

ENG 400 Seminars

Winter 2021

Orientalism, Empire and the Plays of David Henry Hwang Will Nessly

This seminar is targeted toward students interested in plays, US ethnic literature, and the study of race, imperialism and East-West relations. As a focused study of a single dramatist, David Henry Hwang, from his earliest plays to the most recent, including *FOB*, *M. Butterfly*, *Golden Child*, *Yellow Face*, and *Chinglish*, the course will involve a rigorous, in-depth study of dramatic and narrative form and its intersection with race, sexuality, imperialism and transnationalism. We will also examine the larger cultural context of other Madame Butterfly stories and stories of trans-Pacific romance, including works by Pierre Loti, John Luther Long, Onoto Watanna, Giacomo Puccini, and Gilbert and Sullivan, as well as the Karate Kid films from the 1980s and 2010. Students will also examine theoretical selections from postcolonial studies, performance studies, critical race studies, queer studies and gender studies. To learn more about Dr. Nessly's research interests, please view his faculty profile on the English Department website.

Spring 2022

Vulnerable Bodies: Examining Representations of Disability Jacqueline Alnes

From freak shows to contemporary media, disabled people have often been portrayed in limited stereotypes, their bodies part of a spectacle staged for public amusement. This long history of harmful representation has impacted the way we understand disability as a social construct. As Michelle Mary Lelwica writes, we are taught to equate "beauty, health, and virtue with a specific form of physicality -- the 'normal' or 'ideal' body," thus rendering disabled bodies as "other."

In this course, we will use a framework of disability studies, literary studies, and cultural criticism to engage with contemporary personal essays, graphic memoir, and short fiction; and media like Sia's Music and episodes of Queer Eye. Through a research project and our own creative work, we will challenge nondisabled narratives of disability and compare those representations to those created by disabled people. Students can learn more about Dr. Alnes's research interests through the English Department's website.

Breaking Silences: Writing Memoir as an Act of Rebellion Kristine Ervin

In this course, we will examine contemporary memoirs by women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ authors who have broken silences by exploring subjects like rape, incest, family, race, and queerness and by rebelling against traditional narrative forms and genres. We will research and discuss the challenges authors face when it comes to writing and publishing subjects that are considered unspeakable by dominant discourse or culture, and given the nature of memoir writing, we'll inevitably engage with debates about truth and authenticity and representation. Additionally, we will write creatively, producing our own autobiographical art that will break silences and rebel.

Mapping the American Pacific: Poetry, Games and Imperialism **Will Nessler**

This seminar is targeted toward future teachers and advanced students interested in new approaches to American literature and American studies, imperialism, works by contemporary authors and authors of color, and the analysis of poetry and tabletop games. The course explores the idea of the archipelago—a chain of associated islands—as an alternative to continental thinking and the traditional bias in American studies toward the contiguous 48 states, the imperial center, and a US-centric worldview more generally. The course will examine the major published works of Craig Santos Perez, a contemporary poet from the Pacific island of Guam, known for his “poemaps,” which connect the spatial properties of his poems to his anti-colonial and environmental activism and his advocacy for indigenous peoples. Students will also think experimentally about another emerging genre—tabletop gaming. They will explore what board games have to say about geography and geopolitics and how one might use board games to teach in the classroom. To learn more about Dr. Nessler's research interests, please view his faculty profile on the English Department website.

The Professions in Comics/Comics in the Professions **Ashley Patriarca**

From the Golden Age of comics, comics have presented very specific perspectives on people working in certain professions, such as journalists, doctors, scientists, and private investigators. These perspectives have shaped popular imaginings of what individuals in these professions do. At the same time, comics have also been taken up by real-life practitioners in certain professions to communicate their work to audiences outside those professions.

Throughout the semester, we will closely examine the intersections of comics and professions, addressing questions such as these: How do comics simplify or complicate our collective understanding of professions (and, to a certain extent, work or labor in general)?

Sally, Sara, and Phillis: Black Women, Globalism, and the Long Eighteenth Century **Cherise Pollard**

In ENG 400: Sally, Sara and Phillis: Black Women, Globalism, and the Long Eighteenth Century students will analyze several literary texts, primarily by black women writers, that focus on the topics of race, history, colonialism and the transatlantic. Our primary texts will be Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Sally Hemings* (1977), *The Hottentot Venus* (2007), and *Venus* (2012) by Susan-Lori Parks as well as poetry by and about Phillis Wheatley. We will also analyze the James Ivory film, *Jefferson in Paris* (1995). These iconic black female figures whose stories emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in Europe and Early America, Sally Hemings, Sara Baartman, and Phillis Wheatley have become global figures that embody the racial and sexual complexities of transatlantic

colonialism. Each is infamous in her own way: Hemings is rumored to have been Thomas Jefferson's slave mistress, Baartman was the highly celebrated, yet exploited Hottentot Venus—an African woman whose body was objectified even in death, and Wheatley was the controversial, yet highly regarded African slave poet.

The Empire Writes Back: Postcolonial Responses to the British Canon **Eleanor Shevlin**

The colonial and postcolonial impulse to rewrite canonical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British texts serves as a key departure point for this course. Such rewritings function both as independent literary works worthy of attention in their own right and as critiques of specific British classics, the cultural work these classics performed, and then sociohistorical moments which produced them. The core reading for the course will feature three groupings of canonical texts and postcolonial responses. The first set consists of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (brief excerpts) and *Roxana* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*. The second group includes the familiar pairing of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The third unit is still to be determined, but we might view William Hogarth's eighteenth-century "graphic novel," the narrative series *A Harlot's Progress*, and read David Dabydeen's novel by the same name. Reading these canonical and revisionary texts alongside one another, this seminar will examine the types of "world making" that the earlier British works enacted and the aesthetic and ideological significance of the empire writing back in response to these representations. The seminar will emphasize using the postcolonial texts as theoretical maps for reading the canonical works anew and for acquiring a better understanding of the diversity of the postcolonial literary landscape. This seminar invites you to examine revision in a new light, witness generic conventions and transformations, explore audiences within the context of shifting aesthetic and cultural values, and engage in your own rewritings through interpretation and analysis. Besides participating actively in the weekly seminar discussions, you will be able to explore your own interests by writing a paper that builds upon and/or extends the course's collaborative work. The course stresses active participatory learning, creative responses, and thoughtful writing.

Apocalypse and Utopia: Cli-fi, Solarpunk, & Other Environmental Literatures **Cheryl Wanko**

Artists are often the first to imagine possible futures. And so, as we face environmental crises such as climate change, we can turn to writers to help us imagine the worst and the best of what is to come – and, of course all the messy variety in between. In this seminar, we'll discuss fiction that imagines both the horror and promise of tomorrow, in light of two ecocritical theoretical approaches, Amitav Ghosh's searing analysis of the meaning of "science fiction" for a world in crisis, and the forward-looking youth statement of the solarpunk manifesto. We study literature and hone our writing in part to grapple with the complexity of what faces us as individuals and as communities, and to understand how language and textuality shape not only what is but also what is possible. The apocalyptic and utopian and narratives we will read in this class will help us explore how we as users of language can intervene productively.

Folklores, Magics, and the Inheritance We Tell

Virginia Wood

When contemporary writers of color look back on history, on community, and on selfhood, there is a reckoning at the heart of our stories. When it is difficult to see oneself in one's narrative inheritance, our work becomes an exploration of place, internalization, and reclamation. To this work, we bring folklores, magics, secret histories, and complicated relationships with the same. What does it mean to write in a voice that you are simultaneously trying to find? What is our responsibility to previous and future generations? The course will focus on texts by writers from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds, and often on writers of LGBTQIA+ backgrounds – representing critical intersections. We will focus our work toward the theory, criticism, and history behind these texts and across genres, preparing students to reckon with the contemporary literary landscape within which these texts are intimately woven.