—and fun—for all. The only prerequisite is a commitment to effort and honest self-expression.

English 307 (7460): Literature and the Craft of Writing: Why Write: Perspectives on Literary Creativity
Kate Daniels
In this seminar designed for graduate students in creative writing, we will consider why people write poems, novels, plays, and short stories. What is the ancient and cross-cultural urge to express oneself creatively in written language all about? What is the function of the literary imagination in individual lives, as well as in larger social and cultural contexts? Finally, because this is a seminar for creative writers, we will ruminate on this question posed by Australian novelist Sue Woolfe: “What are people who whit in rooms making up stories doing in their minds?” We will essay responses by exploring three current approaches to understanding literary creativity: psychoanalysis, neuroscience, and (for lack of a better term at present) aesthetics. Reading for this part of the semester will include: Freud’s “The Creative Writer and Daydreaming” and “On the Mystic Writing Pad,” Jung’s “On the relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry,” Edmund Bergler’s “Unconscious Mechanisms in Writer’s Block,” Alice Flaherty’s “The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer’s Block, and the Creative Brain,” Sue Woolfe’s “The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady: A Writer Views at Creativity and Neuroscience,” and several other essays and book excerpts.
During the second half of the semester, we will hear from writers themselves—George Orwell, Virgina Woolf, William Styron, Sylvia Plath, Joan Didion, Eudora Welty, Alice Welker, et al—about why they (think they) write, and how they imagine the relationship of their “selves” to the texts they create. Of particular interest may be our inquiries into ideas about mental and physical illness and writing; addition and writing; gender and writing; and confinement and writing. We will end the semester by critiquing two films that feature writers as main characters as a way of taking about some of the common ideas and stereotypes of writers and artists perpetuated by mass media.
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**English 314 (8360): Seminar: 1660–1800: Theater and Empire**  
Bridget Orr

This course is focused on the role of theater in the development (and contestation) of English / British ideologies of nation and empire in the long eighteenth century. We will be reading major dramatic works from Dryden to Inchbald, tracing the emergence and revision of late Stuart, Tory, Whig, Patriot, Walpolean, radical and Pittite defences and critiques of colonialism. But rather than reading the texts solely as vehicles for particular Court/factional or party positions, we shall consider generic changes, including the rise and fall of heroic, pathetic and sentimental modes; the emergence of pantomime, ballad-opera and musical comedy; and what Michael Ragussis calls multi-ethnic spectacles, in the theatrical construction of national and imperial spectators. Our inquiries will be informed by the ancient question as to why Georgian dramaturgy seems to fall away so sharply from the achievements of Restoration playwrights despite the cultural centrality of theatre throughout this period.

**English 320 (8450): Studies in American Literature: Democratic Frontiers**  
Dana Nelson

Where does democratic power originate? Where does it abide? What contains and guards it? Who exercises it and by what right? Is its exercise inevitably through sovereignty, singular and unified through symbol, formal government or representative actor? Or can it be generated—not just effectively but maybe ethically—in plurality, collaboratively, as a commons? These are not just theoretical questions addressed by theorists of democracy from Schmitt and Agamben to Derrida, Hardt, and Negri; they are historical too. In this course, after touring through some recent interdisciplinary work that re-thinks the history and sovereignty in the early years of the nation, we’ll investigate how early U.S. literature can help us animate historical questions about U.S. democracy, and suggest how it fleshes out some recent theorizing about constituent power, or the power of the multitude, while challenging us to think beyond familiar categories. We’ll pay especial attention to frontier literature, for what it has to tell us both about how more equalitarian practices were being represented as “pre-political” and “savage” in the early nation, and for how those practices continued showing up well into the nineteenth-century. And we’ll think about theories, histories, and practices of communing and their relation to alternative democratic practices.


We’ll read histories by Woody Holton, Terry Bouton, Christian Fritz, Reeve Huston, Laura Edwards, and Ron Formisano; political theories by some of the above and Melissa Orlie, Suzette Hemberger, and Sheldon Wolin, and assorted literary critics like Jennifer Greiman and Mark Rifkin.

**English 337B (8450): Introduction to Literary Theory: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Multiculturalism**  
Robert Barsky

This course will survey central postcolonial theories as a way of thinking about some crucial issues relating to the postcolonial and multicultural experiences, and the issues raised by the integration of people into a host country subsequent to significant upheaval in their country of origin. Along the way, we will examine the implications of colonial encounter, and formation of idea “post-colonial” culture, particularly in a multicultural urban setting. Subjects include language, freedom and agency, gender roles, representation of space, and relation between power and narrative. By comparing details of the legal procedure leading to immigrant or refugees status to the experiences recounted in the fictional texts, we will also have occasion to discuss the conflicting images that the society projects onto its ethnic groups, and the effects they have upon individuals attempting to find their way “home” in fiction and in life.

**English 355 (8155): Special Topics in English and American Literature: Cinema and the Thics of Desire: Love, the Other, and the Body in the Film Image**  
Sam Girgus

The relationship of ethics to love, sexuality, and the body in American and international cinema as seen through the writings and thought of leading modern thinkers including Freud, Kristeva, Irigaray, Ricoeur, and Levinas. *The course will consider the body on film as the condition of the ethical relationship to the other. The course will propose a systematic methodology based on psychoanalysis and modern ethics for studying film as a heterogeneous “cinetext,” meaning a complex art form of vision and sound. We will examine such interconnected themes as time and the feminine; the maternal body and the ideology of love; sex and redemption; subjectivity, the law, and the other; paternal power and the missing male.*
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We will concentrate on studying the relationship between the art of the film image (cinematography, editing, sound, etc.) and the themes of the body and ethics, often in the contexts of national, social, and cultural ideologies. This course will be geared for both beginning and advanced students. We will choose a workable number of films for study from a wide-range of diverse films from Bergman, Chereau, and Bunuel; classics by such American directors as Ford, Capra, Hawks, Scorsese, Allen, Lee, Lynch, and Eastwood; the innovative cinema of Almodovar, Oshima, Del Toro, Inarritu, among others; historic and current women directors such as Ida Lupino, Julia Dash, Agnes Varda, Debra Granik, and Lisa Cholodenko; and various adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays. We will consider studying films that test the increasingly porous line between the sexualized screen body and the soft pornography of American popular culture today.

* Suggested critical and theoretical readings will include writings by Kelly Oliver, Tina Chanter, Ewa Ziarek, and Richard Kearney, among others.

English 355 (8155): Special Topics in English and American Literature: Black Male Writers: The Troika Plus One

Hortense Spillers

Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin might arguably be thought of as the major African-American writers of the post-World War II period and as a result, the chief voices of black post-modernism; the youngest member of this literary combination, David Bradley, writing in the wake of his “elders,” shows traces of that past, as well as strides toward new ground. This course is devoted to a study of these figures and the “anxieties of influence” that make it possible for us to read them as a kinds of “visionary company.”