ENGLISH 590S-4-01
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
END OF THE WEST
Wednesday 12:00 – 2:30PM
Corina Stan

The “End” of the West

This seminar will trace the history of the term “the West” (or “Western civilization”) and the cultural pessimism that has accompanied it since its beginnings. We will examine the resilience of European imperial ambitions (from the Holy Roman Empire to the “scramble for Africa”), and the fear that “the West” would suffer a similar fate to the Roman Empire, whose collapse served, for centuries, as a cautionary tale; study the ways in which Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Judeo-Christian morality have been construed as the three main pillars of European identity, and unpack the controversy generated by historians who made a case for the Afro-Asiatic roots of European civilization (Martin Bernal, Tim Whitmarsh); understand the enduring influence of the fetishization, by the “father” of European art history Johan Winckelmann, of “white” Greek sculpture (ignoring that the originals were actually colored), and its connection to race theories that emerged at a time of imperial expansion, serving to justify it (Nell I. Painter, Sarah Bond); how the West’s self-understanding was challenged by colonialism and decolonization, waves of immigration, the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Eastern Block, the crises of 2016 (Charlie Hebdo, the refugee crisis, Brexit...), the rise of the Patriotic Europeans
Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida) and other far-right groups.

We will also evaluate arguments put forward by thinkers who construed Europe as a philosophical project (Husserl to Derrida, Rodolphe Glasché, Simon Glendinning), by critics of Western imperialism (from Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*, Richard Wright’s report from the Bandung conference *The Color Curtain* and the European lectures in *White Man, Listen!*), by James Baldwin’s “Powers and Princes”, and by critics of European decline (Rolf Peter Sieferle’s *Finis Germania*, Walter Laqueur’s *The Last Days of Europe*), and by nostalgic critics of European decline (Walter Mignolo’s *On Decoloniality*), and by Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*, Richard Wright’s *The Color Curtain*, James Baldwin’s “Powers and Princes”, and Samir Amin’s *Eurocentrism*, to Thomas Pakenham’s *The Scramble for Africa* and Walter Mignolo’s *On Decoloniality*), and by nostalgic critics of European decline (Rolf Peter Sieferle’s *Finis Germania*, Walter Laqueur’s *The Last Days of Europe* and *After the Fall*, Douglas Murray’s *The Strange Death of Europe*). We will also explore some of these themes in novels by Joseph Conrad, Leila Sebbar, Jenny Erpenbeck, Michel Houellebecq, and Caryl Phillips.

American literature is distinguished by the number of dangerous and disturbing books in its canon—and American scholarship by its ability to conceal this fact.

--Leslie Fiedler, October 1959

A work of this span goes against the grain of current critical taste, but we haven’t seen the forest for the trees much in recent years, and I think “Transgression & Redemption” will hit a lot of reset buttons, and jumpstart important new works.

--Anonymous ms. reviewer, February 2019

I invite you to a seminar in exposure, if not immersion and participation. The exposure is to an ambitious updating (feminist and queer, Morrisonian and Jamesonian, pansensorial and sacramentally alert) of the greatest account ever given of canonical U.S. storytelling, Leslie Fiedler’s *Love & Death in the American Novel*. For it was Fiedler who first taught us that American narrative is a compulsive restaging (Protestantly derived, Protestantly directed) of the interplay among sex, violence, and sanctity, and it is one of the unrecognized byproducts of nearly a half-century of canonical revision—under the signs of gender, race, class, and diaspora—that it re-animates and re-inflects but by no means defangs or escapes Fiedler’s mythography. By immersion I mean the inhabitation (“slow reading,” if you will) of major novels of that neo-canon—in which the reader cultivates her own capture by the text’s knowing, to the point where she is enabled to talk back to the text in its own idiom. I am especially interested in a major trajectory of the tradition’s own idiom, its conjuring of
Marian Catholicism—be it explicit, closeted, or allied. To participate, then, is to summon the implications of such immersion and act on the consequent vision of re-emergence, not only my re-emergent vision but yours: ideally, it is to contribute to professional praxis at its real cutting edges, beyond the Puritan pedagogy of U.S. Critical Theory, where the impact of visual, sound, and media studies is now being felt in literary studies proper, and where American mythopoetics—its appetite for radiant beauty, its insinuation of fierce wisdom, and its demand for disciplinary-suspicious courage—take command once again.

Our primary reading is to be chosen from:

Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, with “The Minister’s Black Veil”

Herman Melville, Billy Budd

Harold Frederic, The Damnation of Theron Ware

Kate Chopin, The Awakening, with “At Chênière Caminada”

F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, with “Absolution”

Willa Cather, The Professor’s House, with “Coming, Aphrodite!”

Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises, with “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”

Nella Larsen, Passing, with Claude McKay, “Jelly Roll”

Ron Hansen, Mariette in Ecstasy

Complementary readings in theory and criticism, from Fiedler of course, but also from Paglia, Emerson, Lawrence, Williams, Baym, Berger, Mulvey, Sedgwick, Paglia, Rodriguez, Morrison, Benn Michaels, Butler, Orsi, Fessenden, and (should we read The Professor’s House) a small host of Duke affiliates. Also—in Huck’s unavoidable fashion—yours truly.

LITERATURE 850S-01 / ENGLISH 860S-01
DELEUZE: CINEMA & PHILOSOPHY
Wednesday 10:15AM – 12:45PM
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 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.
ENGLISH 890S-01
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR
THE NOVEL AS THEORY
Monday 5:15PM – 7:45PM
Nancy Armstrong, Anne Garreta

Intended for graduate students who plan to research some area of novel studies, this course offers concepts that give them access 1) to the mode or modes of thinking developed in and by novels across the modern period and several different national traditions, 2) to the best known critical theoretical definition of those concepts.

This course takes a new look at the postmodern moment, when major novelists turned against their respective national traditions, seemingly fulfilling Auerbach’s claim that the novels of Virginia Woolf had pushed realism to its vanishing point.

What would the concept of the novel look like if we were to start with Calvino’s 1979 If on a Winter’s Night and proceed metonymically to what Beckett, Pynchon, Perec or Barthes among others do with the vestiges of realism and modernism?

Reversing in the process the prevailing tendency of critical theory, we shall regard the novel both as its own best theory and a critical spur for the late 20th century rise of a hyper-technical literary theory.

This course is designed for online teaching and will include guest participants, workshops, and a collaborative final project.

ENGLISH 890S-02
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
SHAKESPEARE TRAGEDIES
Thursday 3:30PM – 6:00PM
Sarah Beckwith

Shakespeare, Tragedy, Ethics: The Responsibility of Response

A first aim of this class will be to explore Shakespearean tragedy as a “lethal attempt to deny the existence of another as essential to one’s own.” So tragedy in Shakespeare's handling turns out to explore acknowledgment as the home of our knowledge of others and of ourselves. This class explores Shakespeare's tragedies as a set of meditations on the costs of denying that we share language. Why does this idea become compelling and attractive right then? How is such a denial so much as possible? We will focus on Shakespeare's late tragedies (King Lear, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Timon of Athens, Anthony and Cleopatra), as well as Hamlet, and Othello. We will also ponder the tragic matrix of comedy in plays such as Much Ado About Nothing, as well as those plays that begin as tragedies but turn aside from that form: The Winter's Tale, and possibly The Tempest.

A second aim of the class, and closely connected with the first, is an exploration of ordinary language philosophy (Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell) in relation to theatre. I see a natural affinity between the practices of theater and the practices of ordinary language philosophy because each
practice is committed to examining particular words used by particular speakers in particular situations. Each practice understands language as situation, which is different from “context” because sometimes we only understand the context when we understand what it is that is being said. Ordinary language philosophy makes the very radical claim that we will fail to understand what something means until we understand what it does, until we understand the force of the words used on any particular occasion as, say, entreaty, command, order, suggestion, permission, request, prayer. Each practice understands language as act, as event in the world, and so asks us to extend our conception of the work of language beyond the work of representation, the chief focus of historicism old and new.

We will read some central essays of J.L. Austin, Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, and especially Part 4 of Stanley Cavell’s work: The Claim of Reason: Skepticism, Morality, Acknowledgment, Tragedy where we will attempt an exploration of the intimacy of these four terms to each other. This will help us explore tragedy’s work between "avoidance and acknowledgment."

This class should be of interest to anyone interested in exploring Shakespeare, tragedy as a genre, theatre, ordinary language philosophy and ethics, and performance studies.

ENGLISH 890S-03
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL WRITING
Tuesday 12:00PM – 2:30PM
Nathaniel Mackey

A study of poetry and fiction by African American writers pursuing alternative approaches to form, content, style, coherence and meaning inside the literary work and outside it. The period covered is the 1960s to the present. The authors read for the course are Amiri Baraka, Jayne Cortez, Renee Gladman, Erica Hunt, Bob Kaufman, William Melvin Kelley, Clarence Major, Harryette Mullen, Claudia Rankine, Ishmael Reed, Ed Roberson and Fran Ross.

ENGLISH 890S-05
SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR:
THEORIES OF NATURE & THE HUMAN
Wednesday 5:15PM – 7:45PM
Priscilla Wald & Matthew Taylor (UNC-CH)

This class will explore changing theories of nature and the human by examining three conceptual clusters in their broad historical moments: state of nature and natural rights and law (colonial encounter and the Enlightenment); evolution and ecology (mid 19th century); and eugenics, biopolitics, and biotechnology (the long twentieth century). We will start by considering how changing ideas about “nature” informed such
concepts as “natural law” and “natural rights” and how they evolved through the idea and settlement of “America.” Ranging across oceans, genres, and media, the class will then focus on key developments in the sciences and political philosophy and their relationship to innovations in the literary and visual arts. Broadly speaking, we will consider the centrality of theories of nature and the human to the co-emergence of scientific and humanistic thinking—of their similarities and antagonisms. Our working premise in this class is that these conceptions underpin the broad assumptions—we might call them “cosmologies”—that we make about the world and, more specifically for our purposes, that a sense of how theories of nature change and how they shape our thinking is crucial for understanding “theory” more generally.

The wide range of works considered in this class will allow us to investigate how ideas circulate across media, genres, historical periods, and cultures. Accordingly, the course will include discussions not only of the topics covered by the readings, but also of method and approach: how we understand categories such as “theory,” “literature,” “history,” “life,” and “popular culture,” and how we might approach them in scholarship and in the classroom. There will also be an emphasis on pedagogy throughout this class.

ENGLISH 890T-01
ARTICLE WRITING
Monday 10:15AM – 12:45PM
Kathy Psomiades

Contact Maryscot Mullins for a permission number to add the class: mmullins@duke.edu

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

Contact Maryscot Mullins for a signed audit form to add the class: mmullins@duke.edu