

QUEENS COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS
SUMMER 1 2012

English 719: The Middle English Romance

Michael Sargent

M. T. W. TH, 6.45-8.25

Code: 1236

The romance was not just a genre of exciting adventure tales, but a place for the exploration of nationality (Celtic/French/English), temporality (classical/medieval), class (courtly/villainous/wild), humanity (or faery?), emotion, desire. In this course, we will read a number of medieval English romances, including “Lanval”, “Sir Orfeo” and “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.” Because we will be reading these texts in the original, this course satisfies the English language/grammar/linguistics requirement.

English 781: #occupytheaestheticsofdisaster

John Weir

M. T. W. TH, 6.45-8.25

Code: 5861

“Don’t trust the corporate media,” says Occupy Wall Street, resisting the news media’s attempts not just to reduce the Occupy movement to a sound bite, but to turn it into a story about itself: to undermine its influence by rendering it as mere narrative. Yet is it possible to report an event, particularly an uprising or a catastrophe – corporate greed, economic collapse, social upheaval – without aestheticizing it? Without turning everything into just “a great story?” “Writers are always selling somebody out,” Joan Didion says, by which she means that a journalist necessarily has an agenda, personal, political, and/or aesthetic. She may also mean that representation – the literary or writerly or artistic rendering of daily reality – is inevitably a falsehood. In this course we will look at several books and a few films that offer a documentarian perspective on turbulent eras and their widely reported social and political ramifications, asking ourselves to what degree the writer/filmmaker affects, manipulates, revises, and/or invents the action she or he is reporting. We will also wonder about the complexities of representation. Texts will be drawn from a list that includes Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, James Baldwin’s *The Devil Finds Work* (1976), Katherine Boo’s *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2012), Joan Didion’s *Political Fictions* (1992), Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* (1968), George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2002), David Foster Wallace’s two nonfiction collections, and Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968). Films may include Jean-Luc Godard’s *One Plus One* (aka *Sympathy for the Devil*) (1968), Chris Marker’s *A Grin Without a Cat* (1977) and *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon* (1967), Shirley Clarke’s *Skyscraper*, and Agnès Varda’s *Lions Love* (1969). Students will also track the daily news cycle, with particular attention to current national media events, such as for instance Trayvon Martin’s death in a gated community in Florida; Occupy Wall Street’s American spring; ACT UP’s 25th anniversary actions; and the Republican presidential campaign. Students will maintain daily contact with outside-the-mainstream news outlets, including websites and blogs such as truthdig, AlterNet, Daily Kos, Feministing, AMERICAblog, Joe. My. God., Pam’s House Blend, field Negro, Akram’s Razor, etc. Along the way, Students will produce their own journo-

reportorial-personal-essayistic work, in response to class readings and/or the vicissitudes of their immediate everyday (extra)ordinary world.

English 781: Hotel Orient

Wan-Chuan Kao

M. T. W. TH, 6.45-8.25

Code: 5839

It is a truism that travelers by necessity inhabit the space of the hotel, the hostel, the inn. Marco Polo, in his *Travels*, notes the lavish hostels that play host to foreign ambassadors and merchants in the fabled city of Khan-baliq (present-day Beijing) during the reign of Kubilai Khan. This seminar charts the historical encounters between East and West through the very spaces that facilitate cross-cultural transactions from the medieval to the postmodern. Along the Silk Road, hostels are conducive to the traffic of people and wares; good hostel means good trade. If modern hotel consciousness is marked by transience, ennui, eroticism, and isolation, we ask whether or not the same characteristics held true in premodern hotel practices. At the same time, we consider if the space of the Orient, as both the Near and the Far East, makes a difference in hotel narratology. Some of the texts we will examine include Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Wayne Koestenbaum's *Hotel Theory*, Marco Polo's *Travels*, Mary Wortley Montagu's *Letters*, V. S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness*, and Tennessee Williams's *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. We will also consider representations of Eastern hotels in films such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation*, and Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Semantically, "Orient" means not only the geographic east. As a verb, to orient means to position oneself in a particular alignment in order to ascertain one's bearings. In this sense, to write about lodging in the East is to sort out one's cultural and geopolitical orientation. Within the transhistoric cultural imaginary, is hotel Orient really the desired space of elsewhere? Or is it a place of disorientation that nonetheless harbors travelers adrift?
