

MA in English Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies

* Courses indicated by an asterisk will be offered during the academic year 2016-2017

*ENG700 Aesthetics and Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism

This course investigates the emergence of aesthetic discourse in philosophical and literary texts in 18th century Europe, with particular attention to the developments and debates surrounding the beautiful and the sublime due to their crucial significance in the modern discourse of aesthetics. The questions of aesthetics and, especially, of the sublime are implicated in, and often shape, European thought of the past two centuries on truth, ethics, transcendence, beauty, Nature, sensibility, education, politics, literature, the role of art and of the artist. The course selection of theoretical texts attempts to balance the coherence of a dialogic unity of recurrent preoccupations with the diversity of emphases and interpretations given to issues in aesthetics as well as the category of the aesthetic as such. The selected literary texts that feature in the course either had or continue to have an enormous impact and influence on the understanding of the above issues.

ENG 705: The Animal in Literature and Philosophy

This course rests on the hypothesis that far from being an occasional or marginal concern of the philosophical and literary tradition, the question of the animal is in fact both vital to literary and philosophical history and placed to make it legible and understandable in radically new ways. Moving chronologically from classical Greece to early modern Europe, and from there to the 18th and the 20th centuries, we will see how the questions of the human-animal boundary and of its precarity or permeability, of animal reason or the lack thereof, and of animal habits and propensities have been foundational for virtually every aspect of human thought: the definition of what it means to be human, the conceptualization of the origins and nature of human community and human politics, the function of religion and ritual, the questions of power, law and violence, the problem of reason and rationality, the exploration of sexuality and sexual abjection, the rise of biopolitics and political economy. We will also explore the dialectic of utopia and catastrophe that can be said to define the meaning of the twentieth-century, with particular reference to anti-Semitism and the Shoah and to the drama of Soviet "totalitarianism" - a historical conjuncture that is explosively configured in the encounter between Kafka's and Orwell's animal fictions, and between these and the philosophical discussion of humanism and its limits. We will conclude with reflections on the uses of the literary and philosophical tradition of thinking the animal in the fiction and non-fiction of a twenty-first century (and so-called postcolonial) author like Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee.

ENG 707 The Problem of Subjectivity in Postmodern Theory and Literature

The aim of this course is to trace what for Michel Foucault is an "epistemological *break*," the sudden "demise" of "Man" and the consequent emergence of a new discursive, epistemological, imaginary space within which we are invited to understand our distinctiveness as human beings.

The course will focus on the fundamental theoretical approaches to humanism and the problem of subjectivity in postmodernity, exploring the key questions raised in relation to these issues: i.e. questions about choice and individual responsibility, intersubjectivity and alterity, autonomy and heteronomy, history and change, freedom and power. Students taking the course will also study works by selected postmodern writers and artists who have addressed the same issues and have attempted to throw into relief the political, psychological or ethical implications of this inquiry into the nature of what insists on surviving – *even* crossed out.

ENG 709 Imagined Worlds: The Nineteenth Century

The course explores topics in nineteenth century literature, theatre, politics, and culture. We examine how nineteenth century playwrights, novelists, scientists, and economists addressed the discrepancy between the expectations of technological progress and ongoing social unrest. A central theme in the course is the antithesis between an unshakable belief in progress and growing poverty and health hazards caused by environmental degradation. Questions include: What ethical and practical considerations to resolve social tensions were proposed by these writers? What were the ethical outcomes of debates over environmental hazards and population control? How did writers conceptualize the relationship between the metropolis and the colonies? Readings will include Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Dion Boucicault, Douglas Jerrold, Henry Mayhew, Charles Darwin, T. R. Malthus, as well as writings on nineteenth century radicalism, science and technology.

*** ENG 710 Comparative Studies in World Literature and Culture**

The course will be a seminar will be an ongoing discussion about the idea of world literature probing both the notion of ‘world’ and the notion of ‘literature’. There will be a focus on reading, critical thinking and conversation on primary texts and the critical and theoretical discussion they engender raising the question of how literature may engender ideas of the ‘world’ and ‘worldliness’. The texts are drawn widely from different historical period, cultures, genres, and literary traditions. The approach will embrace both close readings of primary texts and the broad theoretical and methodological questions and the changing socio-historical and cultural perspectives that shape and have given rise to the idea of world literature. Regional, transregional and transcultural formations and themes will be explored through a variety of selected topics related to narrative genres, poetry and poetics, translation and transculturation, and relationship of literature to other media such as film, the visual arts, and music.

*** ENG711 Literature, Society, and Revolution in the Early Modern Period**

The word revolution (from the Latin ‘revolvere’ – to revolve) is nowadays most commonly used to refer to a fundamental and transformative kind of change – with the term often applied to describe phenomena like ‘the industrial revolution’ or the ‘sexual revolution’. As a historical process, the term refers to a movement, often violent, to overthrow an old social and political order and bring about a radical change in the fundamental institutions of society. This course aims to provide students with various perspectives on the subject of revolution and social change, focusing primarily on the literature of the English Revolution. Covering a broad set of

texts and authors (including such seminal figures as Hobbes and Milton), the course will chart the political and ideological struggles that marked this turbulent period in the history of England that saw the eruption of a civil war in 1642 and the execution of King Charles I in 1649. During this process, we will explore a wide range of issues, such as the debates about the divine right of kingship, theories of resistance, and the conflict between monarchism and republicanism in the mid-seventeenth century. Students will also study a range of radical ideas expressed in the mid-seventeenth century by groups like the Diggers and the Levellers.

ENG712 Friendship in Philosophy and Literature

For philosophers ranging from Plato and Aristotle, to Cicero, Montaigne and more recently Derrida, friendship has often provided an important theme of philosophical inquiry, one that is closely interconnected with such issues as intersubjectivity, community and ethics. This course aims to provide an in-depth exploration of this theme as it is treated in philosophical as well as literary texts, covering a wide range of material from classical antiquity to the early modern and modern periods. Topics to be discussed include: the relation between friendship (*philia*), *eros* and same-sex desire; the tropes of friendship (especially the trope of the friend as “another self”) and their social and political ramifications; friendship as a mode of political thought (with special focus on the relation between friendship and the figure of sovereignty); friendship in relation to issues of gender and class; friendship and material culture; the relation between friendship, community and ethics.

ENG713 Gender, Sexuality and Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature and Culture

This course aims to examine issues relating to gender, sexuality and subjectivity in the early modern period. Looking at the interplay between these categories of investigation, the course explores how various constructions of gender and sexuality operated in early modern literature and culture and how these contributed to the production of subjectivity during this period. The course will include the study of a wide range of primary texts, which will be brought into dialogue with a selection of critical and theoretical material, thus inviting students to explore some of the broader theoretical questions that relate to the representation of gender and sexuality in early modern literature and culture. Topics to be examined include: the construction of femininity and masculinity; homosocial and homoerotic desire; representations of the body; gender and sexuality in relation to notions of prostitution, madness and witchcraft; the intersections between gender, sexuality, race and class.

*** ENG 714 Literature and the Art of Living**

The course will explore the intersections between Western and Eastern views of happiness, ethical responsibility, and self-transformation. The “art of living,” a notion integral to both literary and philosophical traditions, has always involved examining ways of “knowing oneself” (Socrates) and of understanding how our minds influence our decisions, our health, and our ethical assumptions. Western and Eastern thinkers have explored how, in the process of

becoming “mindful,” that is, aware of how we respond to internal and external influences, we can develop our own, individual, art or practice of living. The idea of mindfulness has been regularly invoked by theorists in the sciences and the humanities in order to confront the ways in which our thought is circumscribed and limited by the language and concepts we use whenever we think, speak, or write. Such limitations impede our ability to grasp the structural underpinnings of how we see ourselves and others. Practicing mindfulness, as we will see in this course and as the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group in the UK attests, may enable us to overcome these limitations both at the personal level and in our interpersonal practices in the world.

ENG716 The Sublime

This course will investigate the continuing significance of the sublime in philosophical aesthetics, literature and the arts in modernity and postmodernity. Beginning with the original Greek text *Peri Hypsous*, attributed to ‘Longinus’, and the concept’s growing popularity after Boileau’s translation in 1674, the course will focus on tracing the different conceptualizations of the sublime in aesthetic discourse as well as its varying manifestations in artistic practice from the 18th century to the present. The first half of the course will examine a selection of key theoretical texts in the modern history of the concept, from Shaftesbury and Addison to Burke, Kant and Schiller, with reference also to works of literature, music, the performing and visual arts, while the second half will combine readings in twentieth and twenty-first century theoretical reworkings of the sublime –especially the post-Kantian sublime made prominent by the work of Jean-François Lyotard –with greater attention to late 20th and early 21st century art.

ENG717 Translation in World Literature and Culture

This course will explore translation culture theory and practice in the context of comparative literary and cultural studies. The focus will be on authors, periods and movements where translation has played a significant role in the transformation and manipulation of aesthetics, poetics and ideology in the processes of cross-cultural transfer. Topics of study will include such areas as poetry and translation; literature and film adaptation; travel writing, anthropology, and translation; colonial translation and post-colonial perspectives, and will include the study of texts ranging from Homer, the Bible, the 1001 Nights, to Benjamin and Borges, as well as the study of films that have translation and translators as a central theme, for example, Peter Greenaway’s *The Pillow Book*, and Sophia Coppola’s *Lost in Translation*

ENG 718 Space and Cultural Mobility in Postmodern Theory and Literature

Through the study of selected literary texts and key theoretical works from different areas in postmodern thought, this course aims at illuminating the historical/social contexts of the post-1960s privileging of the categories of space and mobility. Exposing the (sometimes problematic) assumptions behind it, the course will a) analyze the stakes of this privileging and b) attempt to propose a more nuanced understanding of the interface between space – history- politics - identity.

ENG 719 Space and Cultural Production

In an essay he published in 1984, Michel Foucault made the now famous statement that “the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space,” adding that the rising critical shift from temporality to spatiality was due to conditions endemic in the era: the “simultaneity” and “juxtaposition” of the “near and far,” “the side-by-side,” the “dispersed.” This course aims to take stock of the major theoretical and methodological inroads made by the so-called “spatial turn” in cultural theory by focusing firstly on the place of space as a problem in philosophical and theoretical thought from the classical period to the present; and secondly, on the relationship between specific modes of spatial organization and corresponding trends in cultural practice, with particular emphasis on literary production.

*** ENG 720 Seminar in Contemporary Feminist Theory: Debates on Ethics, Aesthetics & Politics**

The course explores key issues in contemporary feminist theory, as these have been debated in different fields in the Humanities: i.e. continental philosophy, literary studies, religion, political and cultural theory, queer theory, gender and race studies, psychoanalysis and film studies. The issues to be investigated include: the gendered history of the split between ethics and politics and relevant dilemmas in contemporary feminism; the controversy about Sophocles’ *Antigone* and its feminist legacies; the increasing tension within contemporary feminism between the modern politics of recognition and the postmodern privileging of multiplicity and an ethics of alterity; the aporetic status of “Woman” in the context of Western thought; femininity, the non-relational and contemporary feminist politics; essentialisms, anti-essentialisms and the persistence of the (open) question of the feminine.

*** ENG 721 Nation and Narrative**

This course aims to explore the relationship between literary culture and the nation-state, taking its cue from Benedict Anderson's paradigm-shifting gesture of placing narrative at the heart of what we might call the imaginary institution of nationhood. Taking narrative in its broader sense as a mode of selection and emplotment of events that is common to both fictional and historical work, the course will read theoretical and literary works in the light of questions like the following:

In what ways has literary narrative (particularly the novel) interacted with the project of nation-building? What is the relation between literary history, the institutionalization of academic literary study and the formation of a nationalist culture? How have nationalist cultural projects taken stock of the realities of class and gender division and how have they responded to the geopolitical and historical impact of colonialism and imperialism? What alternative ways of fashioning identity and community have been elided, suppressed, or expropriated in the process of producing narratives (fictional or historical) of national identity and cohesion? Through what formal and representational strategies have subjected or minoritized identities been "contained" in a dominant model of nationhood and what means can literary analysis employ to interrogate officially sanctioned narratives of "imagined community"?

Since the project of thinking critically on the relationship between literature and nationalism involves interrogating the "natural" and "given" status of the nation-state, the course will both insist on the specificity of unevenly related national experiences and on the need for a comparative perspective. Indeed, part of our task will be to address both "metropolitan" and "peripheral," "first" and "third-world," nationalisms and narratives, while seeking to interrogate the critical validity and political implications of such distinctions.