

ENGLISH 390/590\*: TOPICS IN LITERATURE

**Cr. 3**

*Johnson: Woolf and Mansfield*

As key literary figures of the first few decades of the twentieth century in England, Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield helped establish a new form for fiction--one that sought a psychological realism quite different from nineteenth-century social realism and that brought together various experimental techniques. In this seminar, we will not only consider their aesthetic innovations but will also explore important political questions, such as how gender and class affect artistry, and how imperialism and war affect the human spirit; historical questions, such as what roles tradition and the past play in the present, both for relationships and for art; and philosophical questions, such as where meaning can be found in an age of skepticism. As we wrestle with such questions, we will pay attention also to how earlier readers have responded to these textual concerns and to how Woolf's and Mansfield's positions within the larger modernist project have shifted over time.

The proposed reading list includes Mansfield's *Selected Stories* and the following titles by Woolf: *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Room of One's Own*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, and *Between the Acts*.

*Danger: Victorian Women Writers: A Transatlantic Conversation..*

This course addresses two myths coloring perceptions of nineteenth-century literature: first, that the fields of British and American literature were discrete categories and second, that women writers were exceptional, minor figures in Victorian publishing. In fact, many influential Victorian writers were women, who influenced one another and who wrote for a transatlantic audience. In our discussion of texts written between 1840-1870 and their historical contexts, we will examine questions such as: how did women writers use literature as a means for resisting cultural stereotypes and for imagining new definitions of women's identity and social positions? Do the borrowings of these writers point to an "Anglo-American character" and voice in women's literature and art? How did their responses to "the woman question" reflect and influence other social and economic preoccupations on both sides of the Atlantic (e.g., social class, slavery, children's rights, the medical and economic treatment of women, educational reform, commercial publishing, etc.)? Course requirements will include a short paper, a research paper, and an oral presentation.

Proposed reading list:

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*,
- Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig*,
- Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall*,
- Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*,
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,

- Elizabeth Stoddard, *The Morgesons*,
- Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*,
- Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market*,
- Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*.

*Burow-Flak: The Worlds of Shakespeare* This course examines selected Shakespeare plays and sonnets in the contexts of sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, and of selected works by playwrights contemporary to Shakespeare. The course's title plays in part on Stephen Greenblatt's recent biography of Shakespeare, *Will in the World*, which is as much a portrait of the England in which Shakespeare lived as of the Bard himself. In the spirit of Greenblatt's biography, the course will examine as well some biographical fictions of Shakespeare the cultural icon, about whom so little is actually known. The course includes viewing of selected plays live and on video, and will very likely include a field trip. The course intentionally does not repeat texts that have been covered in last year's Engl 410: Shakespeare (with the exception of *Romeo and Juliet*, which will be performed on the VU stage this spring).

Units and Texts: I: Biographical Fictions (*Romeo and Juliet*; *Shakespeare in Love*; *Will in the World*; selected sonnets; Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*); II: Problems in Comedy (*The Merchant of Venice*; Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta* or Massinger, *The Renegado*; *All's Well That Ends Well*); III: Recasting History (*Henry V*; Marlowe, *Edward II*); IV: Puzzling Tragedy (*Macbeth*; James I, *Of Demonologie*; Dekker, Ford, and Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*); IV: Inhabiting New Worlds (*The Tempest*; Montaigne, "Of Cannibals"; Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the Newfoundland of Virginia*). Assignments will include a short (5-6-page) and a longer (8-10-page) paper, a summary and presentation of a critical work, and periodic responses to a class discussion board or blog.

*Burow-Flak: Women and Gender in Early Modern Literature.*

Over the past thirty years, scholars have formulated theories about women and gender that have changed the way we look at early modern literature. Examining the disparity between women and men in terms of legal rights, education, and social privilege, literary critics in the 1970s asked if, at the supposed pinnacle of Western thought between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, women had a Renaissance at all. Enabled by microfilm access to a large number of works printed in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, scholars in the 1980s began to identify a substantial corpus of publications by women in which the authors challenged their societies' stringent gender roles. In the 1990s, literary theorists have been examining gender as a social construct--a fiction--identifying an element of performance in masculinities and femininities that early modern literature, in particular, foregrounds.

This course examines four groupings of literary texts in light of the above questions. Works in the first grouping by Milton, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, as well as by writers of conduct manuals for women, represent women or dictate how they should live. Works in the second grouping by Margery Kempe, Christine de Pisan, Aemelia Lanyer, Rachel Speght, Anna Trapnel, Mary Rowlandson, and Katherine Phillips respond to societal definitions of femininity, often taking part in then-current debates about women, and sometimes refashioning or creating their own literary genres. Works in the third grouping by Shakespeare, Ann Bradstreet, Christopher

Marlowe, and Mary Wroth question definitions of masculinity and femininity, playing with more fluid definitions of sexuality and gender. Finally, works by seventeenth through twentieth century writers such as Angela Carter, Oscar Wilde, Abraham Cowley, and Jeannette Winterson rewrite the narratives by earlier authors on the syllabus, further refashioning gender constructs and interpretations of history as they do so. Assignments include a long (ten- to twelve-page) paper, periodic position papers, a presentation to the class, and a final exam.

*Sponberg: The Development of English Drama.*

This course will survey English drama from 1400 to 2000. Writers and plays could include: (Anonymous) *The Second Shepherd's Play*; Philip Massinger, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*; Aphra Behn, *The Rover or The Banished Cavalier*; George Lillo, *The London Merchant or The History of George Barnwell*; William Congreve, *The Way of the World*; Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer*; Richard Sheridan, *A School for Scandal*; Richard Cumberland, *The West Indian*; Thomas Holcroft, *The Road to Ruin*; Edward Butwer-Lytton, *The Lady of Lyons or Love and Pride*; Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroon or Life in Louisiana*; George Bernard Shaw, *Widowers Houses*; Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming*; Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*; Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*. The course will follow on four broad themes: 1) Changes in the dramatic conventions for representing a character's emotional and intellectual experience; 2) Continuities in dramatic construction through a variety of subjects, moods, and incidents; 3) Accommodations made by playwrights to the change in relations between women and men; and 4) accommodations made to the change in relations between England and her colonial possessions. Two essays, panel presentations, mid-term; final exam. Field trips to see productions or related plays, if possible.

*Byrne: A History of Poetic Forms.*

This course presents a study and practice in the formal elements of poetry through the analysis of model poems, critical essays on traditional and organic forms, and regular writing assignments in such forms as the sonnet, the sestina, or the villanelle. Students study rhyme, meter, rhythm, and other musical elements of poetry, as well as lineation, stanza pattern, traditional and experimental forms, and free verse. Readings include selections of poems from different historical periods in lyric, narrative, and dramatic modes. Students will also be assigned a term paper examining the history of a specific form or the use of and popularity of poetic forms during a particular historical period.

*Juneja: Other Englishes.*

It is possible now to speak of Englishes rather than English, of English literatures rather than English literature. Literature written in English thrives in many parts of the post-colonial world. Often it becomes the arena where a contested and complex relationship between the indigenous culture and the western world is being negotiated. What does it mean to be Indian, for instance, when you write in English and live in London? What is your relationship to the language and literature which had formerly been that of your colonial masters?

It is no exaggeration to say that some of the most interesting contemporary literature comes from outposts of the former British empire. This is literature with enormous vitality, suffering none of the tentativeness or self-absorption of the post-modern literary scene in America. The themes are wide-ranging, even grandly

political. I propose to use texts from the following regions: Africa, the Caribbean, and the Indian subcontinent. Texts may include works by some of the following writers: Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, R. K. Narayan, Bharati Mukherjee, Earl Lovelace, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Chinua Achebe, or Nadine Gordimer.

Students will write at least one short essay, a long paper (ten pages), and participate in a panel or some other group presentation. Students should also expect a comprehensive final examination.

*Feaster: The Novel of Social Criticism.*

Throughout its history, the novel has been a powerful instrument of social commentary and social reform. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was at least one factor that led to this nation's Civil War, and just six months after the publication of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act. In this course we will read these and other novels of social criticism that have exerted a formative influence on social values in the United States and other countries as well. A typical reading list might include such writers and works as Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*; H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay*; Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*; Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*; Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* or *Babbitt*; William Dean Howells's *A Traveler from Altruria* or *A Hazard of New Fortunes*; and Edith Wharton's *An Age of Innocence* or *The House of Mirth*.

Course requirements will include short papers (of three to four pages) on four or five of the works read in the class, occasional position papers on specific literary or social issues, a midterm, and a final examination.

*Wangerin: Sacred Tales I.*

Cultures have defined themselves in the stories passed from generation to generation. The stories communicated are both the self-perceived character of that culture and its ordered view of the universe: how all things might be named and related; how this people fit with purpose into the cosmos. Once told as necessary truth, today these narratives are studied, rather, or read for pleasure. Each genre is represented also in the Jewish and Christian Scripture. This course will attempt to reclaim the oral nature of the Scripture's tradition 1) by studying the various genres as genres that shaped cultures; 2) by discussing the specific tales of the Scripture; and 3) by telling these tales in various ways again.

*Juneja/Kingsland: African Politics and Literature.*

This course uses the social and historical basis as a vehicle to achieve understanding of modern Africa and its literature. And it uses the literature as a valuable resource to achieve this social and historical understanding. We will begin with an analysis of traditional (pre-colonial) society and history, then move to an examination of European colonization and the African response, and conclude with an analysis of contemporary Africa's problems and prospects. Even as we achieve this broad perspective on the African experience, we will also have the opportunity to specialize in an area of interest.

Readings will be supplemented with films on society and history. The literary works, although they rely heavily on post-colonial writing from Africa, will attempt to match the developmental perspective we have sketched out here. Thus, we may begin with a slave narrative, and then move to a novel like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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(Nigeria) which recreates the encounter between a traditional African society and the European colonizer. Other writers likely to be included are N'gugi (Kenya), Sembene (Senegal), and Farah (Somalia). Our enjoyment of this literature will, of course, not be limited to analyzing its social and political content.

Teaching responsibilities will be shared by a professor of political science and a professor of literature who do not always agree. Student responsibilities will include an oral presentation, a critical paper (six to seven pages), and a final examination.

*Byrne: Contemporary Poetry.*

A survey of contemporary (or Post-Modern) poets, 1945-Present. This course will examine the literary movements which have influenced poetry in the last half of the 20th Century (Beats, Neo-Surrealists, Minimalists, Neo-Realists, etc.) and the principal poets of the time, possibly including many of the following: Ginsberg, Lowell, Bishop, Plath, Sexton, Merwin, Strand, Levine, Hugo, Smith, Bly, Ashbery, Dickey, Roethke, and Stafford.

Requirements for the course will include two formal papers (ten to fifteen pages each) and a final examination.

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