

## Graduate Course Descriptions Spring 2014

### **636 History of Literary Criticism**

Cassvan Jeffrey M 4:30 Code: 37841

This course provides a thorough introduction to the main concerns of literary criticism and literary theory. We will begin with a careful reading of a few texts by Plato and Aristotle and then turn to a consideration of the diverse perspectives on literature (including Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Formalism, Structuralism, Semiotics, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Gender Studies and Queer Theory) that have emerged during the twentieth century. The most stimulating and far reaching theoretical insights very often arise out of reading encounters: Derrida's careful readings of Plato and Rousseau, Lacan's reading of Freud, Freud's own reading of literature and of the German language, Althusser's reading of Marx, Butler's reading of Derrida's reading of Austin, to cite a number of important examples. Accordingly, we will treat the texts of critics and theorists as primary and will attend throughout the semester to the fallout of what Paul de Man has described as literary theory's "necessarily pragmatic moment...that adds a subversive element of unpredictability and makes it something of a wild card in the serious game of the theoretical disciplines." So while we will make use of the introductory materials and organizational format provided in the second edition of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, we will resist and question the tendency to produce or rely upon simple summaries and paraphrases of difficult arguments and points of view and our class sessions will be devoted to reading encounters with very specific paragraphs and pages in the assigned works. These primary critical and theoretical texts will often be supplemented with a wide range of literary materials (poems, short stories, essays, translations) made available on Blackboard.

### **638 Contemporary American Theater**

Sirlin Rhoda F 4:30 Code: 37769

This course will focus on recent Pulitzer Prize-winning American plays, exploring themes and approaches of contemporary dramatists and what their plays reveal about American culture. We will discuss the works of both male and female playwrights, discovering any similarities and differences. We will explore connections to ancient Greek tragedy and to the social realist plays of Henrik Ibsen. We will also look for any trends or dominant subject matter revealed in late 20<sup>th</sup>-century and early 21<sup>st</sup>-century American theater. Some of the plays we will cover are *'night*, *Mother*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *How I Learned to Drive*, *Wit*, *Dinner with Friends*, *Doubt*, *Rabbit Hole*, *August: Osage County*, *In the Next Room*, *The Glory of Living*, *Water by the Spoonful*, and *Disgraced*.

### **701 Studies in Graduate Methodology (open only to entering MA students)**

Drury Annmarie T 4:30 Code: 37516



**736 Myth and Archetype**

Schechter Harold

M 6:30

Code: 37747

The class will be devoted to the theory and application of myth criticism. Based on the depth psychology of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, this approach posits that myth-making is a basic function of the human imagination. Though the images of myth may disguise themselves in new and different forms, they never disappear. “Myths,” says the Roman historian Sallust, “are things that never happened but always are.” We will begin our semester with a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this methodology, followed by a look at those fundamental patterns of myth that Jung calls “archetypes.” Then—by examining classic literature, folklore, and popular entertainment—we will see how these timeless and universal patterns appear again and again, giving shape and meaning to imaginative works of every kind.

**742 Tragedies of Revenge Before and After *Hamlet***

Walkden Andrea

W 4:30

Code: 37820

Carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts shall be our theme as we investigate tragedies of revenge from their theatrical beginnings in classical Athens to their commercial heyday in Elizabethan and Jacobean London. We’ll be reading three plays by Shakespeare—*Titus Andronicus*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet*—alongside those of his contemporaries and competitors, including plays by Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton, John Webster, and John Ford, before concluding with a twentieth-century revenge play-within-the novel, Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*. Drawing on ancient and recent thinking in Judeo-Christian theology, moral philosophy, legal theory, and anthropology, we’ll situate these literary works, and their relations to one another, within a broader exploration of vengeance culture. Topics of discussion will include: the psychology of the revenger; retaliatory justice; extra-legal redress and abuses of power; sexual identities and atrocities; body parts and body counts; sensationalism and theatrical one-upmanship; revenge-play laughter and the aesthetics of violence. Over the course of the semester, students will develop a research project or prepare a curriculum unit related to the seminar’s central questions, theoretical concerns, and primary texts.

**681 Black Masculinities on the Market**

Grier Miles

T. 6:30

Code: 37606

Think of the last time you heard the language of hip-hop--in person, on your iPod, or on screen. Though hip-hop began in the impoverished urban areas of the Caribbean, Brooklyn, and the Bronx in the 1970s and came to be dominated by male recording artists in the 1980s, it is not uncommon now to hear its trademark phrases spoken by those who are neither black nor male. Could it be that the idioms of African-American men have come to signify one’s belonging in the United States, understood as a multiracial frat party?

This course examines the gendered, national, and sexual selves that have emerged over four centuries of people positioning themselves in relation to black men. I do not seek to present to you black culture as it is. Instead, we will consider how people of all backgrounds derive pleasure, achieve social standing, and assume powers, and liberties by interacting with *imaginary* black men.

Our investigation into the making and enjoyment of blackness will include theories and histories of desire, gender, labor, ideology, and consumption. We will build and test our own theories and histories using and literary and cultural examples. Texts will come from the history of Atlantic slavery, psychoanalytic theory, British and US-American literature, film, and popular music studies. Possible works studied may include those of: historians Walter Johnson and Stephanie Smallwood; fiction writers Aphra Behn, Herman Melville, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, and Mat Johnson; filmmakers Spike Lee, Quentin Tarantino, and Dee Rees; and samples of jazz, blues, rock, gospel, and hip-hop. Both oral presentations and regular writing are required.

**781 Creative Writing: How to Write and Teach Creative Writing**

Hahn

Kimiko

W. 4:30

Code: 37613

Can creativity be taught? In the sense that a good teacher can guide a student--yes! And the first step is for "the guide" to write then participate in a workshop; in this setting, each participant will learn how to create a vocabulary to critique the student-writer. This vocabulary must be clear and constructive, as opposed to subjective and destructive. Our class will be part writing workshop and part exploration of pedagogy. The readings will draw from writers of varying eras, styles, and subject matter. Students will workshop each others drafts as well as read and respond to a range of texts on the challenges of teaching. The latter will include essays by Madison Smartt Bell, Vivian Gornick, Richard Hugo, Sei Shonagon. With permission of the instructor and the Director of Graduate Studies, students may substitute this course for English 703, Composition Theory and Literacy Studies.

**781 Laughing Matters: Asian American Comedy and Humor**

Hong

Caroline Kyungah

Th. 6:30

Code: 37624

In US popular culture, comedy and humor have historically been used to make fun of and to mark Asians and Asian Americans as alien and other. This course examines comedy and humor in Asian American literature and culture, which use the same mediums to disrupt stereotypes and fixed notions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and so on. By studying this vital yet underexamined aspect of Asian American history and culture, we will define and explore an Asian American comedic tradition, which is vast and varied, spanning all forms of mainstream and independent media and a wide range of genres and subgenres. We will also engage many of the major critical debates and theoretical concerns of Asian American literary and cultural studies through the lens of comedy/humor. Questions we will address include the following: How have Asians and Asian Americans been made objects of humor in US pop culture? How do we account for the relative lack of representations of Asian Americans as agents (as opposed to objects) of humor? How do we account for the scholarly neglect of funny Asian American cultural productions? What are the various kinds of work—social, cultural, political, psychic, etc.—that Asian American comedy and humor can do, with all their attendant limits and possibilities? Texts for this class may include works by Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Chin, Gish Jen, Ruth Ozeki, Karen Tei Yamashita, Gene Luen Yang, and others, as well as a wide range of theoretical and critical readings.

**781            The Graphic Novel**

Orchard

William

W 6:30

Code: 37700

The graphic novel is often defined as a book-length narrative of sequential art, which resembles the comic book but is finally distinguished from it by its length, literary and artistic sophistication, and adult readership. The term has thus been used to lift comics out of the specialized enclaves of the newsstand, comics bookstore, and comics convention and into the culturally sanctioned spaces of the library, museum, and college classroom. While the term successfully achieved this aim, it also produced an unnecessarily rigid division between graphic novels and the comic book and comic strip traditions that preceded them. In this course, we will situate alternative comics from the 1980s onward in a longer history of comic art in order to understand how contemporary graphic novels are in dialogue with the innovative comic art of the early twentieth century. This earlier work exposes how the comics medium has long articulated a distinct response to and critique of American modernity. This class aims to understand the graphic novel as not only a *genre* of literature but also a *medium* with its own specific qualities that influence the reader's experience of the text and that impact our attempts to make meaning. To help us develop a vocabulary for performing medium-specific analyses of comics, we will read theorists and critics like Walter Benjamin, Scott Bukatman, Hilary Chute, Jared Gardner, Thierry Gronsteen, Miriam Hansen, Charles Hatfield, N. Katherine Hayles, Scott McCloud, and W. J. T. Mitchell. In addition to considering the medium-specific qualities of graphic novels, we will also consider how graphic novels enlarge our understanding of familiar literary genres like memoir, biography, and travelogue. We will pay special attention to the graphic novel's ability to represent many forms of embodiment. We will read an array of graphic novels and comic art by authors like Lynda Barry, Alison Bechdel, Howard Cruse, R. Crumb, Phoebe Gloeckner, Gilbert Hernandez, George Herriman, Frank King, David Mazzucchelli, Winsor McCay, Adrian Tomine, Art Spiegelman, and Chris Ware.

**791            Thesis Course**

Walkden

Andrea

W 6:30

Code: 37831

Enables students to write their culminating thesis essay. Students must submit a Thesis Sign-Up Form to the Director of Graduate Studies in order to register for this course.

**795            Independent Study**

Hong

Caroline Kyungah

TBA

Code: 37621

Tutorial for work in a special subject not covered by regular course offerings. May be repeated for credit if the topic is different. Open only to candidates for the MA in English. Registration by permission only. Please schedule an advising appointment with Caroline Kyungah Hong if you wish to register for this course.