

**QUEENS COLLEGE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**  
**GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**  
**SUMMER 2 2012**

**English 636: Introduction to Literary Theory**

**Jeff Cassvan**

**T, Th 6:00-8:05      Code: 1242**

As an introduction to literary criticism and literary theory, this course will consider the ways in which a wide range of thinkers have provided answers to the following questions: What is literature? How do we determine the meanings or meaning of a text? What is the relationship between an author, a text, a reader, and a context? What role does a text play in representing or even producing our conceptions of reality? We will begin with a careful reading of 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. Since the most stimulating theoretical insights often arise out of reading encounters (Derrida's 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, to cite a number of examples), we will treat the work of critics and theorists as primary texts and our focus throughout the semester will be on the process of careful reading. This means that while we will make use of the introductory materials and organizational format provided in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, we will resist and question the tendency to produce or rely upon simple summaries 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.

---

**English 729 - Furious Flowerings: African American Poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Wayne Moreland**

**M, W 6:00-8:05      Code: 1727**

W. E. B. Dubois's assertion that the 20<sup>th</sup> century's central problem would be that of the "color line" was answered, adopted, elaborated upon, and celebrated by a brilliant cohort of African American poets who wrote in a wide variety of styles, came from diverse cultural and physical geographies, and who, lacking a viable poetic tradition specific to their "racial identity", had to invent themselves as artists. This graduate class will examine, among other topics, how these poets created a poetic tradition that survives into the present time, a tradition that is only as old as the blues or jazz (i.e., a 20<sup>th</sup> century tradition) and that utilizes some of the same tropes and sources as do the blues and jazz. We will examine the questions of audience, of language, of form; we will look at the vexed problem of political and social responsibility and of the role of the poet/artist within the community. We will examine the interaction between African American poets and other American poets, between African American poets and African poets and artists, between the present and the past. We will also interrogate some of the controversial theoretical

underpinnings of 20<sup>th</sup> century African American poetics. Some of the poets we will read are Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Gwendolyn Brooks, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Melvin Tolson, Amiri Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, Harryette Mullens, Lucille Clifton, Yusuf Komuyakaa, Michael Harper, and Sonia Sanchez, among many others.

---

**English 781: Milton's *Paradise Lost***

**Richard Marotta**

**M, W 6.00-8.05      Code: 1251**

This course will focus on Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a major example of the visionary epic. We will examine the intellectual, theological and mythical contexts of the poem and then move on to such issues as sexual politics, the emergence of gender identity, the authority of the Divine voice, the rhetoric of the Satanic voice, the birth of the human voice and the various configurations of Adam and Eve. Milton made a number of poetic choices that have endeared him to some readers and alienated him from others. We will look at these choices in the context of an epic poem that is very much the heir to non-Christian classical epic traditions and, at the same time, the recipient of a very specific Christian theological position. This tension engenders some of the more problematical elements in *Paradise Lost*. Active participation and two ten page papers are required.

---