GRADUATE COURSES IN ENGLISH

Spring Session 2016

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

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

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

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

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

ERIC C. KEENAGHAN, Associate Professor – Ph.D., Temple University

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

MARTHA ROZETT, Professor – PH.D., University of Michigan

SAMANTHA D. SCHALK, Assistant Professor – Ph.D., Indiana University

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

CHARLES SHEPHERDSOON, Professor – Ph.D., Vanderbilt University

DERIK J. SMITH, Assistant Professor - Ph.D., Northwestern University

LYNNE TILLMAN, Professor and Writer-in-Residence – B.A., Hunter College
SPRING 2015 COURSES

Courses are by Permission of Instructor as noted, otherwise by Permission of Department only.

ENG 500 – Textual Practices 1

6863  M  4:15-7:05 p.m.  HU0115  H. Elam

This course will deal with a few major writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and with important critical essays about them which bring forth debates that have shaped the context of literary study. Readings from Nabokov, Beckett, Nietzsche, Dickinson, Proust, Kafka, Davis, H. Macdonald, others. Two short papers, term paper, student-led discussions.

ENG 516 – Workshop in Fiction (Seminar)

1899  W  4:15-7:05 p.m.  HU0032  L. Tillman

In the Graduate Fiction workshop, each person is expected to be a full participant in the discussion and commentary on colleagues' fictions -- stories/prose of all kinds -- and on the writing of fiction, in all its forms, and with all its vicissitudes. Each person will present three to four stories to the group over the semester (depending on class size). We will especially focus on what narrative is, what its constituent elements are -- questions of time, structure, order, tone, mood, style, etc. Voice will be of particular importance: Who is telling the story, is a significant question. Admission is by approval of Prof. Tillman. To apply, you must email tillwhentillman@gmail with 5-8 page sample of your prose fiction. You must be a graduate student.

ENG 555 – Old English Composition Theory and Pedagogy

10021  TH  7:15-10:05 p.m.  HU0019  H. Scheck

The literature and language of early England (up to about 1100 C.E.) has inspired poets, novelists, and scholars, including Milton, Tolkien, and Pound, and continues to excite the modern imagination. A film adaptation of the Old English epic, Beowulf, appears every two or three years, it seems, and Benjamin Bagby performed his artful recitation of the poem to a full house at Lincoln Center and continues to attract audiences in Europe, England, and America. Indeed, poets from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Seamus Heaney seemed to view translation of Beowulf as a measure of poetic achievement. The legacy of Anglo-Saxon England has political significance as well. Henry VIII hearkened back to Anglo-Saxon letters to prove that the Church of England had always been independent of the Church of Rome. Thomas Jefferson was an avid Anglo-Saxonist and even proposed as a design for the national seal the first Anglo-Saxon leaders, Hengist and Horsa. Old English language, literature, and culture offer much, therefore, to writers and scholars seeking greater historical and linguistic depth.

ENG 581 – The Quantitative Enlightenment: Numbers, Popular Contention, the Novel

5093  W  7:15-10:05 p.m.  HU0125  M. Hill

The early modern period is traditionally presented as a time in which the key tenets of modernity where invented and affirmed: subjectivity, sociability, representative politics, and not least, mass literacy and the concept of English Literature per se. These items are all urgently addressed in the early modern novel, a literary form which itself has eighteenth-century origins. While we’ll pay close attention to the Enlightenment as traditionally defined, our ultimate goal will be to examine this historical moment of political and epistemological change from a different perspective: not subjectivity, but things; not sociability, but popular contention; not reasons of state, but intra-state violence; and finally, not taste, canons, and genres, but quantities of writing so massive that they require media technologies and sensibilities other than those usually associated with print to properly fathom.
Current philosophical texts will include writing by Althusser, Foucault, and Latour, among others. From the period at hand, we’ll read Hobbes, Bacon, Spinoza, Hutcheson and Ferguson. In addition to these, we’ll examine a range of early-modern novels and novel commentary, among them, by Behn, (Sarah) Fielding, Smollett, and Scott.

NB: THIS COURSE WILL HAVE DIFFERENT CONTENT FROM PREVIOUS 581 SECTIONS. IF YOU HAVE ALREADY TAKEN A 581 SECTION, IT CAN BE REPEATED.


Studies and theories of affect have a variety of unique and frequently overlapping origins and genealogies, from Spinoza and Deleuze to Tomkins and Sedgwick. This course focuses on one particular genealogy of studying affect: sentimentality. We will study the place of sentimentality in 19th c American literature, but in so doing study the place of sentimentality in affect theory. Our readings will survey the migration of sentimental fiction from England to the United States in the 1790s, the rise of abolitionist discourse in the 1830s, and the genre’s entwinement with the ideology of separate spheres. Our focus will be on how sentimentality developed as an identifiable set of rhetorical poses, political strategies, and formal conventions, with particular attention to sympathy, mourning, and melodrama. We will ask how and why certain kinds of feelings—and suffering in particular—have become central to the articulation of American identity. We will explore how sentimental literature, in its various guises, seeks to enable identification across boundaries of race, class, gender, and ability. What kinds of politics do spectacles of emotion enable – and foreclose?

Alongside our investigation into the literary history of sentimentality, we will study the history of literary criticism about sentimentality— a crucial strain in how Americanists talk about affect today. We will develop an understanding not only of sentimentality’s cultural politics, but also the cultural politics of certain affects in the American literary canon itself. The work we do will thus culminate in an extensive research paper that reads sentimentality with its cultural and conceptual history. Primary readings include Ruth Hall (Fern), The Scarlet Letter (Hawthorne), Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Stowe), and The Decoration of Houses (Wharton). Secondary readings will span the sentimentality/affect canon from Jane Tompkins to Lauren Berlant.

ENG 582 – Shakespeare: Sources and Offshoots

Nearly all of Shakespeare’s plays were inspired by previous texts, and within a few decades after they were first performed, they began inspiring offshoots of various kinds: sequels, adaptations, revisions, parodies, and radical, often ideologically-inflected appropriations. This course will examine six plays and their sources and offshoots: A Comedy of Errors, Richard III, Hamlet, Othello, Antony and Cleopatra, and The Tempest. We will consider the ways in which changing conceptions of history, character, gender, and other cultural assumptions have contributed to the shaping and reshaping of a story and the language and genres or forms in which that story is constructed. Readings will range from the Romans (The Menaechmi Twins by Plautus, Plutarch’s Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans) to twentieth-century fiction (The Daughter of Time by Josephine Tey, Gertrude and Claudius by John Updike) and plays (All for Love by John Dryden, Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief by Paula Vogel, A Tempest by Aime Cesaire).

ENG 615 – Poetics and Literary Practice: Modern Imagination and Poetics of Possibility (Reading Course)

The idea for this exploratory course was spurred by a well-intentioned question a colleague recently asked me after reading a draft of an essay on Robert Duncan and Charles Olson. “What do you mean by ‘the imagination’? Maybe you should quote Raymond Williams’ Keywords, or something like that…” The answer should have been simple to provide, and, no, Williams would not suffice for it. I would have to articulate my definition out of Duncan’s own poetics. (Olson, after all, has no imagination.) But her question still has turned into an albatross, as all good
questions do, and I’ve been left wondering: What has been the theoretic and philosophical discourse on the imagination, especially after Romanticism and outside Romantic Studies? How has the imagination been thought about?

We know that twentieth-century modernist poets and poetics often invoked the imagination in ways that left many later writers embarrassed or intent on rejecting it (vide Olson, the coiner of the term “post-modern” to describe cold war art and poetry as sharply distinguished from modernism). But not all later writers had the same response (vide Duncan, who dubbed himself a “belated Modernist” and espoused the continuing significance of imaginative poetics). In fact, critic Albert Gelpi (American Poetry After Modernism, 2015) has argued recently that much modernist poetry and related cold war poetry ought to be read as “Neo-romantic,” in part because of poetics that embrace imaginative faculties (vision, witness, incarnation, flux, crisis) to effect social ends befitting a “post-modern” age. The philosophical and theoretic archive to help critically explore these issues remains underdeveloped, though: How might we use our thinking about the imagination to better understand the effects of and to flesh out the poets’ own narratives about these imaginative leanings? And that’s a way of asking: How does the imagination function, and is it working in these poets’ writings in the ways they believe it does?

Imagination may have become a progressively dirtier word for American poets as the twentieth-century wore on, but, happily, that was not the case in philosophy. Indeed, schools of thought contemporaneous with modernism (such as pragmatism, process philosophy, post-Freudian psychoanalysis, phenomenology and existentialism) and afterward (such as gestalt psychology and social theory, Situationism, post-structuralism, legal theory) and up until even today (affect theory, autonomist and other political philosophy) have addressed the concept directly or indirectly. So, this course will explore the different ways philosophers and theorists in the last century or so have addressed the imagination, as well as some related concepts—image and the imaginary, of course; but also judgment (in a neo-Kantian sense), potential, the future, possibility, process, visionary, creativity, the virtual…even life. Our conversations will be focused on the philosophical and theoretic texts, but we will test the concepts and arguments through poetry and essays by six or seven key imaginative poets from the last century (2 modernists, 2 late modernists, 2 or 3 contemporary writers). The course will conclude by considering the limits of the imagination, probably a human faculty, in our post-human/post-humanist age of ecological crisis. How do “hyperobjects,” Timothy Morton’s classification for such phenomena as catastrophic climate change and black holes, interfere with the good sense or even the ethicality or political viability of a critical and poetic vocabulary of imagination?

Note: We will be using American poetry as our shared literary archive for our weekly conversations, but the final projects (MA) and seminar projects (PhD) may put some relevant theory and philosophy into conversation with primary texts and critical conversations from students’ own fields and periods of study. Creative writing students should discuss with me well in advance the possibilities for, and my expectations of, a hybrid final project. The last two to three weeks of the seminar will be devoted to the development and presentation of seminar members’ independent work for the final project (MA) or seminar projects (PhD).

Requirements for MA students: Attendance and participation in seminar discussions; midterm paper (critical conversation between theory and a poem, 10- to 12-pages); researched final paper or researched hybrid project (12- to 15-pages); final presentations on your work.

Requirements for PhD students: Attendance and participation in seminar discussions; researched article-length seminar paper or researched hybrid project (20- to 30-pages); final presentations on your work.

A finalized book list, along with a brief reading assignment for the first class meeting, will be available to all registered students in January when the Blackboard site opens two weeks before the semester’s start. Authors and/or texts on the final reading list are subject to change, but possible philosophers and theorists could be chosen from: William James, John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, R.G. Collingwood, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Otto Rank, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard, Hannah Arendt, Paul Goodman, Raoul Vaneigem, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Martha Nussbaum, Peter Sloterdijk, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Raymond Geuss, Bifo Berardi, Mark Augé, Jane Bennett, and Timothy Morton. The poets are likely to be: Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, Muriel Rukeyser, Robert Duncan, Alice Notley, Nathaniel Mackey, Ed Roberson.
Highly Recommended: For an overview of and some background about Romantic (and some post-Romantic) philosophies of the imagination, read philosopher Mary Warnock’s Imagination (1976) prior to the start of the semester. A complete edition is available for free online through Google Books.

**ENG 641 – Esthetics and Emotion**

8925 M 4:15-7:05 p.m. HU0125 C. Shepherdson

The recent history of literary theory could be seen as a double turn: (1) first, a turn away from New Criticism, which was thought to detach literature from its social and political context in the name of an idealized “esthetic” domain of art, and (2) later, as a turn away from post-structuralist thought (particularly deconstruction), insofar as the so-called “linguistic turn” was thought to reduce everything to language and the “free play of the signifier,” thereby detaching art (once again) from its social and political context. However inadequate these generalized claims may have been, they had – and continue to have – significant force in the humanities.

Movements in literary theory with very diverse aims – including feminist theory, the New Historicism, Marxism, and the general development of cultural studies – had the great advantage of restoring the political, social and historical dimension of art. In the process, however, the peculiarity of esthetic experience has been effaced or ignored. Cultural theory (as it is called – rather than “literary theory”) has tended to neglect the borders that separate esthetic experience from experience shaped by religious, legal, political, medical and other forms of social and discursive practice. Arguments about the “social construction of subjectivity” in literary criticism too often neglect the distinctive character of esthetic experience, absorbing it into the “social,” “cultural,” or “political” domain, as if there were no difference between the literary work and the medical, religious, political and other discourses that surround the work of art. And yet, the work of art cannot simply be situated in its place and time like other historical objects, as a “sign” (or symptom) of the times, as if it were one historical artifact among others (a sewer system, a technological invention, a medical practice or a religious doctrine). The work of art does not belong to time in the same way as other “historical” objects, but has a distinctive historicity which authors as diverse as Jauss, Foucault, and Adorno attempted to elaborate. The work of art does not simply represent its time, or mirror the ideologies and discourses that surround it. Of the contrary, art has a relation to history that is distinctive, disruptive, adversarial, or just imaginatively contrary (i.e. fiction), and it thereby elaborates forms of subjective life, and possibilities of thought, that do not exist in the social world around it.

This point also bears on the role of esthetic experience in the history of subjectivity. The work of art does not testify to the prior existence of a “social” form of subjectivity that exists independently and outside the work of art, as though art could only repeat or “document” the categories of class, gender, and other normative forms of social identity that predate the work of art; rather, esthetic experience brings into being new affective possibilities that challenge the social forms of subjectivity that surround the work of art.

This course will therefore explore the distinct affective and institutional formation of subjectivity that belongs to esthetic experience, focusing on the problem of “emotion.” It will explore the particular ways in which “emotion” is conceptually configured within the horizon of esthetic experience, moving through three case studies, linked to three historical moments and three affective pairs: (1) “pity and fear” in Greek tragedy, in the context of emerging democracy; (2) “fear and “respect” (or “awe”) in Kant’s account of the sublime, and in the poetry of Wordsworth; and (3) more recent elaborations of the esthetic in work by Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière, which concerns the post-Romantic period identified by Rancière as “the esthetic regime.”

The aim of the course is to explore how literature and esthetic experience contribute to (and intervene in) contemporary accounts of the “politics of affect.” Within this trajectory, the seminar will be flexible enough to allow students to explore individualized topics that may be oriented to students’ individual interests and professional orientation.

**REQUIRED WORK**

Annotated Bibliography: Each student will produce an annotated bibliography on the topic you expect to explore in your final paper. Students will submit a list of 20 items (due as posted on the syllabus), which will be reduced to 10
in consultation with me. The final bibliography (due as posted on the syllabus) will consist of a short two-page description of the main arguments, for each of the 10 items on your list.

Final Paper: Each student will produce a final paper based on the bibliography, and developing your own argument in relation to the material you have read.

REQUIRED TEXTS


ENG 642 - Current Trends in Critical Theory: Disability Studies and Literary Criticism.

10024    TH    4:15-7:05 p.m.    ED0022    S. Schalk

This course will focus on using disability studies for literary criticism. Students will develop a robust knowledge of disability studies as a field and the current major theories for analyzing the representation and rhetoric of disability in literature. We will also explore how disability studies can enhance our readings of issues of race, gender and sexuality. The course will be both reading and discussion intensive. Assignments may include book reviews, leading class discussions and a final paper.

ENG 660 - Transnational or Global Studies

10025    T    7:15-10:05 p.m.    HU0019    G. Griffith

This course examines issues that situate English studies within broader transnational, global, or planetary contexts. It addresses trends, movements, or problems that cannot adequately be analyzed within the boundaries of national literature or culture. Possible topics might include postcolonial literatures, ecological crises and their cultural implications, colonial or imperial archives, globalization and culture, among others.

ENG 681 - Seminar: Texts/Authors and Their Critics

10027    TH    4:15-7:05 p.m.    BBB004    S. North

This course will consider the relationship between a selected set of authors working in mystery and detective fiction and those critics who, especially over the past 30 years, have tried to make cultural and/or literary sense of this impressively durable and prolific form of popular literature. Among the likely authors to be included: Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Anna Katherine Green, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Dorothy Roberts Rinehart, Walter Mosley and Sara Paretsky. Critical texts will include both broader background readings (e.g., Walter Benjamin, Tsvetan Todorov); and more recent specialized work such as Maureen Reddy’s Traces, Codes and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction; Catherine Ross Nickerson’s The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women; John Irwin’s Unless the Threat of Death is Behind Them; and Sean McCann’s Gumshoe America. Assignments will include regular short writings, a class presentation, and an extended final project.

ENG 770 – Teaching Writing and Literature

4809    M    7:15-10:05 p.m.    BI0152    D. Smith

This course will help doctoral students develop pedagogical philosophy and also prepare them for practical matters of the college classroom. We will explore the efficacy of various approaches to teaching—the utility of lectures, the value of Socratic questioning, the importance of (dis)comfort in a learning context, etc. We will develop ideas about a variety of assignments that can be used to help students engage cultural texts, and we will build syllabuses that shape our own intellectual interests into teachable courses. But before working through the details of personal
teaching styles and pragmatic concerns about delivering courses, we will situate ourselves by reading about the
history of higher education in the West and the place of The University in contemporary political economy. This
study should help us understand that college teaching today is a key vocation within a neoliberal order that generally
prizes efficiency, competitiveness and “outcomes” that can be measured in quantitative terms. Our readings will
also help us to recognize that we are teaching cultural texts in a historical moment that is characterized by great
wealth disparities (often calibrated by gender and race), by the increasing costs of college education, and by official
discourses that valorize study in “STEM” fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). This historicizing
and contextualizing will strengthen our pedagogical practice; it will allow us to begin a frank assessment of our
teaching work and sharpen our thinking about what we teach, how we teach and why we teach.