

English MA Course Descriptions

2016 Summer II (6 weeks, July 5 to August 15)

ENGL 723: Studies in Romantic Literature

Richard Marotta

Class no. 6171; Tue/Thu 6:00–8:05pm

For many Romantic writers, the “traces of the first Paradise whence man was driven” (McGann) could be found in the imaginative and mimetic structures surrounding them. Wordsworth and Shelley found these traces in nature; Byron in irony; Keats in aesthetics; Blake in myth and Coleridge in ethics. This course will examine how the search for these traces of paradise, or as McGann put it, the idea “that poetry...can set one free of the ruins of history and culture is the grand idea of every Romantic poet,” forms the core belief that shapes the romantic imagination in its exploration of poetic language, of imaginative experience and of the art of poetry. As the romantics looked at ways of regenerating poetic language, they perceived a parallel between the “ruins of paradise” and the ruins of poetic language in Enlightenment practice. In revitalizing the language of poetry, these poets sought to uncover the traces of paradise contained and expressed by the logos. Our exploration will focus on how the romantic poets layered this quest onto idealized characters, nature and poetry itself. Active participation and one major paper are required.

ENGL 727: Studies in American Literature, 1820–1920

Dara Barnat

Class no. 6172; Mon/Wed 6:00–8:05pm

This course will focus on a 19th-century poet whose impact on American literature is perhaps unparalleled: Walt Whitman. In the extraordinary 1855 collection of poems *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman assigned himself the role of America’s poet-prophet: “I celebrate myself, / And what I assume you shall assume.” Whitman’s writing drew controversy as he pushed formal conventions and thematic boundaries. He explored race, sexuality, religion, and democracy, promoting a united vision for America divided by the Civil War. We will be reading poetry and prose from the various volumes of *Leaves of Grass* that Whitman revised between 1855 and 1892, together with relevant scholarship. We will seek to discover how Whitman so profoundly came to influence literatures in the United States and beyond. The main assignment for this course will be a research paper.

ENGL 781: Amiri Baraka: Populist Modernism, the Avant Garde, and the Meaning of "Race"

Wayne Moreland

Class no. 6166; Tue/Thu 6:00–8:05pm

Amiri Baraka (1934–2014) was and is a central figure in the development of African American literature. Prolific in the production of poetry, drama, criticism, polemic, fiction, and other genres, Baraka was also a political activist, rebel, and political theorist. Baraka began his career as LeRoi Jones, emerging as a poet, critic, and editor in the East Village in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In this incarnation, Baraka was an exponent of avant-garde modernism and was thought to be a member of the so-called "Beat" movement. In this period he wrote the award-winning play *Dutchman*, among other works, as he increasingly reacted to the political currents of the early to mid-1960s. After the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Baraka left the Village to move to Harlem where he organized the Black Arts Theatre/Workshop and thoroughly embraced the political/cultural doctrine of black nationalism. In the late 1960s, he moved to Newark, his birthplace, where he was to live for the rest of his life. In Newark, his political affiliations moved from nationalism to various forms of Marxism and, interestingly, to mainstream electoral politics.

It is the premise of this class that, throughout all of these manifestations, Baraka's first aesthetic choices were markedly similar to his last. In the middle 1960s he wrote an essay on black music named "The Changing Same," in which he broached the idea that while black music appeared to differ at various points in its evolution, at bottom all black music is similar in its concerns and approaches, that what seems to be variation in form could not, in the final analysis, mask what he took to be a remarkably similar content, or topical coherence. Likewise, we maintain that Baraka, all of his changes considered, was always seeking, in Werner Sollors's words, a "populist modernism," i.e., an advanced aesthetic that could appeal to an "average reader." Baraka's work is consistent in this desire, to express the most radical cultural and political sensibility in an accessible form.