

**Comparative Literary Studies Program**  
**Graduate Course Descriptions 2016-2017**

**Fall 2016**

**CLS 410/GER 401: Critical Thought – Theories of Tragedy**

**Class Meetings:** W 2:00pm – 5:00pm

**Instructor:** Peter Fenves

**Course Description:** Theories of Tragedy

The aim of this theory is to understand certain formative moments in the development of the theory of tragedy under five major groupings: 1) Aristotle's theory of tragedy in response to Plato's dismissal of the tragedian from the polis under construction in *The Republic*; 2) the emergence of a new, non-Aristotelian theory of tragedy in the context of post-Kantian German idealism, with particular emphasis on Schelling's *Letters on Criticism and Dogmatism*, Hegel's exposition of *Antigone* in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and Hölderlin's "Remarks on Oedipus" and especially his "Remarks on Antigone"; 3) Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* in response to Wagner's and Schopenhauer's provocations; and 4) Benjamin's early reflections on tragedy, which, in response to Lukács and Rosenzweig as well as his own further inquiries into "the guilt-complex of the living," culminate in his *Origin of the German Mourning Play*. In addition to the theories of tragedy noted above, students will be expected to have read *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Each student will develop an in-class presentation around a tragedy of his or her own choosing, which everyone in the seminar will be encouraged to read and discuss. The final seminar paper will be a development of the in-class presentation.

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**CLS 414/ENG 461: Modern Poetics, Transnational Culture**

**Class Meetings:** T 2:00pm – 5:00pm

**Instructor:** Harris Feinsod

**Course Description:** Much recent scholarship on poetry and poetics in the modernist and avant-garde traditions reconsiders modern poetry's cosmopolitan origins, global imagination, international networks, and transcultural diffractions. This scholarship has taken place under headings including "transnational poetics," "global modernism," and "comparative modernisms." This course has several objectives: 1) to read representative works from the significant phases of poetic modernism in English in dialogue with romance language traditions; 2) to survey recent critical approaches to a "transnational poetics" of modernism, including hemispheric American studies, diaspora studies, sociology of literature, cultural front internationalism and the post-WWII emergence of postcolonial aesthetics; 3), and most broadly, to assemble an account of how to read the elements of modern poetic form against literary history's cosmopolitan horizons, rather than within the discrete boundaries of national literatures and natural language formations. We will not manage a comprehensive survey of any particular national modernism, nor an intensive historical dilation of any one moment in modernist literary production (e.g. an *annus mirabilis* such as 1913 or 1922). Rather, our focus will be intentionally expansive in both spatial and temporal terms, highlighting comparative problematics with representative texts.

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**CLS 481/FRENCH 410: Studies in Literary Theory: The Troubadours and the Occitan Tradition: Lyrics in a Manuscript Context**

**Class Meetings:** TH 3:00pm – 5:50pm

**Instructor:** Chris Davis

**Course Description:** This seminar will provide a comprehensive introduction to the poetry of the Occitan troubadours, their language, and their influence on literary traditions. The troubadours flourished in the south of France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, producing a dazzlingly innovative corpus of lyric poetry, which exercised a profound influence on the emergence of literature in other European vernaculars. In addition to studying troubadour lyrics in their original language, we will also think critically about issues related to orality, textuality and the role of literary "traditions" in the construction of cultural and national identities. This course will include study of the Occitan language and close work with medieval manuscripts.

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**Winter 2017**

**CLS 411: Critical Practices: Agamben**

**Class Meetings:** W 4pm – 6:50pm

**Instructor:** Alessia Ricciardi

**Course Description:** This course provides an introduction to the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben, particularly the texts that he includes within the Homo Sacer cycle. We discuss the genealogy and influence of the pivotal concepts that he espouses such as homo sacer, bare life, and the state of exception. These notions have generated both vital interest and vehement controversies that seem likely to endure for quite some time. For example, does the notion of homo sacer help or hinder us from assessing the critical implications of the current global refugee crisis? Through such question, we examine the advantages and limits of Agamben's thought for contemporary discussions of biopolitics, political philosophy, the Shoah, and postcolonial studies. Finally, by considering Agamben's encounters with figures such as Melville, Kafka, and Levi, we ask whether his literary readings offer a more productive horizon than does the rest of his thought. Over the course of the term, we will cover texts by Agamben, Foucault, Schmitt, Benjamin, Butler, Levi, Kafka, and Melville.

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**CLS 414-0-20: Comparative Studies in Genre: Theories of Realism**

**Class Meeting:** Th 2pm – 5pm

**Instructor:** Erica Weitzman

**Course Description:** The art of life-writing is perennially popular, yet its conventions have changed much over time. Medieval authors did not write "autobiography" in the modern sense, assuming that their personal lives were inherently interesting. But several wrote confessiones, with the double meaning Augustine gave to that term: a confession of sin coupled with a confession of faith and praise to God. Converts used the genre to announce their conversion, prophets to validate their prophetic call, and mystics to share divine revelations and edify their readers. More overtly literary forms of autobiography emerged in the high Middle Ages. The poets Ulrich von Liechtenstein and Dante crafted prose narratives to frame their love lyrics, inventing the genre of erotic autobiography?comically in Ulrich's case, seriously in Dante's. Finally, such fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers as Chaucer, Langland, Christine de Pizan, and Thomas Hoccleve skillfully developed literary personas that drew on the confessional genre to situate themselves within their own fictive creations.

### **CLS 414-0-21: Comparative Studies in Genre: Medieval Autobiography**

**Class Meeting:** M 2pm – 5pm

**Instructor:** Barbara Newman

**Course Description:** The art of life-writing is perennially popular, yet its conventions have changed much over time. Medieval authors did not write "autobiography" in the modern sense, assuming that their personal lives were inherently interesting. But several wrote confessiones, with the double meaning Augustine gave to that term: a confession of sin coupled with a confession of faith and praise to God. Converts used the genre to announce their conversion, prophets to validate their prophetic call, and mystics to share divine revelations and edify their readers. More overtly literary forms of autobiography emerged in the high Middle Ages. The poets Ulrich von Liechtenstein and Dante crafted prose narratives to frame their love lyrics, inventing the genre of erotic autobiography?comically in Ulrich's case, seriously in Dante's. Finally, such fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers as Chaucer, Langland, Christine de Pizan, and Thomas Hoccleve skillfully developed literary personas that drew on the confessional genre to situate themselves within their own fictive creations.

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### **CLS 481: Studies in Literary Theory: Visual Culture and Media**

**Class Meeting:** Tu 3:30pm – 5:50pm

**Instructor:** Domietta Torlasco

**Course Description:** The aim of this course is to introduce new graduate students to twentieth-century theories of visual culture and media, with special emphasis on the French and German contexts. Rather than attempting to cover all the positions and directions that this field has produced, we will work around specific questions and trace the ways in which they have been pursued by theorists and practitioners alike. How can we conceptualize the relation between art and technology? Can we speak of perception and memory independently of specific technical apparatuses? What is at stake in the shift from analog to digital media at the level of both inscription and reception? We will also ask questions of media archeology, and consider a range of pre-twentieth century devices for hearing and seeing. As we focus on different kinds of audiovisual media, we will read texts by T.W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Kittler, Bernard Stiegler, and Samuel Weber. We will also analyze films and art installations by Harun Farocki, Martin Arnold, and Pierre Huyghe.

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## **Spring 2017**

### **CLS 412: Literary Studies Colloquium: Ovidian Poetics**

**Class Meeting:** Fr 2:00pm – 4:50pm

**Instructor:** Will West

**Course Description:** Metamorphoses, Ovid's book of changes, continues to be one of the most widely productive texts in the history of world literature. In this class we will consider this poem as a kind of paradigm for poesis, in which transformation is more prominent than creation, and development overshadows origin. We will look at some of the stories Metamorphoses tell, how they tell them, and why; we will look at how those stories have been read and changed in turn, by readers and rewriters, into natural science, ethical prescription, political lessons, psychoanalysis. We will also consider how Metamorphoses have splintered across genres and modes, like the epic, the novel, the lyric, the dramatic?and the visual, the operatic, the cinematic, the digital. We will not attempt anything like a history of reception; the subject is too vast and the description too orderly. Instead, we will try to account in part for the promiscuity and fecundity of the idea of becoming-Ovidian, or of being metamorphic across a range of periods and texts. We will look to

Metamorphoses not as the point of origin of a history, but as a kind of core from which other kinds of production have drawn matter and energy. Insofar as is possible we will draw on the particular areas of expertise of the seminar participants.

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### **CLS 413: Comparative Studies in Theme: Holocaust Writing and Its Discontents**

**Class Meeting:** M 5:00pm – 7:50pm

**Instructor:** Anna Parkinson

**Course Description:** Described as a fundamental "break in civilization" (Dan Diner) or a caesura in Enlightenment humanism, the term "Holocaust" designates the systematic persecution and murder of over two-thirds of the European Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. More than half a century later, a vast body of fiction and non-fiction writing has been dedicated to recording, imagining, extrapolating from, and attempting to comprehend these catastrophic events. It has been argued that the Holocaust cannot be represented (aesthetic limitations), that it should not be represented (Bilderverbot/ban on graven images), and that it must be born witness to and never forgotten (ethical imperatives). So, what exactly is Holocaust writing? This course seeks to answer this question through the analysis of both canonical and lesser-known variants of autobiographical as well as fiction writing about and by Holocaust survivors, such as Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski, Jorge Semprun, Grete Weil, and Elie Wiesel. We will explore genres, styles, and tropes associated with Holocaust writing by examining the use of irony, satire, and hyperbole (Hans Keilson, Georges Perec), as well as the grotesque or even pornographic in fiction (Edgar Hilsenrath, Ka-Tzetnik 135633), through to the critical circumscription of the essay form (Jean Améry, Primo Levi, T.W. Adorno); up to its ongoing impact in the field of continental philosophy (Robert Antelme, Marguerite Duras, Sarah Kofman, Maurice Blanchet, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Giorgio Agamben). Other topics that will be addressed include the question of authenticity (the Wilkomirski affair); the "era of the witness" and the status of testimony (Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Annette Wieviorka); copyright and the reproduction of memory (Anne Frank, Marianne Hirsch); revenge and fantasy (Aharon Appelfeld, Wolfgang Hildesheimer), the connection between writing and affect in postwar therapeutic and psychoanalytic writing (Hans Keilson, Bruno Bettelheim, Viktor Frankl); and, finally, what might be called Holocaust writing of the second degree (D.M. Thomas, David Grossman, W.G. Sebald).

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### **CLS 414/CLS 313: Comparative Studies in Genre: Poetry and Translation**

**Class Meeting:** MW 3:30pm – 4:50pm

**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](mailto:rgibbons@northwestern.edu) to describe them. Experience writing creatively is welcome, especially in poetry writing courses in the English Department.

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**CLS 481-0-20: Studies in Literary Theory: Kafka, His Critics and role of the Reader**

**Class Meeting:** Tu 2:00pm – 5:00pm

**Instructor:** Sam Weber

**Course Description:** The seminar will be evenly divided between readings of certain texts of Kafka and and of some of his more influence critics. Wherever possible, critical readings will be related to specific Kafka texts, even where they are more general in character. The fascination of the authorial name - Kafka - will be juxtaposed to the complexity of the texts themselves, especially the narrative texts, on which the emphasis will be placed. Texts to be read include (the list is not exhaustive): 1. Kafka: Cares of a House Father; 2. The Hunter Gracchus; 3. Josefina, Songstress of the People of Mice; 4. "The Great Theater of Oklahama (sic!)," from The Man Who Disappeared (aka America); 5. Before the Law (and its insertion in The Trial). Critics to be read include: W. Benjamin (in connection with The Theater of Oklahama), Th. Adorno (The Castle), J. Derrida (Before the Law), M. Blanchot, Deleuze-Guattari. Students will be asked to make short presentations of readings, as well as a term paper.

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**CLS 481-0-21: Studies in Literary Theory: Bergsonism and Global Modernism**

**Class Meeting:** W 3:30pm – 5:50pm

**Instructor:** Chris Bush

**Course Description:** In the opening decades of the twentieth century, Henri Bergson was the most famous philosopher in the world. Although his early writings focused on debates about number (he was trained as a mathematician), space, and above all time, he later turned to such topics as evolution and the nature of life. His key terms were interpreted in wildly conflicting ways by different readers and rapidly became a central reference for not only philosophers, artists, and literary writers, but for many political thinkers as well.

This course explores the connections between Bergson as a philosopher of time, space, and life to some of the diverse Bergsonisms that evoked his philosophy to justify and energize their aesthetic and political agendas during the modernist period. After an introduction to Bergson's philosophical writings, we will concentrate on their uses in three different historical contexts: Parisian modernism of the interwar period (with a special emphasis on right-wing uses of Bergson); Japanese philosophy and cultural criticism from the same period; and writers associated with the négritude movement, from the late 1930s into the period of decolonization. Writers from the period may include Walter Benjamin, Wyndham Lewis, Nishida Kitaro, Kobayashi Hideo, Marcel Proust, Georges Sorel, and Léopold Senghor. Recent criticism may include Jimena Canales, Bachir Diagne, Mary Ann Doane, Donna Jones, and Stefan Tanaka.

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**CLS 481-0-22: Studies in Literary Theory: Biopolitics After Foucault**

**Class Meeting:** Tu 6:00pm – 8:50pm

**Instructor:** Penelope Deutscher

**Course Description:** This is an interdisciplinary course, drawing on literatures grounded in contemporary French philosophy in the mid- period work of Michel Foucault ? and its ongoing impact on race, gender and sexuality studies. It considers the contemporary legacy of Michel Foucault in these domains with a focus on figures including Achille Mbembe, Jasbir Puar, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Ann Stoler, Lauren Berlant, Sharon Holland, and Alex Weheliye Participants will spend about the first section of the course reviewing Foucault's College de France lectures from 1973- 1979. We will track their impact on the development within post-Foucauldian biopolitics of the concepts of necropolitics, thanatopolitics, and reproductive biopolitics, giving attention on the one hand, to the role within these fields of critiques of Foucault by Esposito and Agamben,

and new understandings of the reproductive biopoliticization of both gender and race . In light of the increasing focus in the field of post-Foucauldian theory of necropolitics and thanatopolitics, the courses ends with a focus on a number of new directions after Foucauldian biopolitics: such as vitalism, utopianism, futurism, the reconfiguration of life, or alternatively, the "anti-social thesis."