

ENGLISH 493: SEMINAR IN ENGLISH

Cr. 3.

Note: Seminars are designed for juniors and seniors interested in active participation, and enrollment in at least one seminar is a requirement for the English major. The seminar encourages independent thought and research and relies upon open discussion rather than lectures. At least one different topic will be offered each semester. Proposed topics are listed below in the order of their projected offering. Enrollment is usually limited to fifteen students.

Feaster: Realism and Naturalism in American Literature "Realistic" literature dwells on the factual, the probable, the verifiable, and the empirical. The commonplace and everyday—but often squalid—aspects of experience are its subjects rather than the sentimental, fantastic, or improbable. Realistic literature leans more towards the particular than the abstract or symbolic, though this is not to say that realist novels are not frequently concerned with significant social, economic, or moral issues. Naturalism, however, can more accurately be described as writing with a philosophy. Following in general the lead of the French novelist Emile Zola, naturalists consider human beings as, to use Zola's own (translated) words, "beings powerfully dominated by their nerves and their blood, devoid of free will, carried away by the fatalities of their flesh." Not all realists are naturalists; but all naturalists certainly are realists. Recent critical emphasis on the social, historical, and cultural dimensions of literary works has given us cause to regard these writers with renewed interest and enthusiasm. Some of what we will do here, as a consequence, will be historical, comprising an attempt to recreate for ourselves some of the contradictory aspirations and realizations that have accompanied our national socio-cultural development. Alfred Kazin, for instance, has written that realism grew out of the "bewilderment, and thrived on the simple grimness, of a generation suddenly brought face to face with the pervasive materialism of industrial capitalism." The period following the Civil War up to the end of the nineteenth century was an important period in the "demythologizing" of American culture, and many of the works we will read not only reflect that process but contributed to its accomplishment. Writers covered will include Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Harold Frederic, Frank Norris, Richard Wright, and others. Seminar participants will begin work on a writing project early in the semester investigating a writer, an issue, or a theme relevant to the subject matter of the course. There will also be a mid-term examination and a final.

Danger: Women and Victorian Print Culture: A Transatlantic Conversation



This course addresses two preconceptions coloring the reception of nineteenth-century literature: first, that the fields of British and American literature were separate categories and second, that women writers were exceptional, minor figures in Victorian publishing. In fact, many of the most influential and popular 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 identity and community? Do the borrowings of these writers point to an "Anglo-American character" in 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 10-15 page seminar paper; a midterm and a final examination; and a 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* Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market* Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask*

Buinicki: The Shadows of the American Renaissance

The Romantic vision of Ralph Waldo Emerson looms large in our conception of what critics have commonly called the "American Renaissance," a period of remarkable literary production during the mid-nineteenth century. Emerson and his followers imagined that the natural world reflected the human spirit and that our perceptions shaped our surroundings; a revolution in spirit and mind, Emerson argued, would be followed by a "correspondent revolution in things": "So fast will disagreeable appearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, mad-houses, prisons, enemies, vanish; they are temporary and shall no more be seen." But what if those mad-houses and prisons did in fact reflect some aspect of the human spirit? This was the question that writers confronted as they grappled with issues of industrialization and racial and gender inequality. We will examine the connections and divergences between the works of the New England circle of Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller, and texts that respond to these prominent Transcendentalists and explore the harsh realities of mid-nineteenth century America. These will include works by Edgar Allan Poe, Fannie Fern, Louisa May Alcott, William Wells Brown, Harriet Wilson, and Herman Melville. We will also make use of cultural and critical texts to understand how these works reflected and shaped the historical period in which they were created. Work for the course will include leading class discussion, preparing a prospectus and critical review essay, writing a seminar paper and successfully completing a mid-term and final exam.

Uehling: Hawthorne and Melville

This seminar provides opportunities to study in depth a substantial and surprising body of literature. There is a lot to read, of course, but it should prove stimulating because of the range of ideas, the authentic voices, the rich texture of plot and narrative points of view. It has frequently been argued that no writers of fiction in the nineteenth century are more significant than Hawthorne and Melville--in part because they deliberately set out to be innovators and in part because each was self consciously American.

Course Requirements: 1. Two 5-7 page papers--one each on a work by Hawthorne and Melville--and an in-class oral report on each paper. 2. A mid-term examination. 3. A final comprehensive examination. 4. Regular attendance and participation.

Required Texts: Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Marble Faun*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Tales and Sketches*. Melville, Herman. *Typee*, *White Jacket*, *Moby-Dick*, *Billy Budd & Selected Tales*.

Owens: The American Short Story

In this course, we will examine the growth and development of the short story as a genre of American literature from colonial times until the present. Issues and themes considered will include the impact of the changing American culture on short fiction, the development of the short story as a literarily respectable genre, craft differences between short stories and novels, and the short story cycle as a genre.

Readings in the course come from *The American Short Story and Its Writer: An Anthology*, edited by Ann Charters, *Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and *In Our Time* by Ernest Hemingway. Course readings include standards from Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kate Chopin, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Tim O'Brien. However, the course also considers relatively obscure pieces from well known figures along with work from largely unknown or forgotten writers. Course requirements will include mid-term and final exams, a two short (4-7 pages) papers, and an article-length (15-20 pages) original research paper.

Hanson: Canadian Fiction

This seminar surveys a range of Canadian fiction in English dating from about 1940 to the present. The course features authors from a range of geographical regions of Canada, such as the prairie West or the Cape Breton coast. Attention is paid to major themes in Canadian literature, for example, Margaret Atwood's thesis that the central symbol for Canada is Survival. Authors represented in the course may include Sinclair Ross, Margaret Laurence, Robertson Davies, Aritha van Herk, Guy Vanderhaeghe, David Adams Richards, Michael Ondaatje, Lynn Coady, and others. Assignments include a midterm and final, an author presentation and shorter paper (6 pages) as well as a 12-15 page research paper.

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.

Sponberg: O'Casey, Miller, and Shaffer: Varieties of Dramatic Realism in the Twentieth Century

These three important modern playwrights developed their art within the boundaries of realism. One Irish, one American, one English, all partake of traditions which the English speaking theater has evolved since the Medieval period. Yet each nurtured a dramatic voice in the context of cultural crises. Each has sought to make the theater address moral, political, and philosophical issues affecting society. They have not shunned experiment. Each play represents a criticism of the limits of realism either in form or content. Yet the experimental elements have served the purpose of drawing a broader audience to the theater in order to disseminate the authors' ideas more widely.

This course will proceed mainly by discussion and formal presentations by the participants. We will address such questions as: What ideas predominate in the plays and how do they link the theater to society? What problems must a realistic playwright solve to invest plot, character, thought, and language with the convincing illusion of felt life? In what ways do these three represent their countries and in what ways do they share a common culture? The lives of these writers, their cultural contexts, and the problems of their art will provide abundant topics for writing and reflection. Requirements: two essays, two exams.

Burow-Flak: Milton, His Critics, and His Contemporaries

As a literary figure, John Milton is nothing if not legendary. Known primarily for his authorship of *Paradise Lost*, Milton has been celebrated as the greatest of English epic poets. His epic is well preceded, however, by his career as Latin secretary under Oliver Cromwell, and much of his previous writing is of a civic nature. Celebrated by Romantic-era authors as the great rebel and by Whig historians as a Protestant reformer and progressive thinker, Milton conversely was castigated by seventeenth-century Royalists, who ultimately regained power in England, for supporting the regicide of Charles I. Twentieth-century criticism has denounced Milton for other reasons: for his apparent misogyny, and for, in the esteem of Stanley Fish, being a literary manipulator, causing his readers to sympathize with evil and in so doing, to fall along with Adam, Eve, and Satan.

However legendary, Milton is also a misfit. However esteemed he would later become for his works on regicide and freedom of the press, his earliest prose works were on more personal matters, motivated most notably by his desire for divorce as a way out of a bad marriage. A reformer who sided with Puritan revolutionaries, Milton's Christology and position on predestination conflicted with the Calvinistic slant of most reformed sects. Fluent in classical Latin and the Latin necessary to be a statesman, Milton nonetheless penned his epics in English.

However Homeric in stature, finally, Milton penned his greatest epic while blind and in exile. Milton is an enigma, and however of the ways of studying him have multiplied, the reasons for doing so have multiplied in turn. This course surveys Milton's works, but also studies his reception among critics and addresses the literary, cultural, and historical context of Milton's England.

Assignments include a midterm exam, one long and one short paper, and two presentations to the class. Link here for a copy of the [2004 syllabus](#).

Byrne: The Nonfiction Novel

In 1965, upon the publication of his novel *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote invented the phrase "nonfiction novel" to explain a work which blends factual information and imaginative depiction of a historical event, especially when the author is represented as a character in the text. Critic Frederic R. Karl has suggested that this may be a misnomer and that "non-novelistic fiction" might be a more correct term since the works which have been created in such a manner, "fictions quarried out of facts," transform "fact into fiction without using the full dimensions of a novelistic sensibility." Throughout the semester, the ongoing controversy over the status of such works will be debated and detailed through examination of critical essays that will be distributed and through reading of some of the following writers and their texts: Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*; John Hersey, *Hiroshima*; Norman Mailer, *The Executioner's Song* or *The Armies of the Night*; William Styron, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*; Tom Wicker, *A Time to Die*; Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* or *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Requirements will include a twenty-five page paper and a final examination.

Uehling: Fiction of the Vietnam War

This class will examine significant fictional responses to the Vietnam War. Among issues for discussion are the following: what, besides combat, provides suitable material for war fiction? How, during times of war, do people--soldiers and civilians alike--discover meaning and dignity? What is the language of war? What changes in focus and technique have come about in this growing body of literature during the last thirty years?

Students will read seven war novels, a collection of stories, and will prepare a report on other responses to war (e.g., painting, photography, film, music, biography). Probable texts include Halberstam, *One Very Hot Day*; Hasford, *The Short-Timers*; O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato* or *The Things They Carried*; Heinemann, *Paco's Story*; Del Vecchio, *The 13th Valley*; Butler, *A Good Scent From a Strange Mountain*; Balaban, *Remembering Heaven's Face*; Brown, *Dirty Work*. There will be a midterm exam, a final exam, and a major paper of ten to fifteen pages.

Juneja: Tragedies of Revenge

This course will focus on a special genre of the tragic play, the revenge tragedy, which became extremely popular during the English Renaissance. Why should there be a course on revenge tragedies? These plays are vivid, theatrical, exciting--simply a lot of fun to read and talk about. Murder, revenge, ghosts, rape, madness, and bloody endings define the formula for this genre; extremes of human experience test character and spirit. Despite the chiller theater ingredients, some of the powerful plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries belong to the genre. The issues we will explore together include: What social, political, and

ideological tensions inform these plays? What do we learn about the nature of tragic experience and the tragic protagonist? What is the relationship between revenge and justice? What are the aesthetics and the psychology of violence, bloodshed, and horror? What is the role accorded to women in the world of these plays?

Our texts will include some of the following: Shakespeare, Hamlet and Titus Andronicus; Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy; Marlowe, The Jew of Malta; Tourner, The Revenger's Tragedy; Middleton, The Changeling; Webster, The Duchess of Malfi; Ford, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. We may also look at a Greek antecedent like Euripedes' Medea, and a contemporary manifestation of the genre. Students will be expected to write a short and a long paper and take a final exam. Plays require viewing, and arrangements will be made to see some of these plays on tape at a mutually agreeable time in the evening.

Ruff: John Milton, William Blake and the Protestant Epic

Everyone knows about the Protestant ethic: in this seminar we will look at works by John Milton and William Blake that aspire to be Protestant epics. We will begin by examining early works by Milton that lead up in his heroic efforts "to justify the ways of God to man" first in Paradise Lost and then in his shorter epic Paradise Regained. In those works we will analyze Milton's attempts to redefine classical notions of the hero and the epic along Protestant Christian lines. Then we will shift our attention to the art and poetry of early Romantic poet and artist William Blake, who more than any other writer attempted to rewrite Milton, and to redefine traditional notions of the fall by relocating it in the human imagination. Special attention will be paid to Blake's illustrations of Milton's poetry and to the visual imagery of his own illuminated texts, including The Songs of Innocence and Experience, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, The Song of Los, The Book of Urizen, and "The Everlasting Gospel."

Students will be required to take a midterm and a final exam, write at least two short papers and a longer seminar paper, and to participate in classroom and panel discussions.

Byrne: Hemingway and Fitzgerald

This course will examine the novels and short stories of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, two of America's most important and most influential writers, who helped shape American fiction in the modern era and beyond. Readings will include A Farewell to Arms, The Sun Also Rises, For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Great Gatsby, Tender is the Night, The Last Tycoon, and selected short stories by each author. Readings will be supplemented by background lectures highlighting biographical information and critical evaluations. Course requirements: a final exam and a substantial paper (twenty to twenty-five pages).