

Seminar Descriptions for Winter/Spring/Summer 2015

WINTER 2015 (December 2014 through January 2015)

Laura Renzi -- Exploring One's Own Cultural Identity through the Understanding of Cultural Pluralism in Young Adult Literature

What is the definition of a culturally pluralistic society? How does your cultural identity enhance, inhibit, detract from how you see and interact with a culturally pluralistic society? What types of young adult literature get published in this society, and what do these texts teach us (and school age children/adolescents) about the cultures that can be found in our society? This seminar is designed to discuss the cultural identity of the reader, as well as the characters that can be found in culturally pluralistic young adult literature. How does the cultural identity of the reader (race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) affect the knowledge that is made when reading these young adult texts? We will work to define what it "culturally pluralistic" means as a class through discussion and readings about cultural identity. We will also discuss how our views of race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and religion (as well as other things) affect how we read and what we expect from these young adult texts. Through facilitated discussions, we will work our way through various cultural identities and look at how these cultural identities have been historically represented through stereotypes, media, and historical events. As a class, we will also touch upon how these historical representations have also been used to dictate educational policies within our society. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Renzi's research interests on the English Department's website.

SPRING 2015

Eirini Panagiotidou--Stylistics: The Language of Literature

This course focuses on the interface between language and literature and investigates the language of literary texts by drawing on linguistic methodologies. The two key questions that we address are: "What is style?" and "How do texts mean?". Students will learn to identify and analyze specific linguistic features and then use them to arrive at an interpretation of the meaning of texts. Some of the topics that we will explore include cohesion, transitivity, modality, point of view, speech and thought representation, and metaphor. We will look at a range of literary texts, including drama, poetry, and prose from various literary periods. Connections will also be drawn with the study and understanding of media in contemporary culture. We will discuss how advertisements win the audience over, what constitutes weak versus strong writing, and how persuasive language is employed in political and media discourse.

Gabrielle Halko -- Behind Barbed Wire: Occupation, Internment, and WWII in Children's Literature

This seminar focuses on literary and cultural representations of children and childhood in conditions of occupation and internment, including children as internees, refugees, and POWs, during World War II. This content expands beyond the literature of the Holocaust that often dominates the "foreign" part of America's WWII narrative and instead features representations of lesser-known experiences of wartime internment and occupation in places such as the U.S. and Southeast Asia. The course texts include children's and young adult literature in a range of genres (picture books, non-fiction, historical fiction, memoir) as well as oral histories and critical works. As a class, we will take a cultural studies approach, first examining childhood as a cultural construct and establishing historical/cultural context and then studying various representations of children's experiences as POWs, internees, or occupied citizens during World War II. We will also employ aspects of war studies in our work with this material. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Halko's research interests on the English Department's website.

Erin Hurt -- Reading Race, Ethnicity, and Nation in the Graphic Novel

Through close readings of graphic novels, this seminar asks students to develop an approach to textual analysis that accommodates both the alphabetic and the visual. Students will examine how graphic novels draw on the genre's formal qualities in order to enable new ethnic and cultural representations. The course will begin by examining the history and development of the graphic novel: where did it come from? How has it evolved? Next, we will consider a number of novels, with a focus on how the work's representation of cultural identity intersects with, and draws on, its stylistic strategies. The course will end with students' final projects, in which they will synthesize their knowledge of this material and present their own conclusions about the graphic novel and this medium's ability to represent the US experience for the marginalized other. During the semester, students will practice a number of different skills such as close reading, content and audience reception analysis, finding relevant scholarly work, and synthesizing critical arguments. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Hurt's research interests on the English Department's website.

Jane E. Jeffrey -- Reading the King James Bible

The King James Bible, published in 1611, is the most widely printed book in the English language. Built on a century of English translations by writers from Tyndale to Cranmer, the KJB is the result of historic, linguistic, and intellectual collaboration and has had an immeasurable influence on the language, literature and culture of the western world. This seminar will read substantial parts of the Old and New Testaments in the King James version and explore the 1611 text, along with its precedents and afterlife, as a basis for research in literary and cultural studies. A unique interdisciplinary object--not so much a book as a library of books--the King James Bible provides an opportunity to explore and synthesize resources and method in linguistics, rhetoric, the arts, popular culture, religion, politics, and education. Students will practice both close and contextual reading, and they will learn how to frame research topics by means of analyzing past approaches and identifying open-ended questions. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Jeffrey's research interests on the English Department's website.

Paul Maltby -- Christian Themes in British and American Fiction Since 1980

Fiction has long served as a resource through which to explore core themes in Christian thought and experience. These themes embrace questions of divinity and transcendence; the experience of epiphanies, conversions, and miracles; and a concern with sin, atonement, and redemption. This course will consider how these themes are addressed in five currents of Christian fiction as practiced, from 1980 down to the present, in the United States and Britain. First, we shall examine the spiritual-warfare fiction of leading fundamentalist authors: Dan Betzer, Frank Peretti, and Tim LaHaye/Jerry B. Jenkins. Second, we shall read writers whose "miraculous-mundane" strain of fiction pursues the divine in daily life: John Updike and Marilynne Robinson. Third, we shall look at an ecstatic current of Christian fiction that narrates female visionary encounters with the sacred: David Guterson, Jodi Picoult, and Ron Hansen. Fourth, we shall consider eremitic narratives, whose protagonists seek seclusion to open a channel to the divine: Frederick Buechner and Walker Percy. Finally, we shall examine the revisionist agenda of secular novelists who rewrite key tenets of the Christian faith: Jim Crace, Philip Pullman, and Michèle Roberts. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Maltby's research interests on the English Department's website.

Joseph Navitsky – Shakespeare’s America: Theater, Classroom, and Culture

This research seminar examines the cultural inheritance of William Shakespeare in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. In addition to his indelible influence on English language and literature, Shakespeare—poet, celebrity, and literary icon—remains a crucial force in the cultural landscape of America. What accounts for the abiding relevance of an *Englishman* born 450 years ago and how does his writing continue to shape the *American* experience? More specifically, how have attitudes toward Shakespeare shaped such core American ideals as freedom of expression, racial and religious equality, and access to public education? Special emphasis will be given to the collaborative nature of theatrical and film productions and to those critical issues (literary adaptation, the “cult of genius,” theories of authorship, the formation of the canon, and secondary and university curricula) relevant to the work of all English majors, especially those with an interest in teaching. Familiarity with Shakespeare is not a requirement but enthusiasm for his work is. A change from previous offerings of this seminar is that the class will devote significant time considering the early history of Shakespeare (1850-1910) in secondary and post-secondary education. Students will read at least three Shakespeare plays—possibilities include *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *Othello*—along with a series of American adaptations, including burlesques. We will pursue a rigorous schedule with supplementary readings on the cultural and intellectual history of America and on theories of artistic imitation and adaptation. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Navitsky’s specific research interests on the English Department’s website.

William Nessly – Theorizing the Novel: Kazuo Ishiguro and Chang-rae Lee

This seminar is targeted toward students interested in narrative and the theory of the novel, contemporary literature, ethnic and minority literature, and the study of imperialism. As a focused study of two similar authors, the course will involve a rigorous, in-depth study of narrative form and a detailed introduction to the theory of the novel. By narrowing our focus, we will be able to go deeper into the novels and theories than is usually possible. You will read five novels—Ishiguro’s *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, and *The Remains of the Day*, and Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life*. You will also read selections from classic novel theorists such as Ian Watt and Mikhail Bakhtin, Foucaultian scholars of the novel, and theoretical works by Edward Said and Lisa Lowe, among others. Unreliable narration, links between imperialism and the novel, comparisons of American and British contexts, and the representation of trauma will be important topics of the course. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Nessly’s research interests on the English Department’s website.

Justin Rademaekers – Writing and Social Action: The Case of Environmentalism

This course explores the intersection of language and action through the lens of environmentalism. Students taking this course are given an opportunity to engage with theories of public rhetoric and produce texts, written and otherwise, which are designed to urge readers and viewers to take action on pressing environmental concerns such as land conservation, water pollution, and global climate change. The course itself is divided in two, with the first eight weeks emphasizing a theoretical view of writing as means for social action and the tropes of environmental advocacy. The second eight weeks emphasizes action as students propose a writing assignment that enables them to take action on an environmental topic of their choosing. In particular, students will be asked to show how their writing (action) is informed by class readings and class discussions. Professionals from environmental advocacy groups will be invited to speak to our class during the second portion of the semester, and students will be encouraged to pursue writing assignments that might aide these organizations in their work. This course provides a unique opportunity for students to engage with advanced rhetoric and writing theories while developing writing samples for their professional portfolio and networking with local community organizations. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Rademaeker’s research interests on the English Department’s website.

Judy Scheffler -- Contemporary American Women's Life Writing

This course will examine the critical issues and controversies of life writing by American women from the twentieth century to the present. Students will read a variety of texts, including letters, memoirs, diary, and autobiography. Scholars as well as the general reading public are giving increasing attention to autobiographical texts. For women writers, the various forms that life writing may take have long provided especially congenial avenues for self-expression. This course gives students an opportunity to examine in detail the variety of ways that contemporary American women have expressed their lives in writing. We will approach our readings from a feminist perspective and we will consider how the cultural and historical context informs and shapes the writer's choices of genre and content as well as her perspective as an interpreter of her life's story. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Scheffler's research interests on the English Department's website.

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

This course will focus on American and British 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 members 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 all these variations of the academic novel 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. That campus novels, especially those operating as satires, proliferate in times of transformations within universities and society points to the potential significance of their representations as commentary on shifting values and social change. Beginning with a mid-eighteenth-century satire of Cambridge University students, the course will then examine one of the many novels written during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century to convey, prescribe, and comment on the experiences of the American college woman. The remaining six or seven novels will include David Lodge's *Changing Places* (1979), James Hynes's *The Lecturer's Tale* (2001), and perhaps either Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2006) or Chad Harbach's *The Art of Fielding* (2011). 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. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Shevlin's research interests on the English Department's website.

Cheryl Wanko -- Environmentalism in English Studies: History, Language, Change

This seminar looks at how "nature" and environmental problems have been constructed in North American writing. After briefly looking at Western and First Nations foundational texts, we will move to contemporary times to read novels that reveal American gendered environmental attitudes as well as the sustainability memoir *No Impact Man*. We will consider a range of questions related to ecocriticism, perform research related to the intersections between language, literature, science, and culture, and create texts that address local environmental questions. We will complete and reflect on a week-long "No Impact" experiment and, in a final session combined with another class, we will hold a conference that questions the function of English Studies in relation to the global crises that confront us. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Wanko's research interests on the English Department's website.

SUMMER 2015

Chris Kwame Awuyah -- Folklore in African Literature (also CLS400)

The oral tradition is generally considered the staple of African literature. In this course we will discuss major scholarly approaches (e.g. Ruth Finnegan, Richard Dorson, and Isidore Okpewho) to African folklore. We will also 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. Lastly, we will undertake a comparative analysis of folklore in selected African and African Diaspora writing. Our reading list will comprise texts of African folk narratives (mostly) and African/African American literary works which incorporate major folklore features. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Awuyah's research interests on the English Department's website.