

QUEENS COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS
FALL 2012

English 636: What is literature? What is literary theory?

Seo-Young Chu

Th 6.30-8.20 Code: 1297

What does it mean to interpret a literary text? In exploring these and related questions, we will examine a diversity of frameworks through which to approach texts both "literary" and "non-literary." Such texts may range from lyric poetry to North Korean propaganda posters, from lesbian gothic slipstream to television detective shows, from philosophical treatises on the sublime to YouTube videos of puppies engaging in "cuteness overload." Possible frameworks include classical rhetoric, postcolonialism, trauma studies, formalism, marxism, deconstruction, queer theory, feminism, science fiction, and new historicism. Possible topics: mimesis, memes, metafiction, medicine, historiography, ethnicity, ethics, aesthetics, gender, genre, generalism, globalization, high art, pop culture, kitsch, camp, search engines, pronouns, the politics of form, the meaning of reading, the grammar of hyperlinks, canine epistemology, and the epistemology of "spoilers." Possible authors include Achebe, Anzaldúa, Aristotle, Auerbach, Butler, Caruth, Delany, Derrida, Freud, Greenberg, Haraway, Hayles, Jameson, Johnson, Kim, Landow, Marx, Miéville, Millan, Ngai, Plato, Poe, Said, Smith, Sontag, Stein, Wittig, Woolf, and you.

English 701: Graduate Methodology

Annmarie Drury

Th 4.30-6.20 Code: 1311

What does literary scholarship in graduate school look like? When your graduate instructors ask you to write a research paper, what do they mean? In this course, we practice methods in research and writing that will be useful to you in all your graduate classes. For us, it is an especially reflective practice, because we think together about how knowledge is created in the discipline of "English": what kinds of questions generate knowledge, and what values inform those questions? By examining the work of others – of scholars outside our course and of one another – we collect a toolkit of thinking, reading, writing, and research strategies. We give particular attention to the academic essay as a flexible, sophisticated form. We aim to develop a new sense of our own proclivities as literary scholars and a new competence in realizing our interests: to leave the course knowing which strategies for reading and posing questions each of us finds most engaging *and* knowing how to research and write in ways convincing to other literary scholars.

English 702: Graduate Methodology for English/Education Students

Judith Nysenholc

Th 6.30-8.20 Code: 1313

This course provides current and future secondary-school teachers with an opportunity to study literary texts from a pedagogical perspective. Besides reflecting on the selection process of a text appropriate for a secondary-school curriculum, we will examine research methods and theoretical perspectives currently used in the field of literature. We will focus on two novels, *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*, examine them through a variety of critical approaches, and discuss how these reading strategies could be incorporated in a high school literature classroom. Independently, you will also research and synthesize existing interpretations of a novel of your choice. The ultimate goal of the course is to enrich and deepen your understanding of literary study, as well as to broaden your pedagogical content knowledge.

English 703: Composition Theory and Literacy Studies

Hugh English

M 6.30-8.20

Code: 1315

We will think, talk, read and write about literacy practices and writing pedagogy; our conversations will be framed by reading texts that put literacy into wide historical, theoretical and ethnographic contexts. We will start, in other words, from questions about literacies, rather than unexamined assumptions about literacy. (Note: the plural vs. the singular usage.) From this starting point, we will move into considerations of how writers compose and revise; what constitutes “student writing” and “academic discourse”; how teachers teach writing and revision, respond to writing and assess writing; how writing might be seen in English Studies in relation to different literacy practices and rhetorical conventions in other academic disciplines and in other contexts outside “schooling”; how technologies are changing literacy practices; what we mean by and how we can effectively respond to conceptions and misconceptions of “error” and to calls for and resistance to “standards” and “standard usage.” Throughout the course, we will attempt to produce a productive dynamic between a teacher’s need for immediate practices and a teacher’s need for a longer horizon and deeper view, that is, for a reflective and intellectual practice that allows her/him to understand, to adapt and to develop her/his practices, based on a sense of history and some theoretical self-awareness in the face of inevitably changing circumstances. In other words, this will be a course that asks you to be theoretical and historical about your practices. Students will write 2 essays and an annotated bibliography focused on a self-defined research topic. In addition, each student will be responsible for 20 minutes of class time during which s/he will invent a way to stimulate, to shape and to facilitate our discussion of one of the assigned readings.

English 719: Religious Difference in Medieval Literature

Steven F. Kruger

W 4.30-6.20

Code: 1319

Although we tend to think of the Middle Ages in Europe as a time of clear Christian cultural dominance, much medieval writing takes up questions about Christianity’s relationship to other religions – Judaism, Islam, the religions of the East, European “paganism,” Christian heresy. In this course, we will consider how questions of religious difference are represented in a wide range of medieval literary genres: courtly romance, travel writing, autobiography, saint’s life, drama, chronicle. The course will include both works in translation (from Latin and the European vernacular languages) and works in the original Middle English (students need not have any prior experience reading Middle English). Alongside primary texts, we will consider a wide range of historical, critical, and theoretical writing that might elucidate the course material. Work for the course includes participation in class discussions; at least one oral presentation;

and both informal (ungraded) and formal (graded) writing, culminating in a term project adapted to the interests of individual students.

English 638: Modern Drama

Rhoda Sirlin

F 4.30-6.20 Code: 1972

This course will explore the development of modern drama from Ibsen and Strindberg to contemporary American playwrights, including tragedies, comedies, and tragicomedies. We will look at how modern culture is reflected in this art form, how theater holds up a mirror to the human condition, forcing us to look at and come to terms with contemporary issues as well as universal struggles transcending time and place. We will read both female and male American playwrights whose work earned a Pulitzer Prize or played a crucial role in the development of American culture and ideas. We will put on scenes from these plays and see some film versions. If possible, we will see a Broadway or Off-Broadway production of a play related to the course material.

English 720: Early Modern Utopias

Andrea Walkden

T 6.30-8.20 Code: 1321

A Greek pun on good place (eu-topos) and no place (ou-topos), the word Utopia was coined by Thomas More when he published his *Utopia* in 1516. By then, Utopian world making, the invention and intricate elaboration of fictional societies, imaginary commonwealths, and ideal states, was a long-standing literary practice that claimed Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* as its founder texts. In this class, we'll be sampling a broad spectrum of early modern Utopian fiction, beginning with More's *Utopia* and including Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*, and Henry Neville's *Isle of Pines*.

Throughout the course, we'll explore the advantages and limitations of Utopian thinking, paying attention to how these fictions negotiate what Frederic Jameson has termed "the Utopian leap"—the gap between an empirical present and the utopian arrangements of an imaginary future; how they variously function as thought experiments, theories of human nature, nostalgic disavowals, prehistories of capitalism and globalization, political manifestos, and visionary social schemes.

English 724: Victorian Marriage

Talia Schaffer

M 4.30-6.20 Code: 1323

The Victorian novel always seems to end with a happy marriage - or does it? Recent analysis of "the marriage plot" has revealed that it is actually much more complicated than readers have assumed. Victorian novels by authors like Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, Henry James, Ellen Wood, and Charlotte Yonge, turn out to feature marriages that are quite strange from a modern perspective. Sometimes characters marry family members; sometimes their marriages seem like disguises for same-sex affiliations; sometimes they deliberately choose a marriage without romantic love. In this course we will explore what marriage meant in this tumultuous era, when marriage was being redefined in drastically new ways. Our readings may include such novels as *Jane*

Eyre, *Wuthering Heights*, *Middlemarch*, *Can You Forgive Her?*, *Portrait of a Lady*, and *East Lynne*, along with Victorian journalism on the "Marriage Question" and anthropological accounts of "primitive marriage." We will also read important new works of literary criticism, including Sharon Marcus's *Between Women* and Mary Jean Corbett's *Family Likeness*, that help us re-imagine the nature of the family, incest, and same-sex relations. Weekly blog, presentation, and final paper.

English 729: A Critical Comparison of James Baldwin and Toni Morrison

Wayne Moreland

W 6.30-8.20

Code: 1328

"Notes of Native Sons and Daughters"

When James Baldwin died in 1987, one of the eulogists who spoke at his funeral at St. John the Divine on the edge of Harlem was the novelist Toni Morrison. Facing his coffin, Morrison said, "You gave me a language to dwell in, a gift so perfect it seems my own invention. I have been thinking your spoken and written thoughts for so long I believed they were mine. I have been seeing the world through your eyes for so long, I believed that clear view was my own. Even now, even here, I need you to tell me what I am feeling and how to articulate it." This class will attempt to evaluate the truth of those words. Using the critical compendium *James Baldwin and Toni Morrison: Comparative Critical and Theoretical Essays* as our guide, we shall read some of the novels of Morrison and Baldwin and, as the title of the class implies, find commonality between them. We will read the Baldwin novels *Another Country*, *Just Above My Head*, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, and a selection of his non-fiction work. Likewise, we will read *Jazz*, *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, and selections from Morrison's critical work, *Playing in the Dark*.

English 742: Shakespeare in Hollywood

Rich McCoy

M 4.30-6.20

Code: 1330

This course will consider film adaptations of eight major Shakespeare plays: *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard III*, *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, and *The Tempest*. We will also explore his place in popular culture and attitudes towards the entertainment industry then and now. We'll also view excerpts of classical film adaptations by Lawrence Olivier, Orson Welles, and Franco Zeffirelli as well as more recent work by Baz Luhrmann, Julie Taymor, Kenneth Branagh, and Ralph Fiennes. Requirements will consist of two short papers on Shakespeare's stage drawing on Gurr + additional sources and Shakespeare and popular culture drawing on Bristol and + additional sources and one research paper on one Shakespeare play on film. Additional readings will include Andrew Gurr's *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, Michael Bristol's *Big-Time Shakespeare*, as well as articles in the Robert Shaughnessy's *Shakespeare on Film* and Russell Jackson's *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*. We will also discuss using film and performance in the classroom. Course requirements will consist of a research paper on one or two Shakespeare plays on film.

English 781: The Caribbean Short Story: Landscape, Memory, and Consciousness**June Bobb****W 4.30-6.20****Code: 1336**

Edouard Glissant in *Introductions to Caribbean Discourse* captures the beauty of the Caribbean landscape and the dread of its history: "...spread out beneath this surface, from the mountains to the sea, from north to south, from the forest to the beaches. Maroon resistance and denial, entrenchment and endurance, the world beyond and dream." Caribbean writers dreaming the future refashion self, community and national identity even as they "creolize" form to accommodate the tensions and resistance inherent in their lived experiences. This course examines the writers' rootedness in orality, the transformative possibilities of *creolization*, cultural identity and artistic creation. Ranging from early writers such as Wilson Harris, Samuel Selvon and V.S. Naipaul to Jean Rhys, Lorna Goodison, and Edwidge Danticat, the course explores the diversity of community, the relationship of literature to history, the colonial encounter and slavery. Critical theorists will likely include: Evelyn O'Callaghan, Olive Senior, Elaine Savory, Kamau Brathwaite, C.L.R. James and Gordon Rohlehr. As we explore how these writers have subverted and developed conventional forms of the short story, we will "read" to develop an imaginative way of knowing, of consciousness.

English 781: African American Literature (Seminar Title TBA)**Instructor TBA****T 6.30-8.20****Code: 1337**

This course will study a range of literary works by African American writers. Authors may include Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, William Wells Brown, Willa Cather, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Nancy Rawles, Toni Morrison, and Anna Deavere Smith.

English 781: Film Adaptation**Kevin Ferguson****Th 4.30-6.20****Code: 1338**

This course examines the relationship between writing and cinema by focusing on film adaptations of literary genres such as the novel, short story, nonfiction essay, and poem. We will consider classic and contemporary theories of film adaptation as well as historical and industry-specific issues to address our central question: "How can studying film adaptation allow us to better understand what it is that literature does, and vice versa?" You'll see that this is a very contentious issue, so expect to read lots of different points of view about the value of adaptations, to watch film adaptations outside of class, to engage in weekly blog responses, and to examine extensively one selected adaptation for a final project.
