

English Department MA Seminars, 2014 to 2016

Spring 2014

ENGL 6980 SEMINAR: POETIC SOUND & FORM TO 1900 MATTISON

Despite the innumerable, mutually contradictory definitions of poetry that have been proposed in the past and are still being debated, there is nearly unanimous consensus that poetry is distinguished from other linguistic forms in part by its emphasis on sound. Why that is, however, and what its implications are for the interpretation of poetry, remain elusive. This course will focus on lyric poetry in English from the 16th to the 19th centuries, and the theories of poetry and poetic form most read over that span, but will also feature broader discussions of the sound of verse and of language in general that will reach back to antiquity and forward to the present. Questions we will explore include: Are the sounds of words arbitrarily assigned to meanings by social and historical convention, or do sounds have inherent meaning in themselves? What is meter for, and what is its relation to meaning? How does poetic sound, including meter and rhythm, relate to music? Can we have rhyme without stanza, or stanza without rhyme? Is a rhyme a rhyme if it's not at the end of a line where we expect it? Why was blank verse ever controversial? In our attempts to answer these questions—or determine whether they are answerable—we will read, among other things, theoretical texts on poetry, poetic, music, and linguistic sound by Plato, Aristotle, Horace, George Puttenham, Nicolas Boileau, Eduard Hanslick, and Stephane Mallarmé; and poetry by Sidney, Donne, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Wordsworth, Blake, Keats, the Brownings, Whitman, Dickinson, Hopkins, Hardy, and Stephen Crane.

Fall 2014

ENGL 6010 SEMINAR IN ENGLISH

INSTRUCTION: COMPOSITION EDGINGTON

James Zebroski argues that “Theory is practice, and practice is always theoretical.” This course will focus on this connection. Using keywords from the field of writing studies, we will look at how theory and practice is interconnected in areas such as process theory, the classroom environment, curriculum development, and methods of assessing and responding to student writing. Students will be asked to read literature and research studies in the field of composition, participate in both in-class and online discussions of the readings, and develop a pedagogical assignment that could be used in the classroom. The class culminates in the production of a statement of teaching philosophy, a revised syllabus, and a paper which argues for how the syllabus enacts the philosophy.

ENGL 6980 SEMINAR: POSTCOLONIALISM & THE CITY SARKAR

“When finally Britain convinced itself it had to decolonize, it had to get rid of them, we all came back home. As they hauled down the flag, we got on the banana boat and sailed right into London...they had always said that this was really home, the streets were paved with gold and, bloody hell, we just came to check out whether that was so or not” – Stuart Hall

Standing on the deck of the *SS Empire Windrush* in 1948, Calypso singer Lord Kitchener had performed a paeon to the immigrant dream of England as a land of possibility. Lord Kitchener’s song “London is the place for me” captures the optimism and hope that was felt by the initial group of West Indian immigrants that soon turned into disillusionment and despair as they got a taste of British racism. Starting with the demystification of the imperial metropolis in the works of

postcolonial writers, this course, structured loosely around the subject of the postcolonial city, will investigate the city/urban space as a site of cultural production in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We will explore how widespread exoticism and xenophobia frustrate attempts by immigrants to assimilate in London and other urban spaces, and consequently, in the larger postcolonial British society, effectively puncturing Britain's self-constructed myth of itself as a happy multicultural land. We will also study how postcolonial cities like Mumbai or Cairo or Lagos, once the site of frenzied colonial activity, have re-invented themselves as modern cities in their own right, but are still plagued with lingering effects of colonization and neo-colonial politics. Authors will likely include Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Caryl Phillips, Zadie Smith, Kazuo Ishiguro, Hanif Kureishi, Sam Selvon, Jamaica Kincaid, Chris Abani, Orhan Pamuk, Tayeb Salih, V.S. Naipaul and others. Students will also get familiar with postcolonial criticism and engage with theorists like Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Simon Gikandi, Mary Louis Pratt, George Simmel, Raymond Williams and others.

[Spring 2015](#)

ENGL 6640 SEMINAR: COLD WARD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, FILM, MUSIC REISING

In this course we will examine the various ways in which American literature, film, and music registered the pressures, contradictions, and fears associated with nuclear war and the possibility that human life in the northern hemisphere might be obliterated at the push of a few buttons. Students will read DeLillo's *End Zone*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Ginsberg's *Howl* and other poems, and Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. We will watch films such as *Dr. Strangelove*, *Fail Safe*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Iron Giant*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Big Jim McLain*, *The Day After*, and *The World, The Flesh, and*

the Devil. We will listen to music by a variety of folk, rock, jazz, gospel, and country/western artists. Each member of the seminar will write one brief (5 pages) paper and one substantial seminar paper on a topic of her/his choice. Each member will also be responsible for leading one of our weekly discussions.

ENGL 6980 SEMINAR: JOHN DONNE MATTISON

The history of responses to the poetry and prose of John Donne (1572–1631) has been extraordinarily complex. In his own time he was called wanton and blasphemous, as well as exalted miraculous and holy. At various times since, Donne has been regarded as the premiere English lyric poet and dismissed as a metrically irregular wit, only to revert to an even loftier reputation. This course will examine Donne’s life, work, and reception history in the context of the dynamics of literary reputation in seventeenth-century England. In addition to the literary history of the period and the history of the circulation of poetry in manuscript and print, it will explore theoretical questions of the relationship between biography and meaning and the hermeneutics of intention and reception.

In the various forms in which Donne’s poetry has been circulated since the 17th century, it has usually been paired with at least a brief sketch of his life: a wild youth, periods of sickness, a religious conversion, and his ordination as an Anglican priest in 1516. The idea that the different genres and modes of Donne’s poetry limn the stages of his life—which is endorsed implicitly in the early editions of Donne’s collected works in the 1630s and explicitly by Izaak Walton in his biography of 1670—actually dates from within Donne’s lifetime. Ben Jonson mentioned to his friend William Drummond of Hawthornden that Donne, “since he was made Doctor, repenteth highlie, and seeketh to destroy all his poems.” In this seminar, we will consider first, the historical question of whether we should believe this third-hand

statement and what exactly it would mean in the context of the time; second, what effect the general idea of Donne's repentance had on the reception of his poetry—the early love poetry as well as the later satirical, religious, and philosophical work; and third, what effect such histories should have on modern interpretations. In pursuit of this last idea, we will also continue our history of Donne's reception, through his relative neglect in the eighteenth century, his association with the “metaphysical” school in the nineteenth, his celebration as the quintessential Renaissance lyric poet in the twentieth, and the broad and varied discussion of his work in recent scholarship.

Fall 2015

ENGL 6010 SEMINAR IN ENGLISH

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6410 Seminar: Medieval and Early Tudor Drama (Fall 2015) FITZGERALD

This course will serve as a graduate-level *introduction* to the dramatic texts, activities, and practices in England in the centuries prior to the opening of the first purpose-built theater

in 1576. The course will emphasize both the texts and the producing and consuming communities of such dramatic activity, communities formed by social and religious structures, economics, and geography, as well as by the plays themselves, which performed important social roles as well as artistic ones. In addition, the seminar participants will form their own playing community, as we explore this drama in part through *practice-led research*. That means actual performance will be part of the course's regular methods of inquiry. Take this course and discover a surprising pre-modern mix of the sacred and the profane, the high and the low, the humorous and the deadly serious. At turns hilarious, moving, strange, and disturbing – but always fascinating – medieval and early Tudor drama expressed not only the religious devotion but the ordinary, everyday dreams and anxieties of various communities in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries of England. We will explore these plays as literary critics, cultural historians, anthropologists, and dramatists. Course requirements will definitely include active participation in class – including the frequent informal staging of scenes to think through the meanings of space, gesture, etc. – and will likely include a short report on historical or archival material (much of it collected and edited in the *Records of Early English Drama* series), a longer report on a recent work of criticism on medieval drama, and a final project that either proposes or actually stages a production of medieval or early Tudor drama. (We will talk about the possibilities for this on the first day of class, but if the class is willing to work together, we *could* put on a play for a small audience of friends and colleagues!)

Required texts for the class will include *The Broadview Anthology of Medieval Drama* (which I co-edited, but I do *not* receive royalties from your purchase), *The Cambridge Companion to Early English Theatre*, 2nd Edition, and various texts online and on reserve.

Spring 2016

ENGL 6520 Seminar: Victorian Genres

GREGORY

What is genre? The concept of genre is central to our perception of how a literary text operates, but often our generic expectations are so deeply embedded that we fail to recognize them. In this class, we will discuss what genre means for us as readers and writers. Our testing ground will be the Victorian period, an especially rich moment for genre studies. Not only did Victorian writers continue to grapple with traditional genres such as the sonnet or the epic, but new genres also proliferated over the course of the nineteenth century, including melodrama, the dramatic monologue, science fiction, and a host of new sub-genres of the novel (historical fiction, mystery, horror). As we read and study the formation of these genres at this critical point in literary history, we will also read major genre theory. Ultimately, this course seeks to introduce students to the major genres of the Victorian period but also to provide them with a portable theoretical framework they can use in relation to other literary texts and periods

Fall 2016

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**ENGL -6440 SEMINAR: DEVOTION AND
BLASPHEMY: 17TH CENTRY RELIGIOUS
POETRY** **MATTISON**

This course examines the intersection of two institutions—religion and poetry—that were subject to tremendous upheaval in 17th-century England. Sectarian religious differences were the subject of violent conflicts, including multiple civil wars and other national crises of governance, and poets were in the middle of these conflicts, with their poetry sometimes brutally suppressed. Our readings will include writers who were imprisoned or beheaded, and others who were reviled as heretics by some while held up as models of piety by others. The course will focus on poets who combined religious preoccupations with significant literary ambition, and who used poetry to explore and defend unconventional religious ideas. Topics will include trinitarian vs. non-trinitarian conceptions of God; iconography and iconoclasm; the election of souls; the nature of grace and of providence; the theology of love, marriage, and sex; and the three-way relationship between religion, economic policy, and politics. Contextual reading will include theological and polemical writings of John Donne, Eleanor Davies, Robert Persons, Gerrard Winstanley, and John Milton; poets to be studied will include Robert Southwell, Aemilia Lanyer, Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Milton, Thomas Traherne, Katherine Philips, and Henry Vaughan.

**ENGL 6640 SEMINAR: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IMPULSE
IN 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN BLUES LITERATURE,
DRAMA, AND MUSIC (FALL 16) MACK**

What constitutes autobiography? According to Paul John Eakin, “autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and, further, that the self that is at the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure” (3). This interdisciplinary course examines the enunciation of autobiographical self-invention by various musician characters and narrators in 20th-century American blues literature, drama, and music. In this class, our exploration of blues autobiography will not be limited to literary and dramatic narrative (storytelling), but we will also analyze musical narrative forms. As such, we will study novels and plays side-by-side with selected blues songs. We will also use literary and musicological theories and methods to read the literary, dramatic, and musical texts. Through weekly reading assignments, music listening, and lively in-class discussion, this seminar will culminate in interdisciplinary final research projects. Class assignments will also allow for ongoing discussion about the goals, challenges, and outcomes of literary and musicological interdisciplinarity. What do we learn about literature when juxtaposed with music or when read through a musicological lens? Does our understanding of the literary and dramatic class readings change through a sustained engagement with music and musicological theory?