

## English Department MA Seminars, 2011 to 2014

### ENGL 6420 SEMINAR: HAMLET

WIKANDER

“Who’s there?” Between this famous opening question and the final word (“Shoot”) unfolds the mysterious world of Shakespeare’s most famous play. This course will begin with some source work (looking at the Hamlet legend as Shakespeare received it), some text work (critically examining the new Arden 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the play in both its volumes), and some performance work (viewing excerpts from the recent Hamlets of David Tennant—Dr. Who—and Jude Law). Our primary focus will be on the text(s) of “Hamlet,” and considerable class time will be spent in close reading and discussion. Students will make two presentations, one an interpretive engagement of a crucial moment in the play and one a study of a critic’s approach (or a body or criticism), and also write a 15-20 page analytic paper.

### ENGL 6640 SEMINAR: AMERICAN POETRY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LUNDQUIST

A graduate seminar on American poetry published since January 2000. In this seminar, students will read a lot of poetry, and consider poetic phenomena such as conceptual poetry, FLARF, language poetry, Oulipo, poethics, ascemic poetry, exophonic writing, writing “through,” performance poetry, ekphrastic poetry, cyberpoetry, 911 poetry, UbuWeb, uncreative writing, citational poetics, and poetry written by “the tribe of John.” We will consider the response in poetry to 21<sup>st</sup> century conditions such as the explosion of available information via the internet, the prevalence of advertising language, the degradation of the planet, the “post-American century,” “post-literacy,” American wars on other continents, globalization, economic uncertainty and so forth, while noting how the poets deal also with love, sex, mortality, friendship, grief, joy, despair, illness, aging, memory, nature, and other traditional themes of poetry. Poets read in common will probably be chosen from the following: Meena Alexander, Rae Armantrout, John Ashbery, Anne Carson, Henri Cole, Mark Doty, Stephen Dunn, Louise Gluck, Albert Goldbarth, Kenneth Goldsmith, Jorie Graham, Robert Hass, Terrance Hayes, Juan Felipe Herrera, Brenda Hillman, Susan Howe, Fanny Howe, Brigit Pegeen Kelly, Yusef Komunyakaa, Philip Levine, Nathaniel Mackey, Amit Majmudar, Maurice Manning, Jeffrey McDaniel, Heather McHugh, W.S. Merwin, Harryette Mullen, Atsuro Riley, Kay Ryan, Charles Simic, Tracy Smith, Cole Swenson, Jean Valentine, CK Williams, David Wojahn, Charles Wright, C.D. Wright, Franz Wright, Jay Wright, Kevin Young, and Rachel Zucker. We will explore poetry and poetry-related material available on the web. Seminar participants will write a paper suitable for delivery at an academic conference, practice innovative forms of critical writing, create a pod- or video-cast on the model of “Poem-Talk” or “Poetry Off the Shelf,” write a review of a book of poems published between January 2012 and April 2012, and write a longer seminar paper.

**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 paean 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.

**ENGL 6410 SEMINAR: THE POSTMODERN BEOWULF**

**FITZGERALD**

BANG! like a flash  
that hard hearted, grim, greedy,  
sick thing snatched 30 sleeping  
Danes &  
jiggetyjig ran home again,  
fists full of blood candy.

-Thomas Meyer, *Beowulf: A Translation* (47)

I no longer trust those who say they know what *Beowulf* means, or what it is about.

-James W. Earl, *Thinking about Beowulf* (11)

This course takes both parts of its title — “Postmodern” and *Beowulf* — seriously, taking as its subject the oldest major work of English poetry, the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, and its postmodern afterlives in criticism, translations, and retellings in fiction and film. And, in what I hope will be a fruitfully anachronistic approach to *Beowulf*, especially for non-medievalists, we will study the poem itself *as* a postmodern text (or even multiple

texts): in terms of how it is re-created multiple times over in and by the postmodern era, as well as in terms of how the pre-modern text and the post-modern world speak to each other, particularly through motifs of fragmentation, apocalypse, ruin, and the end of history. More concretely, the course will proceed something like this: first, we will read *Beowulf* in a modern, scholarly translation, to give us all one experience of the poem in common. We will also read some key shorter Old English poems and other texts with *Beowulf*. We will then revisit the poem through the lens of various critical approaches, starting with two that are more modernist than postmodernist (from J. R. R. Tolkien and Jane Chance) to set the stage, but then proceed through a wide variety of recent scholarship collected in the anthology *The Postmodern Beowulf*. We will then turn back to the poem, in two additional translations: Seamus Heaney's much-lauded, best-selling 2000 translation, which we will read as a post-colonial, post-modern text in its own right, and then, Thomas Meyer's translation, composed in the early 1970s but only published in 2012 — a translation that, according to its editor, shows *Beowulf* "as having always been a part of the phenomenon of the twentieth-century avant-garde long-poem." We will close the semester with a handful of retellings in the late 20th century, possibly including John Gardner's novel *Grendel*, Michael Crichton's novel *Eaters of the Dead*, and the movies *The 13th Warrior* (2000, based on *Eaters of the Dead*), *Beowulf and Grendel* (2006), and *Beowulf* (2008). Student do not need to read Old English to take this class (although students who have learned the language are encouraged to use it) and all graduate students, whatever their primary historical, critical, and theoretical interests, are invited to enroll. Requirements will likely include either a formal presentation and/or a turn at leading class discussion, as well as a final research project, which may address any of the many "Beowulfs" — pre- or postmodern.

## ENGL 6520 ENGLISH GOTHIC FICTION

## GREGORY

As the current obsession with ghosts, vampires, and the supernatural indicates, Gothic narratives are more popular today than ever before. This course will introduce you to the Gothic as both a literary genre with specific historical origins and—more generally—a cultural mode. We will consider what the Gothic is and how it emerged particularly in the English novel. As we take an historical look at the Gothic, we will ask why Gothic narratives crop up with great urgency in some historical moments rather than others, and we will consider what cultural work the Gothic performs. Although we will focus on the important tradition of English Gothic fiction from the eighteenth to late-nineteenth century (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Frankenstein*, and *Dracula*, for instance), we will read a wide range of criticism that will illuminate other permutations of the Gothic that you might apply to texts beyond the syllabus.

**ENGL 6640 SEMINAR: CREATIVE WRITING & 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION    STROUD**

This class will use Mark McGurl's *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* as its guide to mid- and late-twentieth century fiction. Along with McGurl's book--perhaps the most important large scale study of the period to come out in recent years--our readings may include work by Flannery O'Connor, Wallace Stegner, Joyce Carol Oates, Toni Morrison, Robert Olen Butler, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Ken Kesey, Bharati Mukherjee, and Philip Roth. We'll use McGurl's study of the period as a jumping off point to discuss the various strains of fiction (from Postmodernism to Minimalism to the fiction of third wave immigrants) while considering how they relate to this new, distinctly American thing--the academic creative writing program.

**6980-001 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.