Fourth-Year Seminar Descriptions

Questions about these courses can be sent via email to the Undergraduate Director, Jennifer Blair, at engdiru@uottawa.ca, or to the professor who is teaching the course.

ENG 4175 A (Fall 2021)

Title: Culture in the 1990s

Professor: James Brooke-Smith

Course Description: Writing history by the decade is a notoriously dicey proposition. The historical forces that shape our lives run deeper and longer than any ten-year perspective can grasp. And yet, more than most decades, the 1990s come ready-packaged as a historical unit, beginning in the autumn of 1989 with the fall of Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union and ending on September 11th, 2001 with the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York.

In this course, we’ll study a wide range of books, films, music and television programs that respond to this micro-epoch in world history and reflect upon its central concerns: the “end of history” and post-Cold War politics, globalization and transnational migration, digital culture, fin de siècle decadence. In addition to surveying the key artistic and cultural movements of the day – the “new earnestness” in postmodern literary fiction; Oprah’s book club and commercial trauma narratives; representations of working class identities in popular culture; the rise of the internet and utopian cyber-culture; political hip hop and the art of sampling; obscenity in contemporary art; rave music and the politics of post-industrial space; the millennium bug crisis and post-apocalyptic cinema – we will explore a variety of methodological approaches to studying the recent past. The 1990s are history, but only just. Where does the contemporary end and the historical begin? How should we set about studying the literature and culture of an era that still glows in the memory with a mixture of proximity and distance, familiarity and strangeness?

List of Potential Texts:

Novels:
Zadie Smith, White Teeth
Irvine Welsh, Trainspotting
Douglas Coupland, Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture
J.G. Ballard, Millennium People
Chris Krauss, I Love Dick
Helen Fielding, Bridget Jones’ Diary
William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition*
Michel Houellebecq, *Atomised*

**Films:**
Robin Campillo, *120 Beats Per Minute*
Werner Herzog, *Lessons of Darkness*
John Singleton, *Boyz N The Hood*
Sally Potter, *Orlando*
Lars Von Trier, *The Idiots*
Mathieu Kassovitz, *La Haine*
John Lasseter, *Toy Story*
The Warschowskis, *The Matrix*
Wong Kar-Wai, *Happy Together*
Jeremy Deller, *Everybody in the Place*

**Background – History, Theory, Criticism**
Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*
Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*
Donna Harraway, *Modest Witness@Second Millennium*
Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*
Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*
Naomi Klein, *No Logo*
Greg Tate, “What is Hip-Hop?”
Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*
ENG 4165 A (Fall 2021)

Title: The Unfinished Business of Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction

Professor: Lauren Gillingham

Course Description: Many of the elements that we know and love in contemporary crime and detective fiction have their roots in the nineteenth century: specifically, in the narrative methods and forms that authors developed to tell stories about crime, criminals, the mysteries that develop around them, and the amateur and professional sleuths who track them. Nineteenth-century writing on crime also provided frameworks for conceptualizing deviancy, vagrancy, and social disorder that are with us still, and that continue to inform contemporary discourse on governance, policing, and social difference.

In this course we will examine nineteenth-century British crime and detective fiction in its own narrative and historical contexts; we will also investigate its long legacy in our own moment, looking at how twenty-first century crime narratives perpetuate narrative structures and conceptual forms from the earlier period. Among the issues we will consider in our discussions will be the broad connections our narratives explore between narratives of crime, criminals, and detective work and matters of social and political reform; shifting class relations; imperialism and racial difference; and women’s rights and social roles.

Method:
Seminar with discussion and presentations

Grading: (subject to change depending on course format)
Seminar presentation 25%
Research paper 35%
Take-home final exam 30%
Participation 10%

Texts:
William Harrison Ainsworth, *Jack Sheppard*
Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret*
Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*
Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*
Rachel Howzell Hall, *They All Fall Down*
Jordy Rosenberg, *Confessions of the Fox*
Plus: additional readings posted on Brightspace
ENG 4180 A (Fall 2021)

Title: Modernism, Modernity, and Environmental Justice

Professor: Anne Raine

This seminar will examine U.S. modernist literature from the perspective of the climate emergency and the global struggle for multispecies environmental justice. Recent scholarship in the environmental humanities has drawn attention to the ways in which the rights and freedoms associated with progressive modernity—and American modernity in particular—depended on the shift to fossil fuels that reshaped landscapes and communities and ultimately destabilized the earth’s climate. Environmental justice activists emphasize that what the twentieth century called progress depended on the designation of certain landscapes as “sacrifice zones” and Black and Indigenous lives as disposable. And scientists and activists now point to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s as not just a regional crisis, but part of a process of desertification that was happening around the world as a result of colonization and the imposition of unsustainable agriculture and extractive industry. For literary historians, the global ecological crisis demands that we reexamine U.S. modernist literatures and their investment in capitalist modernity’s destructive legacy of accelerating climate change, mass extinction, and global environmental risk.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, environmental humanities scholars, activists, artists, and writers have sought to address the planetary crisis by developing new literary and cultural forms that express the uncertainties and anxieties of living in the so-called Anthropocene; how to turn the “slow violence” of catastrophes like climate change, toxic contamination, and species extinction into cultural forms dramatic enough to motivate people to action; how to develop cultural forms that help us think beyond the face-to-face scale of our everyday interactions with the world and apprehend the much larger scales of human, evolutionary, and geological history; and how to rethink twentieth-century assumptions about human and nonhuman nature, modernity, agency, selfhood, freedom, and progress. Our seminar will review some of this work, and will then revisit some influential works of U.S. literary modernism to see how they anticipate, or differ from, twenty-first-century responses to the climate emergency. Can we find in modernist texts a critical sensibility that has something in common with that of contemporary environmental thinkers, activists, artists, and writers? Or do we see a decisive break between the humanistic politics and aesthetic strategies of the modernist texts and the attempts of twenty-first-century writers, artists, and activists to articulate more sustainable and ethical relations between humans, nonhumans, and the earth?

Grading: Seminar work, 50%; seminar paper, 50%. Seminar work will include two presentations, one on a primary text and one on a critical article.

Course texts:
TBA, but will include a selection of ecocritical theory, environmental justice studies, fiction, and poetry.
Title: The Rectangle

Professor: Kimberly Quiogue Andrews

Course Description:

“Genre always fails.” --Claudia Rankine

In this course, we will explore the possibilities inherent in one of the more generically vexing forms of creative writing: the paragraph. Capable of containing entire stories and essays as well as experiments in the lyric, the paragraph-as-genre has both a rich history and an exciting present, and can offer creative writing students a wealth of new ways to explore and play with language. Over the course of our readings in this class, we will develop a kind of negative theory of the line—a theory, in other words, about what happens in the line’s absence, or in the line’s presence as delineated by the shape of the page. Students in this class will try their hand at various short prose forms with a focus on the “lyric” (a term we will complicate and unpack repeatedly), in the process gaining an enhanced understanding of both genre and lyric theories. The “rectangle,” as it were, has cropped up in nearly every major recent literary movement—be it Gertrude Stein’s modernism, Frank O’Hara’s New York-ism, Russell Edson’s neo-Surrealism, Christian Bök’s conceptualism, Harryette Mullen’s late-Oulipeanism, even Robert Hass’s careful formalism—and as such, students will also come away with a rich sense of the form’s applicability across traditions and time periods.

The professor’s written approval is required for registration in this course. As a preliminary to registration, applicants must submit a portfolio (up to 10 pages, in PDF format) of their writing to English.Secretary@uottawa.ca. Students will be selected solely on the basis of aptitude as indicated by work submitted.

Starting June 15th, portfolios will be accepted and considered for admission until the course is full. Students will be notified of their acceptance no later than three weeks before the beginning of term. As acceptance is not guaranteed, students submitting portfolios are advised to register for an extra course to ensure against being left short of credits in case of non-acceptance.

Method: Seminar

Texts:
**Grading:**

- Workshop Participation and Attendance: 20%
- Weekly Poems: 40%
- Reading Responses: 10%
- Recitation: 5%
- Journal Presentation: 5%
- Revision Portfolio w/ Cover Letters: 20%
ENG 4180B (Winter 2021)

Title: Africa-descended Futurisms

Professor: Suyi Okungbowa

Course Description: Africa-descended futurisms--otherwise considered “Afrofuturism” and the more nascent “Africanfuturism”--have exploded in creative and theoretical celebration in recent years. As a school of thought, these futuristic imaginations of alternate existences are tailored specifically to interrogate possible futures for people of African descent--both on the continent and in the diaspora. Today, Africa-descended futurisms have emerged as a significant intellectual framework for deconstructing the history of race and identity, the legacies of colonialism, theories of science and technology, and the making of modern Blackness and Africanness.

This course will take a multidisciplinary approach to engaging with Africa-descended futurisms, examining the literatures and other media that have shaped the contexts and debates of science fiction and other speculative works of futurism from and about the African continent and its diasporas. Topics of import will include empire and slavery, colonization and its offshoots (decolonization, neocolonization), civil rights, technoculture, and Africa-rooted spirituality and mysticism. We will consider these in intersection with other markers of identity like gender, religion, sexuality, social class, ability, etc. Students will leave the course with knowledge of major themes and works related to Africa-descended futurisms.

Method: Seminar and discussion

Grading: Reading responses (30%); Term papers (2) (30%); Creative/Craft work (5%); Participation (20%); Final reflective essay (15%)

Texts and resources:

- Brown Girl in the Ring by Nalo Hopkinson (novel)
- The Black Gods Drums by P Djeli-Clark (novella)
- The Black Imagination, Science Fiction and the Speculative, ed. by Sandra Jackson & Julie Moody Freeman (critical text)
- Jalada 02: Afrofuture(s) by the Jalada Africa collective (short story anthology)
- Dirty Computer by Janelle Monae / Black Is King by Beyonce Knowles-Carter (music)
- Black Panther by Ta-Nehisi Coates / After the Rain by Nnedi Okorafor (comics)
Title: Frauds and Scams on the Early Modern Stage

Professor: Jennifer Panek

Course description: Catfishing. E-mail from generous strangers offering to share large sums of money with you. Threatening calls from the CRA who, strangely enough, demand that you pay your taxes with gift cards. Dealing with—or rather, avoiding dealing with—fraudsters and scammers seems to be built into the technology of modern life. But frauds and scams were just as rampant some 400 years ago in early modern London, and while getting caught in one in real life was no more fun than it is now (if you were really unlucky, people might sing mocking ballads about you in the pub), they provided the plots for some very funny early modern theatre, like the six plays on this syllabus by the two pre-eminent playwrights of city comedy, Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton. The nature of scams also reveals a good deal about the culture in which they circulate: what desires and fantasies do they tap into? What weaknesses and delusions do they exploit? What makes scammers assume they can get away with their schemes? This course will be a deep dive into the foreign and fascinating culture of early modern London, c. 1600, as we examine the underlying social structures that drive the scammers and their victims.

Method: Seminar discussion, student presentations

Grading:
Class participation: 10%
Seminar presentation and leading discussion: 25%
Article presentation: 10%
Final project: 25%
Final exam: 30%

Texts
Course reader of contextual articles on early modern culture.

From Thomas Middleton: The Complete Works (Oxford: plays will be provided in a reader)
Michaelmas Term
Your Five Gallants
A Mad World, My Masters

Ben Jonson: Four Plays (New Mermaids, available through Benjamin Books. We will read the 3 plays below.)
Epicoene
The Alchemist
Volpone
ENG 4151A (Winter 2022)

Title: Gender and Sexuality on Screen: Adapting the 18th Century

Professor: Sara Landreth

Course Description: This seminar explores how 18th-century debates about gender and sexuality are adapted for the 21st-century screen. What does it mean to be a “coquette” or a “prude”, a “rake” or “a man of feeling”, and how are these literary types translated from page to film? Each unit on our syllabus pairs a film set in the long 18th century with primary and secondary readings that engage with 18th- and early 19th-century texts. We will discuss the economics of the traditional marriage market as well as new approaches to 18th-century Queer cultures. Filmic works will include Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019), The Favourite (2017), Belle (2013), Northanger Abbey (2007), Marie Antoinette (2006), Dangerous Liaisons (1988) and Barry Lyndon (1975). We will read “dressing room” poems, “scandalous” prose narratives by Eliza Haywood, Mary Wortley Montagu, and James Boswell, and novels—such as Northanger Abbey (by Jane Austen) and The Woman of Colour (Anonymous)—that resist traditional marriage plots.

Method: Seminar and discussion

Grading: Seminar Presentation (oral & written) (30%); Participation (30%); Final essay (40%)