

Comparative Literary Studies Program Graduate Course Descriptions 2015-2016

Fall 2015

CLS 410/ENG 411: The Logic of Poetry

Class Meetings: TH 2:00-5:00

Instructor: Susannah Gottlieb

Expected Enrollment:

Course Description: "Poetry does not impose; it exposes." So writes Paul Celan, as he seeks to capture the peculiar character of poetry among the arts -- as an art that is somehow different from all others because of its own internal, highly concentrated, and constantly changing logic. This seminar will provide a systematic introduction to the formal elements of poetry including diction, syntax, image, trope, rhythm, and a variety of verse forms. Each week we will concentrate on a particular element of the poetic process, identifying major poems from the English and American literary traditions, with particular attention to the twentieth century. At the same time, we will read a number of major poetological reflections, beginning with Aristotle, but again concentrating on twentieth-century thinkers and critics. In the course of the seminar students will be expected to build up a reservoir of poetological knowledge, as they work through the particular poems under consideration and analyze in detail theoretical writings directed toward elucidating those elements that enter into the logic of poetry. Along with weekly exercises that aim to develop the skill required to undertake formal analysis, students will write a final seminar paper working out the poetic logic of a small set of poems.

Evaluation Method: Attendance, class participation, weekly exercises, final paper

Reading List: Poetological writings may include selections from Aristotle, Nietzsche, Jakobson, de Man, Brathwaite, and Sedgwick. Poetry will be drawn from the English and American literary traditions.

CLS 413-0-20/SPAN 480: Visual Culture

Class Meetings: T 2:00-5:00

Instructor: Alejandra Uslenghi

Expected Enrollment:

Course Description: Phantasmagorias of Progress: Exhibitions, Photography and Literary Writing in Turn-of-the-Century Latin America.

The course will explore how visual culture at the turn of the nineteenth-century became a significant source for articulating modern experience and utopian visions of progress. We will examine specific images/objects /texts but also reach beyond them to include a history of vision, visual experience, and its historical construction. We will discuss the theoretical frameworks that have come to shape this period and its relation to literary modernism: phantasmagoria, spectatorship, technological reproduction, exhibitionary complex, mass media and consumer culture. We will read texts by T. Adorno, W. Benjamin, S. Kracauer, J. Crary, G. Didi-Huberman, K. Silverman, J. Rancière, M. Hansen, M. Doane.

CLS 413-0-21/GER 441: Introduction to Irony

Class Meetings: M 3:00-5:00

Instructor: Erica Weitzman

Expected Enrollment:

Course Description: This course will offer an overview of the fundamentals of irony and its theorization from Socrates to the present day. The aim of this course is to provide students with a broad but also thorough

understanding of this slippery “concept” (or non-concept, according to Paul de Man) in order to engage with some of the most significant debates in literary theory of the past several decades. We will examine the history of irony through a reading of fundamental texts in literature, philosophy, and literary theory from ancient Greece through German Romanticism to the twentieth century, being attentive to the different forms of position-taking that irony entails in the various domains in which it appears. We will also discuss irony in connection to related themes such as humor and comedy, theatricality, camp, and nihilism. Above all, we will ask the question of why the seemingly simple matter of irony proves to be such a tenacious problem in Western thought, and why it continues to be a topic of debate and controversy (including repeated calls for and announcements of its “end”) up to today.

Prerequisite: This course is intended for graduate students and upper-level undergraduates (with permission).

Evaluation Method: Attendance, class participation, presentations, final paper

Reading List:

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata and Other Plays* (Penguin, 2003) ISBN-13: 9780140448146

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Routledge, 2006) ISBN-13: 9780415389556

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony* (Princeton UP, 1992) ISBN: 9781400846924

Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (MIT Press, 1974) ISBN: 9780262620277

Plato, *The Trial and the Death of Socrates* (Hackett, 2001) ISBN-13: 978-0872205543

Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge UP, 1989) ISBN-13: 978-0521367813

Robert Walser, *The Robber* (University of Nebraska Press, 1983) ISBN-13: 978-0803298095

CLS 487/SLAVIC 411: Poetry and Biography

Class Meetings: M 3:00-5:00

Instructor: Clare Cavanagh

Expected Enrollment:

Course Description: Poetry and Biography: Theoretical Problems and Case Studies

“What a biography they are making for our red-head!”

--Anna Akhmatova, on hearing of Joseph Brodsky’s arrest in 1963

“The poet has no biography. His biography is language.”

--Joseph Brodsky

“It is precisely their lives [Mandelstam’s, Akhmatova’s, Tsvetaeva’s, Auden’s and Frost’s] no matter how tragic and bitter they were, that often move me-- perhaps more than the case should be.”

--Joseph Brodsky, Nobel Lecture, 1987

Biographies, both popular and scholarly, remain among the most widely-read of all genres. Yet biography itself continues to be, as one recent scholar puts it, “radically under-theorized” in cultural and literary studies today. How do we use biography in reading post-romantic poetry? How do poets themselves perceive, and manipulate, their biographies in creating and assessing their own work? What does it mean to read biographically? What are the cultural myths that inform the poet’s biography, both as lived and as read retrospectively?

In this seminar, we will explore these questions both through theoretical texts from the Formalists and New Critics to the present, and through the work of poets whose lives and writing were shaped by the powerful cultural myths and explosive history of modern Eastern Europe particularly. Documentaries, films, and mini-series on the poets’ lives—they continue to proliferate in Eastern Europe-- may also be explored. Poets to be

discussed may include: Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Joseph Brodsky, Czeslaw Milosz, and Wislawa Szymborska, along with key figures in modern Anglo-American poetry. All readings will be available in English translation.

Evaluation Method:

Participation

Oral Report (15-20 minutes)

Review of secondary text (2-3 pages)

Close reading exercise (2 pages)

Abstract (approx. 400 words)

Critical bibliography (approx. 2 pages)

Research paper (10-12 pages), including scholarly apparatus

All assignments are designed to develop scholarly writing skills across genres and to aid in preparing the final research project.

Winter 2016

CLS 411: Lacan

Class Meetings: M 4:30-7:20

Instructor: Alessia Ricciardi

Course Description: This course explores a selection of Jacques Lacan's essays and seminars while assessing his continuing relevance for fields as diverse as literature, film studies, and political theory. We will consider at length Lacan's notions of the unconscious, language, sexuality, gender difference, the drives (especially the death drive), the mirror stage, the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, the gaze, enjoyment, and the object *petit a*. We will also examine what important psychoanalytic elements appear to be missing from his theory (e.g. affects). In what direction does Lacan's thinking extend psychoanalysis after Freud? How should we take his propensity for sophistry? Our reading will cover a broad sample of the Essays, Seminar VII (particularly the section on Antigone), Seminar XI (particularly the section on the gaze as *object petit a* and XX (particularly the section on jouissance and the section on God and Woman's jouissance). We will conclude with a look at Žižek's Lacanian analyses of films and Badiou's political re-reading of Lacan. The author of a forthcoming book on Lacan and Derrida, Professor Isabelle Alfandary of Université de Paris III will visit us as a special guest.

Prior to the start of class and in preparation for our discussion, please read Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (at least Chapter Seven), *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, the Wolf Man case study, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and *Civilization and its Discontents*, as well as Sam Weber's *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis*.

Evaluation Method: participation 25%, oral presentation 25%, final paper (14-15 pages) 50%

Reading List: Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, Book VIII, Book XI, Book XX*

Requirements: Taught in English, seminar-style. Open to advanced undergraduates.

CLS 413/SPAN-PORT 455: Comparative Literature & Cultures: Literature & Anthropology

Class Meetings: TH 2:00-4:50

Instructor: César Braga-Pinto

Course Description: In his *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), Claude Lévi-Strauss refers to Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* (1578) as the "breviary of the anthropologist." Indeed, since the Renaissance, accounts of the native cultures of Brazil (sometimes utopian, sometimes nostalgic and melancholic) have

played a central role in Western epistemologies, as well as in the construction of the modern Brazilian nation and aesthetics. By studying ethnographic and fictional narratives about Brazilian indigenous peoples, this course is intended first, to understand the role played by ethnographic accounts in the construction of nationality in Brazil (and in Latin America in general) and, second to understand the role of the imagination in 20th anthropological writing. We will analyze, for example, how the Brazilian lettered elite responded to the image of Brazil that was constructed by Europeans as an exotic space, and how they incorporated it into their projects of nation building (from 19th-century Romanticism to Modernist Avant-gardes and beyond). In addition, we will discuss how indigenous cultures remain a heterogeneous space in the national and global imagination, and the political consequences of this contradiction in contemporary societies

Reading List: Readings will include travel narratives, novels, poems, ethnographic accounts and films. Essays by Montaigne, Jacques Derrida, Frank Lestringant, Michel de Certeau, Silviano Santiago, James Clifford, Johannes Fabien, Phillipe Descola, Viveiros de Castro, among others. Assignments for the first class will be posted in CANVAS.

CLS 414/GER 441: Essential Readings in Modern Jewish Culture

Class Meetings: M 3:00-5:30

Instructor: Marcus Moseley

Course Description: The twentieth century has been referred to as “The Jewish Century”. Numerically, an insignificant minority, Jews in both Western and Eastern Europe kicked open the doors to modernity in all fields of culture, finance and politics. Accompanying the rise of the modern Jew, radical anti-Semitism shook the foundations of European culture.

Topics of discussion include: Germany as the laboratory of Jewish modernity; anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred; the cultural encounter of Eastern and Western European Jewry; the emergence of Modern Hebrew and Yiddish literatures; Jewish heretics and the shaping of twentieth-century sensibilities.

Figures to be studied include Solomon Maimon, Franz Kafka, Karl Marx, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, Martin Buber, Sigmund Freud, Haim Nahman Bialik, Sholem Aleichem, Marc Chagall.

Teaching Method: Seminar.

Requirements: Students will meet once per week for a seminar and will be asked to make oral presentations. A paper of twenty pages is required at the end of the quarter.

Brief Biography: Marcus Moseley is Associate Professor of Hebrew and Yiddish literature at the Department of German, Northwestern University. He has taught at the University of Oxford, Harvard University and Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *Being For Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford, 2006)

CLS 481/GER 403: Aesthetics: 1735 and 1935 (From Baumgarten to Benjamin and Heidegger)

Class Meetings: W 2:00-4:50

Instructor: Peter Fenves

Course Description: The aim of this seminar is to approach two groundbreaking inquiries into the status of aesthetics that were drafted—under very different circumstances—around 1935: Walter Benjamin’s “Kunstwerk in der Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” (The artwork in the age of its technical reproducibility) and Martin Heidegger’s “Ursprung des Kunstwerks” (Origin of the artwork). In preparation for a reading of these two contrasting attempts to re-think the tradition of aesthetics from the ground up, the seminar begins with an analysis of the first work in which the term “aesthetics” appeared, namely Alexander Baumgarten’s 1735 dissertation, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (generally translated, oddly enough, as “Reflections on Poetry”). After a discussion of the Leibniz-inspired context that enabled Baumgarten to conceive of “aesthetics” as a “science” that is analogous to “logic” (understood as the study of rational knowledge), the seminar will concentrate on a series of stages in the development of the

German (and perhaps Danish) aesthetic tradition. The choice of texts will depend on student interest; but the possibilities include Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. In the final half of the seminar, we will attend to the aforementioned essays from 1935, while adding further texts of Benjamin and Heidegger in response to individual student interests. Among the primary questions we will be asking are these: Where does language stand in the construction and de-structuring of the concept of aesthetics? Why does the concept of aesthetics first emerge in the context of a “philosophical meditation” on poetry, when poetry is supposed to be only of the many forms of art that come under scrutiny in the new science? And to what extent does the Leibnizian origin of the term “aesthetics” reflect itself in the directions of thought proposed by Heidegger and Benjamin in their respective writings?

Teaching Method: Seminar discussion.

Evaluation Method: Two in-class presentations (one informal, the other written in advance), seminar paper.

Reading List: 1) Alexander Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, ed. Karl Ashenbrenner and William Holther (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1954; translation of [Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus](#), 1735). 2) Martin Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks* (in whatever edition the student prefers); Walter Benjamin, “Das Kunstwerk in der Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” (with emphasis on the 1935 edition that is available in several places both in German and English).

Language: Discussion is in English; readings are in German (and perhaps Danish), but English translations will be available, and students can write in whatever language they prefer.

CLS 481-21/FRENCH 493: Topics in Literary Theory: French Materialist/Marxist Theory

Class Meetings: T 7:00-9:20

Instructor: Scott Durham

Course Description: This introductory course on problems in contemporary critical theory will begin by focusing on critique of ideology in the Marxist tradition (with particular attention to Sartre, Althusser, and Jameson, along with some of their major predecessors, allies and adversaries, including such thinkers as Eisenstein, Barthes, Bataille and Derrida). We will then discuss how the relationships between discursive, institutional and aesthetic practices and their pragmatic effects are rethought in the writings of such theorists as Foucault, Rancière and Deleuze. While the primary focus of the course will be on theoretical texts, these texts will also be considered in dialogue with literary and cinematic works.

CLS 486/ENG 481: Globe, Planet, Hemisphere, Ocean

Class Meetings: T 2:00-4:50

Instructor: Brian Edwards

Course Description: This course brings together two sets of critical debates that have responded to the so-called transnational turn: the vibrant discussion in US literary studies about the appropriate frame of reference for thinking beyond the nation when reading critical literary marked “American.” And in comparative literature, postcolonial, and diaspora studies that have responded to what is called the transnational turn. Thus key terms such as the hemisphere, the planet, the oceanic, the transnational, the global, are investigated both for the debate within the field and, more importantly, how it might orient students’ own critical projects in US and transnational literary studies. Subtopics include reading in the digital age and the impact of new methods of digitally driven research paradigms, distant reading, etc. Selected 20th/21st century literary texts from US, North Africa and the Middle East, will be incorporated and read through competing paradigms. Primary texts may include Henry James, Claude McKay, Jane Bowles, Thomas Pynchon, Naguib Mahfouz, Abdellah Taia.

Evaluation Method: Students will meet once per week for a seminar and will be asked to make oral presentations. A paper of at least twenty pages is required at the end of the quarter. In this paper, students

will be asked to integrate the insights they have acquired in the course of the quarter to their own scholarly enquiries.

CLS 487/FRENCH 421: Writing in Images and Sounds: The Film Essay

Class Meetings: W 5:30-7:50

Instructor: Domietta Torlasco

Course Description: In the past few decades, a number of artists have experimented with the moving image essay as a mode of writing that blurs the distinction between creation and interpretation, fiction and documentary, history and memory. This seminar will be devoted to films and videos that have contributed to the emergence of new forms of visual thought, from Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* and Jean-Luc Godard's *Scénario du film Passion* to Agnes Varda's *The Gleaners and I*. As we follow the trail set by these works, we will read texts by Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Roland Barthes, among others. We will also consider essayistic experiments in the fields of photography, performance, and installation art. Because we stand at a pivotal juncture in the reconfiguration of our mediatic landscape, particular attention will be given to those works that problematize the relation between the analog and the digital.

Spring 2016

CLS 412/GER 401: Communicating the Incommunicable: Kant & Sterne

Class Meetings: M 2:00-4:50

Instructor: Sam Weber

Course Description: The seminar will be evenly divided between a study of Kant's Critique of the Power to Judge and Sterne's Tristram Shandy. In both of these roughly contemporaneous texts, but in very different ways, the question arises of how it is possible to communicate experiences so singular as to be unique, and hence in part incommunicable. Kant's answer has to do with developing a notion of feeling – pleasure or displeasure – which is the way that singular differences may be shared. This approach has not just aesthetical consequences, but also social and political implications. Some of these can be seen to be at work in Sterne's novel, Tristram Shandy, in which Tristram – the narrator – recounts how his father and uncle, and indeed almost everyone else, talk past one another, due to what he calls their "hobby horses." But again, through a certain shared feeling things are communicated that otherwise would remain totally disparate. A similar situation is shown to obtain in the relation of the narration to the reader, where such domestic, familial sympathy does not necessarily exist. Reading Tristram Shandy turns out in this sense to be a practical exercise and experiment in communicating the incommunicable.

Learning Objectives: At the end of the seminar students will hopefully have acquired fresh insights into the relation of affects such as pleasure, pain and sympathy in the process of reading and otherwise communicating across the gulf of distinctly singular, but in part shared experiences. This should also lead to a better understanding of the relation of affect and language, in which feeling and thinking are shown to be in no way mutually exclusive.

Evaluation Method: Attendance 25%, class participation 25%, final paper 50%

CLS 414: Poetry and Translations

Class Meetings: T/TH 11:00-12:20

Instructor: Reginald Gibbons

Course Description: A combination of seminar and workshop. Together we will translate several short poems and study theoretical approaches to literary translation and practical accounts by literary translators. We will approach language, poems, poetics, culture and theoretical issues and problems in relation to each other.

Your written work will be due in different forms during the course. In your final portfolio, you will present revised versions of your translations and a research paper on translation.

Prerequisite: A reading knowledge of a second language and experience reading literature in that language. If you are uncertain about your qualifications, please e-mail the instructor at rgibbons@northwestern.edu to describe them. Experience writing creatively is welcome, especially in poetry writing courses in the English Department.

Teaching Method: Discussion; group critique of draft translations; oral presentations by students

Evaluation Method: Written work ("Canvas" responses to reading, draft translations, revised translations, and final papers) as well as class participation should demonstrate students' growing understanding of translation as a practice and as a way of reading poetry and engaging with larger theoretical ideas about literature.

Reading List: Essays on translation by a number of critics, scholars and translators, in two published volumes and on the Course Management web site ("Canvas").

CLS 412/GER 401: Communicating the Incommunicable: Kant, Nietzsche, Sterne

Class Meetings: M 2:00-4:50

Instructor: Sam Weber

Expected Enrollment:

Course Description: The seminar will be evenly divided between a study of Kant's Critique of the Power to Judge and Sterne's Tristram Shandy. In both of these roughly contemporaneous texts, but in very different ways, the question arises of how it is possible to communicate experiences so singular as to be unique, and hence in part incommunicable. Kant's answer has to do with developing a notion of feeling – pleasure or displeasure – which is the way that singular differences may be shared. This approach has not just aesthetical consequences, but also social and political implications. Some of these can be seen to be at work in Sterne's novel, Tristram Shandy, in which Tristram – the narrator – recounts how his father and uncle, and indeed almost everyone else, talk past one another, due to what he calls their "hobby horses." But again, through a certain shared feeling things are communicated that otherwise would remain totally disparate. A similar situation is shown to obtain in the relation of the narration to the reader, where such domestic, familial sympathy does not necessarily exist. Reading Tristram Shandy turns out in this sense to be a practical exercise and experiment in communicating the incommunicable.

Learning Objectives: At the end of the seminar students will hopefully have acquired fresh insights into the relation of affects such as pleasure, pain and sympathy in the process of reading and otherwise communicating across the gulf of distinctly singular, but in part shared experiences. This should also lead to a better understanding of the relation of affect and language, in which feeling and thinking are shown to be in no way mutually exclusive.

Evaluation Method: Attendance 25%, class participation 25%, final paper 50%

CLS 414: Poetry and Translations

Class Meetings: T/TH 11:00-12:20

Instructor: Reginald Gibbons

Expected Enrollment:

Course Description: A combination of seminar and workshop. Together we will translate several short poems and study theoretical approaches to literary translation and practical accounts by literary translators. We will approach language, poems, poetics, culture and theoretical issues and problems in relation to each other. Your written work will be due in different forms during the course. In your final portfolio, you will present revised versions of your translations and a research paper on translation.

Prerequisite: A reading knowledge of a second language and experience reading literature in that language. If you are uncertain about your qualifications, please e-mail the instructor at rgibbons@northwestern.edu to

describe them. Experience writing creatively is welcome, especially in poetry writing courses in the English Department.

Teaching Method: Discussion; group critique of draft translations; oral presentations by students

Evaluation Method: Written work ("Canvas" responses to reading, draft translations, revised translations, and final papers) as well as class participation should demonstrate students' growing understanding of translation as a practice and as a way of reading poetry and engaging with larger theoretical ideas about literature.

Reading List: Essays on translation by a number of critics, scholars and translators, in two published volumes and on the Course Management web site ("Canvas").

CLS 481/GER 441/PHIL 414/HIST 405: Special Topics in German Literature and Culture

Class Meetings: T 5:00-7:50

Instructor: Hans-Jörg Rheinberger

Expected Enrollment:

Course Description: If the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of positivism, the twentieth century started with a crisis of positivistic thought without a clear response, or even alternative, to the nineteenth-century legacy. It was only slowly, over the course of a century, that a philosophy of science evolved in which epistemology, having been historicized in some manner, began to reconnect the separated contexts of justification and discovery. The organizing thread for this class will be the contribution that different streams of twentieth-century philosophy of science made to this overall process. The class proceeds from the assumption that historicizing epistemology captures the essence of what the past century has added to the

Teaching Method: Lecture and discussion

Reading List: Distributed through Canvas

CLS 481-0-21/PHIL 415/GNDR_ST 490: After Foucault: Sexuality and Politics of Time

Class Meetings: TH 2:00-4:50

Instructor: Penelope Deutscher

Expected Enrollment:

Course Description: This is an interdisciplinary course, drawing on literatures grounded in contemporary French philosophy and in race, gender, and sexuality studies. It considers the contemporary legacy of Michel Foucault in the following domains: critical theory, critical race studies, gender and sexuality studies (with a focus on Achille Mbembe, Wendy Brown, José Muñoz, Heather Love and Jasbir Puar, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, and Lauren Berlant). There are three foci of the course: debates concerning the politics of deconstructing and revising Foucault (with a focus on Derrida's critique of Foucault and the concept of hypergenealogy); the emergence of post-Foucauldian biopolitics (foregrounding necropolitics and thanatopolitics, with a focus on Mbembe); and third, contested evaluations of the political role of the future (particularly as seen in critical race theorists and queer theory). In this section, debates include the politics of utopianism, futurism, the anti-social thesis and critique of reproductive futurism, the critique of the latter within critical race studies, Mbembe's analyses of necropolitics and plural temporalities and alternative understanding of plural temporalities to have in feminist theory and queer of color theory.

Learning Objective: Acquisition of the core fundamentals of contemporary Foucauldian and deconstructive theory. Familiarity with the scholarly reception and discussion of this material from a gender studies, critical race studies and sexuality studies based perspective.

Evaluation Method: Class presentation, one short and one long paper.

Reading List: Course packet.