GRADUATE COURSES IN ENGLISH

Spring Session 2015

Course offerings for:

Master of Arts
Doctor of Philosophy
Non-Degree Study

Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
Humanities Building
Room HU 336
(518) 442-4099

Jennifer Greiman, Director of Graduate Studies
Courses are by Permission of Instructor as noted, otherwise by Permission of Department only. Please contact Jennifer Greiman (jgreiman@albany.edu) with questions.
FACULTY TEACHING SPRING 2015

RICHARD BARNEY, Associate Professor - Ph.D., University of Virginia

BRET BENJAMIN, Associate Professor - Ph.D., University of Texas, Austin

HELEN ELAM, Associate Professor - Ph.D., Brown

GLYNE A. GRIFFITH, Associate Professor – Ph.D., University of the West Indies

MICHAEL K. HILL, Associate Professor – Ph.D., Stony Brook University, SUNY

ERICA FRETWELL, Assistant Professor - Ph.D., Duke University

JAMES D. LILLEY, Associate Professor – Ph.D., Princeton University

STEPHEN NORTH, Distinguished Teaching Professor – D.A., University at Albany, SUNY

HELENE SCHECK, Associate Professor – Ph.D., Binghamton University, SUNY

LYNNE TILLMAN, Associate Professor and Writer-in-Residence – B.A., Hunter College

ROBERT YAGELSKI, Associate Professor - Ph.D., Ohio State University
**SPRING 2015 COURSES**

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**ENG 500 – Textual Practices 1**

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This course (re)introduces students to some of the theoretical issues, interpretive strategies, and transdisciplinary interchanges that have shaped the enterprise we have come to call English Studies. Readings will be drawn primarily from David Richter’s comprehensive anthology, The Critical Tradition (3rd edition, 2007) and Terry Eagleton’s Literary Theory: An Introduction (3rd edition, 2008).

**ENG 516 – Fiction Workshop**

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For the graduate fiction workshop, students are expected to have already been developing, thinking about, and working on fiction. Poets who are interested in writing fiction are also welcome to apply. During the workshop, each student will present pieces to the group, three or four times (depending upon our number). Each student is expected to be a full participant in the discussion and commentary on colleagues’ fictions, stories, and consequent questions about issues in writing. We may do additional readings, stories and theory, to augment our discussions. This is a Permission by Instructor course. Those interested in applying should email 5 - 7 pages of their writing to: Tillwhen@aol.com. In addition, students must also indicate previous writing courses; major or area of specific interest in graduate school, and reasons for wanting to take this workshop.

**ENG 521 – Composition Theory and Pedagogy**

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This course introduces students to the area of English Studies variously referred to as Rhetoric and Composition, Composition Studies, or Writing Studies. Accordingly, part of the agenda of this course is to explore the theories and practices that define the field and to encourage students to examine their participation in that field as teachers, scholars, researchers, and writers. Through varied readings and in-class activities, the course will explore some of the issues, problems, and questions around which the field has organized itself. This project inevitably begins with questions about the nature of writing (and rhetoric) and writing instruction; it will lead as well to examinations of the purposes of literacy education and the role of writing in students’ lives. Ultimately, however, this course is about the teaching of writing and how it is understood and practiced. The course will thus focus to a great extent on addressing questions about how best (or even whether) to teach writing. Students will be encouraged to focus their work in this course on issues related to writing instruction that grow out of their own experiences as writers and teachers and to examine those issues in light of the evolution of theory and research on writing. Requirements will include several short writings and presentations and a longer project.

**ENG 580 – Models of History in Literary Criticism**

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In this course, our historical model or foundational historical event is the San Domingo Revolution, that New World Revolution that began as a slave revolt and expanded into a full blown revolution undergirded by the same principles of liberty, fraternity and equality that fueled the French Revolution. Out of the San Domingo revolution, the only successful slave revolution in modern history, came the first black, independent republic in the so-called New World, Haiti.
In this course we will read C.L.R. James's The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution as our foundational historical text and we will then examine diverse critical and literary responses to the revolution, its key figures, and its meaning in the shaping of freedom and modernity in the Atlantic world. Additional texts will include Phillip Kaisary's The Haitian Revolution in the Literary Imagination: Radical Horizons, Conservative Constraints, George Lamming's essay "Caliban Orders History" in his The Pleasures of Exile, David Scott's Conscriptions of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment, and Michelle Cliff's novel, No Telephone to Heaven.

ENG 581 – Taste and Postbellum Literature

5306   W   7:15-10:05 p.m.   HU0125   E. Fretwell

No longer can we accept without question the distinction between aesthetic taste and gustatory taste. To take the metaphor of “taste” seriously is to infuse the word with its etymological meaning: to bring the two meanings of sensation and style together into a versatile, comprehensive, and powerful whole. In its combined form, then, ‘taste’ governs far-reaching and crucial aspects of American literature and culture, from the mid-nineteenth through early-twentieth century, in which a new definition of aesthetic taste was forming just as the social function of eating was being redefined. How were food and eating deployed in postbellum writing and art, as well as at the table, so as to direct and reflect concerns about national life in the wake of the Civil War? What, if anything, did the so-called “Negro Problem” have to do with the nation’s skyrocketing consumption of sugar? Looking at aesthetic taste and literal eating in postbellum writing – in novels, poems, and cookbooks – this course explores simultaneously the development of dietary preference as a racialized characteristic and the history of metaphors of eating. The two, we will find, are intertwined. As a readings course, this course will largely focus on literature of the Civil War and postwar period (Alcott, Chopin, Dickinson, Howells), but also expand our conception of “literature” to include lesser known texts by cooks and servants. Foundational critical essays by Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Bourdieu, and bell hooks will help our collective endeavor to understand the relationship between physiological and aesthetic taste in an era of dramatic social change.

ENG 581 – Studies in a Literary Period: Enlightenment Networks and the Novel

8605   TH   7:15-10:05 p.m.   HU0112   M. Hill

Philosopher Bruno Latour has famously stated: “we have never been modern.” At stake in this controversial claim are fundamental and longstanding achievements of the Western Enlightenment (a period covering roughly, the late seventeenth, through the early late eighteenth centuries). These achievements might be summed up as: the sanctity of the individual; human mastery over technology and therefore, society’s transcendence over nature; the necessity of historical progress; and the uniqueness of literary discourse per se. Ideas like this appear now to be empirically vulnerable, and open to serious question. Multitudes over identity; accident over probability; the secret life of things; the aesthetics of other than strictly literary media—these are the new prospects to which Latour’s provocative assertion alludes.

Our task will be to read Enlightenment philosophy (e.g. Bacon; Rousseau; Spinoza), histories of the period (e.g. Morretti; Thompson), in partnership with contemporary theory (e.g. Althusser; Latour; Serres), to field the question: if not modern then what? As one of the most popular and controversial kinds of discourse in the Enlightenment, and as arguably, a key feature of modernity, the novel (e.g. Behn; Burney; Sterne; Scott) will have special prominence in our discussion throughout the semester.

NOTE: Students who have taken 581 in the past may repeat this course for credit as the material does repeat previous offerings.
How does the definition of life matter for literature and the other way around? This course will approach that question by examining how 18th- and 19th-century vitalism—which was based on the conviction that living organisms have an inherent source of vitality that distinguishes them from mere objects—spawned noteworthy innovations in the British biological sciences as well as in the period’s fiction, poetry, and prose. While vitalism has had an intellectual pedigree stretching as far back as the ancient Greeks, it was René Descartes’ powerfully dualistic separation of mind and body, or matter and spirit, that launched self-described “modern” efforts to reject that dualism in favor of describing “life” as a profoundly unified phenomenon in terms of biological composition, philosophical origin, or sociopolitical organization. Among other things, it was a shift in thought that accompanied new discoveries about the function of the nerves, a corresponding reformulation of “sympathy” in both physiological and ethical terms, and pioneering descriptions of the biological environment or “milieu” that had crucial political implications. We will explore the influence of these historical developments on Enlightenment and Romantic poets, novelists, and essayists, while considering how a literary aesthetic also shaped the period’s vitalist turn. Along the way, we will examine the relevance of the more recent theoretical renovation of vitalism in the wake of Gilles Deleuze, whose work has inspired writers including Jane Bennett, John Protevi, and Patricia Clough.

Readings will include: philosophical and theoretical work by Descartes, Deleuze, Bennett, Georges Canguilhem, Adam Smith, and Mary Wollstonecraft; scientific texts by John Hunter and Marie François Bichat; and poetry and fiction by Wollstonecraft, Laurence Sterne, John Thelwall, John Keats, and Percy and Mary Shelley.

ENG 651 - Theories of Language

This course will focus on “translation” not in its ordinary sense of ferrying meaning from one language to another but as the most intense expression of a problem within language: “translation” as a nickname for the issue of “meaning” at the heart of literature. Readings from a broad range of literary and theoretical texts—Proust, Nietzsche, Benjamin, de Man, Nabokov, Carson, Davis. Two papers, the first one a project statement, the last one a term paper; intense class participation, student presentations.

ENG 685 – Body Politics: The Early Anglo/European Stage

This course will examine the uses and abuses of bodies in early drama from the medieval into the early modern period. We will consider recent theories relating to performance, performativity, and bodies as well as to cultural and historical documents from the period in order to trace connections among lived bodies, the economic, social, and political forces with which those bodies interacted, and the staged bodies that emerged. Readings will include a variety of dramatic texts; critical analyses of dramatic texts, modes, and production; short historical documents (as relevant); and theoretical texts relating to bodies and performance. Primary texts include plays ranging from the early medieval to the early modern period, sacred and profane, from plays by a 10th-century nun to some early modern plays by Jonson and Marlow; comic interludes and farce to moral drama to socio-political. Our engagement with each play will begin with some historical background and then move towards developing historically and culturally aware, theoretically informed responses to the texts. Assignments will include informal presentation on a critical essay; response papers relating to critical and primary texts; and a seminar paper. In class we will likely engage in impromptu informal performances of short scenes or interludes to more fully appreciate early dramatic forms in their material, visual, and spatial dimensions. For more information, contact Helene Scheck at HScheck@albany.edu.
What is the nature of substance? From Aristotle and Lucretius to Carnot and the Higgs boson, philosophers and scientists have often attempted to define what we so often take for granted—the stuff of matter—in variety of often contradictory and sometimes strangely beautiful ways. After introducing some of the ways that matter mattered in the classical and medieval world, we’ll focus our attention on a key, transformational moment in the aesthetics of substance—the birth of thermodynamics—in order to explore the ways in which the transatlantic literature of Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment influences—and is influenced by—debates in physics, medicine, natural philosophy, economics, ontology, epistemology, geology, and taxonomy concerning the nature of matter. In what ways do aesthetic transformations in the nineteenth-century novel reflect new vitalist or thermodynamic approaches to materiality, where substance is no longer an inert and passive participant in a world of external forces but is now imbued with its own energetics and its own capacity to transform the world? Whether we are reading an “it narrative” from England (where inanimate objects become the protagonists of the rising novel form) or an American romance of metempsychosis (where the consciousness of our protagonist will hop between the receptive flesh of different bodies), we’ll not only be paying attention to the aesthetics of substance in these texts but also marking the ways in which this new sense of materiality works in tandem with its spiritual Other, paving the way for the transformation of religious—as well as secular—experience. And in transatlantic novels of colonial exploration and expansion, we’ll examine how the new world of thermodynamic forces challenges the inherent mechanism of the nation-state and encourages us to imagine new forms of political community.


Required of all doctoral students in their first year of study. This course examines current issues in the teaching of writing and literature, with attention to how teachers think students learn, and the institutional context within which teaching and learning occur. Particular attention will be given to how issues of gender, race and class affect teaching theory and practice.