

Fall 2020  
Department of English  
Graduate  
Course Descriptions



ENGLISH 590S-1-02  
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:  
**THEORY OF POETRY**  
Wednesday 3:30 – 6:00PM  
Julianne Werlin

What poems are, how they work, and what makes them 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. We will also 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. Assignments will include collaborative group work, a series of short response papers, and a final project.

This will be a hybrid course, with both in-person and online components.

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ENGLISH 590S-3-02  
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:  
**CONTEMPORARY BLACK SOUTH**

Thursday 5:15PM – 7:45PM  
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, Alice Walker, or Gloria Naylor—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, Attica Locke, Jericho Brown, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 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.

In Fall 2020, this course will only be offered online. Students will be expected to submit a critical response paper each week, lead 1-2 class discussions, and submit a 15 to 20-page seminar paper at the conclusion of the course.

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ENGLISH 826S-01 / ROMST 826S-01  
SEMINAR: **CONTEMPORARY GENRE FICTION**

Monday 5:15PM – 7:45PM  
Nancy Armstrong, Roberto Dainotto

Louis Althusser is known to have said that “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 it is 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 in film, television series, comic books, audiobooks, electronic games, and so forth. In that a good number of these novels quite literally attempt to escape the material confines of the medium, they require us to figure out new procedures for reading them.

Procedures: This course will be taught over zoom, with seminars recorded, questions pre-circulated, and voluntary responses solicited beforehand.

Requirements: In addition to informal class responses, the writing requirement will include a 12-15-page essay developed from a repertoire determined by the class in two workshop sessions where we develop a collective glossary of critical concepts most helpful in elucidating the novels.

Likely primary readings: McCarthy's *Remainder*, Saviano, *Gomorra*, Whitehead's *Zone One*, Kushner's *The Flamethrowers*, Hage's *Cockroach*, Lianke's *Lenin's Kisses*, Cole's *Open City*, Kehlmann's *Fame*, Bolaño's *The Skating Rink*, Pajak's *Uncertain Manifesto*, Cusk's *Transit*, Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*.

Likely secondary readings:

Adorno and Benjamin, "The Work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction."

Williams, *Technology, Television, and Cultural Form*.

Deleuze, "Postscript on societies of control."

Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*.

Jameson, "The Aesthetics of Singularity."

Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*.

McGurl, "Fiction in the Age of Amazon."

Bernes, "The Feminization of Speedup."

McClanahan, "Credit, Characterization, Personification."

Broe, "Serial Aesthetics."

Illouz, "Romantic Webs."

McCarthy, from *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*.

Murakami, TBD

General Plan: This course begins with two seminars aimed at establishing (with the help of the 1st set of critical readings) a critical framework for reading the novels. Subsequent seminars focus on a novel listed and paired with an appropriate critical essay from the 2nd set of critical readings.

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ENGLISH 890S-01 / XTIANTHE 890-01

SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:

**REDEEMING LOVE: FOUR MEDIEVAL TEXTS**

Thursday 12:00PM – 2:30PM

David Aers

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

ONLINE

“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 (online) meeting: Nicholas Love’s early fifteenth 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*,

2<sup>nd</sup> 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:

Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Elizabeth Salter, “Piers Plowman: An Introduction” in her posthumous collection, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England*, ed. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 111-157.

Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich: Theologian* (Yale University Press, 2011, paperback).

Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, second edition (Yale University Press, 2005, paperback), chapters 1-10: anybody studying medieval writing should read the pre-Reformation part of this book.

Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism: 1350-1550* (Herder and Herder, 2012, paperback).

#### Note on class format, expectations, and grading

This class is an online seminar, and attendance (either by joining live via Zoom or by watching a recording of the live seminar) and active participation (discussed below) are mandatory. The grade will come from one essay of not more than 25 pages to be handed in during or before the final class. Please note well: Even in an online format, a seminar is a dialogic form of learning, very different to a lecture class. Robust participation and careful preparation will be key to ensuring that the rich discussion, debate, and reflection that characterize in-person seminars can continue to thrive in the somewhat alien format demanded by our current situation. While it is strongly encouraged that students participate by joining in our seminar meetings live and contributing to our discussions there, asynchronous participation will be possible through viewing recordings of the seminars and contributing to

class discussion via some combination of written responses, email exchanges, virtual “office hours,” or other methods.

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ENGLISH 890S-02  
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:  
**HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM**  
Wednesday, Friday 10:15AM – 11:30PM  
Robert Mitchell, Charlotte Sussman

Hybrid

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 department 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, such as new criticism, structuralism, deconstruction, Foucauldian 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 also 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).

This course will offer Zoom lectures and discussion during the Wednesday meeting time (these will be recorded for those who cannot meet at that time), and two modes of discussion section: an in-person discussion section at the Friday meeting time, and an online discussion section at the Friday meeting time. (There will also be the possibility of asynchronous discussion for participants.)

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LIT 890S-02 / ENGLISH 890S-03  
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:  
**HISTORIES OF THE SELF**  
Wednesday 3:30PM – 6:00PM  
Nima Bassiri

This course examines the intellectual history of the idea of self and personhood in the modern era. Although course readings will commence with a sample of key texts and intellectual positions of the Western philosophical canon, the majority of the course will draw from a broader conceptual reservoir of readings from nineteenth and twentieth century social theory and anthropology, political theory, history of science, and critical race and feminist theory. The course will centrally examine the various ways in which selfhood has been conceptualized as a process of adaptation, modification, and transformation. We will consider, for instance: 1) conceptions of self as an early modern ethical practice of self-fashioning; 2) the self as an effect of the traumatic fracturing of colonialism and racialization; 3) the relationship between selfhood and theories of mental pathology in the nineteenth and twentieth century; and 4) the role of embodied habitus in modern social theory. The course will end by drawing out the global tensions concern the secular-liberal traditions and limitations of North Atlantic conceptions of selfhood using, as a comparative point of entry, the question of the self in a twentieth-century Islamic context.

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ENGLISH 890T-01  
TUTORIAL IN SPECIAL TOPICS  
**JOB MARKET WORKSHOP**  
Tuesday 12:00PM – 2:30PM  
Kathy Psomiades

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ENGLISH 891-01  
**INDEPENDENT STUDY: DISSERTATION WORKSHOP**  
Thursday 5:15PM – 7:45PM  
Ranjana Khanna