

SUMMER AND FALL 2012 SEMINARS

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

SUMMER 2012

1. CHRIS KWAME AWUYAH: Folklore in African Literature. [FIRST SUMMER SESSION]

In this course we will examine the presence and relative importance of folklore elements of content (e.g. themes, beliefs) and form (e.g. narrative style, songs, proverbs) in selected African literary works. We will also undertake a comparative analysis of folklore in selected African and African Diaspora writing. In general, much of modern African writing involves an attempt to reclaim and redefine black experience in response to European domination. As Chinweizu and Ngugi note, European cultural hegemony has obscured and distorted black experience. Thus many African writers share a commitment to celebrate, in Achebe's words, "the philosophy ... depth, value and beauty" of the indigenous tradition. The writers tap into the traditional culture to show that before the advent of Europeans, Africans "had poetry; above all they had dignity" (Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*). The authors give expression to indigenous cultural forms which have been denigrated by the West. In form, and content, the writers give expressions to codes of aesthetics from the local culture. Some of the primary texts for the course deal with African experience prior to the colonial encounter (*Sundiata; Mwindo Epic; Gassire's Lute*) or the African phenomenon free from the fetters of the European presence (Beiers). The post-colonial narratives, selected for the course, rely mostly on indigenous folkloric forms and structure for poetics. We will also focus on the emergence of black female consciousness based on the positions of Bell Hooks and Barbara Smith. These scholars call for a development of a black feminist consciousness since the broad based political movements that provide the context for black aesthetic limit the perspectives of the black woman.

2. JANE JEFFREY: Film Noir. [SECOND SUMMER SESSION] Course crosslisted as ENG/FLM.

This seminar will explore American film noir, its antecedents, development, and influence on American culture. The course will discuss its definition, its place in film history, and its place in film today. Specific topics include backgrounds, production and reception, noir style, narrative strategies, gender, themes, and neo-noir. In addition to studying some of the defining films, such as *Double Indemnity, The Maltese Falcon, Out of the Past, Hitch-Hiker, and Chinatown*, we will look at filmmakers, actors, and the cinematic properties of film noir.

FALL 2012

1. GABRIELLE HALKO: Children In Wartime: Representations of Childhood in War, Occupation, and Conflict

This seminar focuses on literary and cultural representations of children and childhood in conditions of war, including children as internees, refugees, soldiers, and survivors. We'll examine the complicated stereotype(s) of childhood across several eras and cultures, as well as cultural anxieties and values around those stereotypes. By studying, discussing, and writing about a range of children's and young adult literature that addresses war – the 9/11 attacks, World War II at home and abroad, and child soldiers in late 20th century Africa – we'll map the strange territory where war and childhood coexist.

2. CHERISE A. POLLARD: African American Autobiography

This course will trace the development of African American Autobiography from nineteenth century slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass' 1845 Narrative, to late twentieth century memoirs such as Barack Obama's Dreams of My Father. Using A New Historicist critical perspective, as well as Black Feminist Theory, we will study African American life writing in its historical and cultural contexts. Our analysis will focus upon the ways that the genre emerged as a testament against the institutionalized forces of oppression from slavery to various manifestations of implicit and explicit abuses of power that affected African Americans in the Twentieth Century. As an investigation of the meaning of black American identity, a semester-long study of African American Autobiography affords us the opportunity to further examine the structures of self-expression that are central to the articulation of black experience.

3. JEFF SOMMERS: Crime in America: Fiction and Non-Fiction

Most bookstores feature a “True Crime” section because, apparently, readers are fascinated by reading about violent crime. This course examines that fascination and focuses on the word “true” in naming the genre. We read books about actual crimes and books that fictionalize those crimes. We view both documentary and fictional film versions of several books. Our primary objective is to learn how to read “true crime” books: how do we know what to trust as “true”? How do writers, both nonfiction and fiction writers, turn the facts of the crime into a story? How do their strategies as writers influence and affect our reading? What do “nonfiction” and “fiction” mean when applied to the genre of “true crime”? What do the words “true,” “real,” “factually accurate” mean when applied to crime stories? We shall endeavor to answer these complex questions.

4. JEN BACON: Feminist Rhetorical Criticism

This seminar will explore feminist theories alongside rhetorical theories and apply both to reading and analyzing a variety of texts. We will look at the movement to consider women's rhetorical acts "worthy" of criticism, and at early work to "reclaim" a tradition for women rhetors, but we will also apply a variety of feminist theoretical lenses (Liberal, Radical, Marxist, Postmodern, Psychoanalytic) to other texts in order to examine the ways that feminist study has changed both rhetorical practice and rhetorical theory. Ultimately, the course will consider the ways that rhetorical constructions of gender have been used to recreate the conditions of domination and oppression, and the ways that rhetorical acts can resist those very conditions.

5. ELIZABETH MAHN NOLLEN: Gothic Monsters as Meaning Machines in Fiction and Film. Course crosslisted as ENG/FLM.

In this seminar, we will concentrate on three iconic figures of page and screen: Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll, and Count Dracula. After reading the precursor texts, we will study a selection of fictional and cinematic adaptations of Mary Shelley's, Robert Louis Stevenson's and Bram Stoker's works. Students will explore issues of adaptation and intertextuality before approaching each work through various critical approaches, including cultural, feminist, and psychoanalytic criticism. We will explore the various monsters as "meaning machines," to borrow Judith Halberstam's words, exploring how those meanings have morphed over the years.

6. LYNNE COOKE: Visual Design: Images, Technology, and Society

Increasingly, visual representations of words and ideas drive how people and technology communicate in our society. Icons have replaced text on cell phones and other technological devices, while effective web site usability depends heavily on intuitive visual design. This seminar explores visual communication from both theoretical and practical aspects and approaches the topic from an interdisciplinary perspective. Consequently, we investigate research in the areas of industrial design, art, human-computer interaction, rhetoric, semiotics, mass communication, information graphics, web usability, typography, and technical communication.

7. SETH KAHN: Activism and Activist Rhetoric

This course investigates the rhetorics that activists use in their work as educators, organizers, and mobilizers. We will approach activist rhetoric from three directions. First, we will consider an array of theories of persuasion and deliberation, theorizing rhetoric as the basis upon which democracy depends. Second, we will take a case-study approach to several activist campaigns, some of which students will select as part of their research for the course (e.g., environmental, human rights, reproductive rights, election campaigns). Finally, we will study the first-person accounts of activist rhetoricians, who describe their own activist work, and how they understand rhetoric's place in it.

8. MERRY G. PERRY: Vampire Narratives

Vampires Narratives is an English seminar and writing emphasis course designed for the advanced study of vampire narratives, specifically in novels, television shows, and films. What is it about these dark creatures of the night that has inspired their almost immortal popularity for countless decades? After considering some of the historical origins of vampires, we will read and discuss influential vampire narratives: John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood* (1845), John Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Then, we will move to a consideration of vampire narratives (both written and visual) of the 20th and 21st centuries: *Nosferatu* (1922) and other vampire films from the 1920s-2011, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (TV series 1997-2003), Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (Book 2005 & Film 2008), *True Blood* (TV series 2008-present) and *The Vampire Diaries* (TV series 2009-present). We will consider how vampires have been rhetorically framed and represented in these narratives, while also considering the historical and ideological context in which they were written.

9. CAROLYN SORISIO: 19th-Century American Indian Literature

While much attention is paid to twentieth-century American Indian Literary expression, the nineteenth-century was a time of significant literary productivity for many American Indian authors. The canon of American Indian literature from this century is changing, as scholars recover texts remarkable for their diversity of genre and styles. By focusing on American Indian authors in the contexts of non-Native representations of American Indians (literary and cultural), US-American Indian relations, colonialism and nationalisms, we will be able to explore the rhetorically savvy works of diverse authors. Authors we will study include: Black Hawk, William Apess, George Copway, Elias Boudinot, John Rollin Ridge, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Zitkala-Sa. We will also analyze many of the pre-twentieth century poets recently recovered by Robert Dale Parker in his collection, *Changing is not Vanishing: A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930*. When interpreting these works, readers encounter a number of complex interpretive questions about authorship, print culture, translation, identity and cross-cultural rhetorical appeals. To address these questions, we will draw upon American Indian literary and cultural criticism as well as theories you may have encountered in ENG 194, ENG 295 or ENG 296.

10. Eleanor F. Shevlin: The University Novel: Representations of Campus Life and Academic Culture in Fiction.

This course will focus on novels whose settings are universities and whose themes concern academic life and higher education. Written typically by “insiders”—that is, those who are directly involved in higher education such as faculty and, at times, students—these works can be further subdivided into categories such as comedy of manners, biting satire, murder mystery, or some combination of these three types. What these variations share, however, is a decided interest in exploring and critiquing the function and purpose of the university as a socio-cultural institution dedicated to the production and dissemination of knowledge. After reading one or two historical examples of academic fiction, we will turn to six or seven novels from the last several decades. We will examine these works through the lens of contemporary cultural theories and ethical criticism and will interrogate what sorts of worlds they create within the context of historical developments affecting higher education to what ends these created worlds serve.

11. ANDREW SARGENT: Literature of the Civil Rights Era

The course looks closely at printed and visual texts produced *during*, *after*, and *about* the Civil Rights and Black Power eras (a period spanning roughly 1954-1975) and asks how these texts can reshape our understanding of this storied time in American history. What insights can we gain from creative representations—e.g., from a novel, a play, a memoir, or even a photograph—that might not be available in “factual” historical accounts? In answering this question, we will examine writings by such leading figures as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X while also considering texts produced by, among others, rank-and-file activists who observed or participated in protests; men and women who called attention to the gender and sexual tensions of the struggle; and even whites who sought to assert and/or understand their own place in a specifically African American movement. We will also look at texts that seem only indirectly to be “about” Civil Rights or Black Power yet have much to say about race, power, and social protest. In addition, we will consider more recent works that look back on the period from the vantage point of the post-Civil Rights era and tell us something about how the movement’s legacy is remembered and contested today.
