ENGLISH 590S-1-01
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
THEORY OF POETRY
Wednesday 3:05 – 5:35PM
Julianne Werlin

What poems are, how they work, and what makes poems good (or not) has been a preoccupation of literary theory since its inception. In recent years, however, there has been a wave of innovative theoretical work on poetry, inspired in part by the New Lyric Theory and exemplified in Jonathan Culler’s Theory of the Lyric (2015). This class will introduce the theory of poetry in historical perspective, including both classic works and cutting-edge treatments. We will pay particular attention to classic problems such as the nature of metaphor, the “lyric I,” meter and scansion, aesthetic judgment, and the social function of lyric. In addition, we will look at work at the intersection of linguistics and literary theory, including such understudied topics as the relation of poetry to linguistic standardization. Texts will include Aristotle, Coleridge, Adorno, and Jakobson, and important recent figures such as Jahan Ramazani, Virginia Jackson, Nigel Fabb and Jonathan Culler. In addition, we will test out the theories we read (and, perhaps, invent) on a small set of poems. The course will include one final paper and one presentation.
ENGLISH 590S-3-02
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
CONTEMPORARY BLACK SOUTH
Thursday 4:40PM – 7:10PM
Jarvis McInnis

This course explores contemporary representations of the Black US South in African American literature and culture. Journeying through rural Mississippi and the Carolinas to urban centers such as Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans, and Houston, we will interrogate the geographic and cultural diversity of the contemporary Black South. We will juxtapose canonical texts—by Ida B. Wells, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, Anne Moody, or Alice Walker—that have shaped predominant cultural representations of the region, alongside works by contemporary writers such as Jesmyn Ward, Natasha Trethewey, Randall Kenan, Tayari Jones, Kiese Laymon, and Regina Bradley. We will also examine depictions of the region in media and pop culture, e.g., TV shows Atlanta and Queen Sugar; HipHop artists OutKast, Lil Wayne, and Big Freedia; and experimental films such as Julie Dash’s Daughters of the Dust and Beyoncé’s Lemonade. We will read a range of critical and theoretical works that cut across literary, cultural, media and performance studies, African American Studies, New Southern Studies, gender and sexuality studies, geography, and sociology.

ENGLISH 826S-01 / ROMST 826S-01
SEMINAR: CONTEMPORARY GENRE FICTION
Monday 4:40PM – 7:10PM
Nancy Armstrong, Roberto Dainotto

THE GLOBAL NOVEL: Mediation

Louis Althusser is known for saying, “ideology represents individuals’ imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence.” Assuming that statement is a pretty good fit for traditional literary realism as well, we feel that it’s time to rephrase this principle for the global novel, “the global novel represents individuals’ imaginary relation to forms of mediation.” Rather than refer to life beyond the page as one organized around the home, the workplace, the school, the legal system and so forth, the novels we have in mind aspire to live not only outside the language in which they were written but also beyond the printed page as film, television series, comic books, audiobooks, electronic games, and so forth. Given that a good number of these novels quite literally want to escape the material confines of the medium, they require us to figure out new procedures for reading them. We shall organize our seminar meetings with this aim in mind.

Murakami, McGurl, Todd, Merchant, English, Brouillette, Illouz and others will help us define the problem posed by works of fiction that present themselves as between media. Each seminar thereafter focuses on a device or topic that lent intelligibility to the operations of the world in which a representative individual succeeded in making a place for her or himself within the given social order. Each week, we will
consider how a particular novel of the past two decades has declared one such device or topic obsolete by repurposing or replacing it. Our task will be to determine how, with what, and perhaps why. By the end of the course, we aim to have developed a method of reading for the formal changes by which novels remake themselves for intermediality.

Seminar topics are likely to include: social mobility; origin/destination; production/reproduction; property private and public; protagonist/antagonist; setting/environment; narrative markers/clues.

Assigned novels may well include: Kushner’s The Flamethrowers, Whitehead’s Zone One, Ibrahim’s Season of Crimson Blossoms, Cole’s Open City, Lianke’s Lenin’s Kisses, Saviano, Gomorrah, Cusk’s Transit, Saunders’s Lincoln in the Bardo, Bolano, Literature in South America, Ozeki’s A Tale for the Time Being, Rawi Hage’s Cockroach.

Deleuze’s philosophical interpretation of movement and change, of time and duration, of being and becoming, of expressionism and aesthetics, of subjectivity, of the “will to power” and the “eternal return,” of cinema as philosophy, and of ethics. Readings accompanied by assigned films from primary representatives of art, world, and experimental cinema, related to the philosophical questions/material under examination each week.

LIT 850S-01 / ENGLISH 860S-01
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
DELEUZE: CINEMA & PHILOSOPHY
Tuesday 3:05PM – 5:35PM
Markos Hadjioannou

Examination of Gilles Deleuze’s books: CINEMA 1 and CINEMA 2. Exploration of his concepts of the “movement-image” and the “time-image” with reference to his other single studies on Bergson, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Nietzsche. Key topics include

ENGLISH 890S-01
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM
Wednesday 11:45AM – 2:15PM
Robert Mitchell

This course provides students with a concise historical and theoretical overview of university-based literary criticism, with the goal of enabling graduate students to better understand—and hence, situate their own projects within—the history of their discipline. (The desire for such a course has been expressed at several recent graduate town hall meetings, and this course is the response to those requests.) We will focus on a number of key twentieth- and twenty-first century methodological orientations and movements, including new criticism, structuralism, deconstruction, Foucaultian poststructuralism, new historicism, postcolonial criticism, critical race studies, and distant reading. We will also consider how these movements relate to both the changing structure of
the university and to non-university publics across this period. Rather than aiming for an exhaustive survey of twentieth- and twenty-first century modes of literary criticism, we will focus on those modes that have had the most impact on current practice.

In addition to providing a historical survey of literary criticism, this course focuses on several key skills for navigating successfully the first few years of graduate school, including time management strategies; project abstract writing (useful for conference and fellowship applications); and locating, and positioning oneself within, existing academic debates/discussions (useful for minor exam creation and articles).

ENGLISH 890S-02 / XTIANTHE 890-01
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
REDEEMING LOVE
Thursday 12:00PM – 2:30PM
David Aers

Redeeming Love: Julian of Norwich; Margery Kempe; William Langland; Nicholas Love

Synopsis

“The medievals located the redemptive value of Christ’s work primarily in his passion and crucifixion, seeing Christ as making satisfaction for our sins, and as meriting our justification and everlasting life.”

(Richard Cross, Duns Scotus, 129)

This quotation introduces some central areas explored in “Redeeming Love.” We will be working with different kinds of writing as we study different models of the redemption. This is a course in vernacular theology. Were it on Latin theologians of the late medieval world, it would not include two women writers. Although the seminar involves the study of central topics in Christian teaching, it is text centered. I have no interest in encouraging intellectual or theological history composed as a grand narrative of ideas or doctrines, no interest in a survey of theories of the atonement (a sixteenth-century term I shall eschew as an unhelpful anachronism). Why not a survey, why not a grand survey? Because such surveys have a habit of abstracting ideas / doctrines from complex exploratory and sometimes self-divided texts: and then composing their abstractions into an orderly, teleological story. The result is often a persuasive, even compelling history of ideas that no texts actually produced and perhaps nobody actually thought. What alternatives are there? A history concentrating on particular texts belonging to particular practices in particular discourses. A history of the way ideas are embodied and explored in often thoroughly complex, intellectually and affectively demanding texts. With such hermeneutic caveats in mind, we will study four medieval texts. Having done so, we may be able to consider whether these texts tell any kind of story and, if so, what.
We will begin with a text you should read before the first class, bringing a copy of the text to the first meeting: Nicholas Love’s early fifteen century translation of an immensely popular and formative Franciscan work, Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ (Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies, published by Liverpool University Press, 2004, paperback). Why begin here? Because this work displays in detail the late medieval tradition of affective devotion and its approach to Jesus Christ. The translation by Nicholas Love (a Carthusian from Mount Grace in Yorkshire) also includes some fascinating anti-Wycliffite inflections: the first Wycliffite had been burnt to death in 1401. The form of contemplation was central to Margery Kempe who we study later in this course. I would like participants to have read, before this course, St. Anselm’s Cur Deus Homo since this was such a decisive text in late medieval accounts of the Redemption. Although I do not intend to discuss this directly in class, it should be a shared reference point. I recommend the translation in Anselm of Canterbury, The Major Works, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford World’s Classics, published by Oxford University Press, 2008, paperback). From Nicholas Love’s Mirror we will turn to the greatest Christian poem of the Middle Ages written in English: William Langland’s Piers Plowman. We will be studying the C version of this work, the final version. Those unfamiliar with Middle English should certainly read the poem in the translation by George Economou, William Langland’s Piers Plowman: The C Version (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, paperback); for the Middle English, the set text is the fine annotated edition, with the helpful introduction, by Derek Pearsall: Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text, 2nd edition (Exeter Medieval Texts and Series, published by Liverpool University Press, 2008, paperback). Make sure you get this, “new annotated” edition (2008 and later); not the first edition (1978). This wonderful, demanding poem you should read in the long vacation, before the class, re-reading it during the class. After Langland, we will study another truly great work from the period, the visions and meditations of Julian of Norwich. The most accessible cheap text and one I recommend is The Showings of Julian of Norwich, edited by Denise Baker (Norton Critical Edition, 2004, paperback). If you want a good modern translation read the “Long Text” in Julian of Norwich, Showings, edited and translated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Paulist Press, 1978, paperback). If you want a densely annotated, so-called critical edition, use that by Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, The Writings of Julian of Norwich (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). We conclude the course with some weeks on the astonishing work of a lay woman, mother of fourteen children, pilgrim to Jerusalem and elsewhere, and intimate contemplative of Jesus Christ. Her work, The Book of Margery Kempe, should be read in either the fine modern translation by Lynn Staley (Norton Critical Edition including some essays on Kempe, 2000, paperback), or in Lynn Staley’s Middle English edition (TEAMS Texts, Western Michigan University Press, 1996, paperback).

The primary task of anyone enrolling in this course is to read the set texts, slowly and meditatively. I will suggest relevant scholarly work during the class but here are a few excellent introductory works:


Note on class format and expectations and grading

This class is a seminar, so attendance and participation are mandatory. Laptops (and other electronic devices) are not to be used in class. A seminar is a dialogic form of learning, very different to a lecture class. In my experience, laptops act as an impediment to the kinds of attention and communication I consider essential to a flourishing seminar. Also, since we will have more than enough to chew on already, please refrain from eating during class.

The grade will come from one essay of not more than 25 pages to be handed in during or before the final class.