Literary History

Prof. R. Beebe
Coleman Hall 3841
rlbeebe@eiu.edu

Office Hours: T-R 9:30-11:15, 12:30-2 W, 9-10:30 or by appt.
M 9:00-10:30
TR 9:30-10:30 + 1:00-2:30

Course Description

This senior capstone course allows an opportunity to reflect on your studies as an English major. A large portion of your major has been organized around the idea of literary periods, and it's also likely that you have confronted literary periods or historical contexts in some of your other courses as well. We will begin the course by examining the reasons for this kind of historical organization, common characteristics of Anglo-American periodization, and some of the related problems and controversies associated with historical periodization. We will also be reading some selected texts to accompany our discussion, reading that may help you fill in historical gaps.

This discussion of literary periods will set the stage for a second layer of discussion—indeed the heart of the course—where we will be focused more centrally on what it means to read a literary text historically and how literary works confront, configure, or remake history. We will be asking provocative questions in both a theoretical and material way, questions such as: How has reading or readers changed over time? How has print technology and the digital age affected how we understand the literary text? Is "meaning" something that stays the same or changes? How do newer movements like "transatlanticism" or "global literary history" or "translational literary history" provide better categories for understanding the dynamics of literary change?

Course Format

Since we'll be covering a lot of ground—with some relatively new concepts—the class will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. But because the entire premise of this course is that it serve as a capstone experience, it's important that you use classroom discussion as the means to think through and synthesize your experiences as an English major. In other words, while the concept of LITERARY HISTORY is the focal point for our meetings and readings, the primary matter of the course is your engagement with the concept and using it to help you better understand the discipline and your career as an English major.

In this respect, the class may be quite different than other courses you have taken—and it should be.

Texts

:: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (late 14th century)
:: Shakespeare, Richard III (ca. 1592)
:: Washington Irving, The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon (1819-20)
:: Alan Moore, David Lloyd, V for Vendetta (1982-89)
:: Peter Ackroyd, Chatterton (1987)
:: Tim O'Brien, The Things They Carried (1987)
:: Tom Stoppard, Arcadia (1993)
:: M. Ferguson, ed. Norton Anthology of Poetry
:: Melvyn Bragg, The Adventure of English: The Biography of a Language
:: Other Readings (via handout and e-text)

Requirements

:: 3 Writing Projects (@ 15%) 45%
:: Short Response Papers & Quizzes 15%
:: Weekly Journal 15%
:: Final Exam 10%
:: Participation 15%
Conferences ~
You should plan to meet with me often throughout the semester to discuss your projects and whether you’re understanding the concepts introduced in class.

Attendance Policy ~
- I abide by the University’s definition of an excused absences, and I generally allow two unexcused absences—no questions asked. On the third absence—and for every absence thereafter—I will deduct 5% from your final grade.
- Five or more absences equate to an automatic “F” for the course.
- For any day that you are not in class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered, new assignments given, changes in the syllabus, or any homework due for the next meeting. Unless the absence is excused, any homework due on a day you were absent may not be turned in late or made up.
- It is also your responsibility to provide the appropriate documentation to verify an excused absence, preferably within a week of the absence.
- Please do not email me to tell me you were not in class or why. This is best done in person either after the next class or during my office hours.

“A function of literary history is to set the literature of the past at a distance, to make its otherness felt.” — David Perkins

Academic Honesty ~
Students are of course responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University’s regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism, even if unknowing or accidental, can result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Please note the English Department’s statement on plagiarism. Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—“The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s own original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to ask me to clarify.

Computer & Classroom Etiquette~
You’re welcome to bring your notebook computer to class. However, I ask that you observe common rules of etiquette and decorum when you use it. In brief, you may use it to take notes or complete an in-class writing activity. You may not use it for anything not directly related to class work. Also, please turn off (or mute) cell phones. Out of respect for the class and the integrity of class activities, absolutely no text messaging during class is allowed.

Electronic Writing Portfolio ~
This course is a writing-intensive course and, as such, your papers satisfy the requirements for the Electronic Writing Portfolio. If you plan on using work from this course for your EWP, I ask that you complete this before the last two weeks of the semester.

Students with Disabilities ~
If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.
Requirements

3 Papers
In addition to an ambitious reading schedule, you will complete three writing projects, projects that will ask you, in very specific ways, to address the matter of history and literature. Below are their approximate due dates:

- Elegy (3-5 pages)                      Feb 11
- Allusion Paper (4-6 pages)            Mar 6
- Infographic (4-6)                     May 1

Weekly Journal
One way to help you keep track of the reading—and the different levels of our discussion—is to keep a weekly journal where you address specific items or problems that find interesting, significant, or perplexing. You will do this each week and submit your dated into a D2L dropbox by each Friday at 3:00 p.m. I'll grade each posting as either superior, average, or below average.

This isn't a hard assignment at all. It requires persistence and discipline, and an easy way to earn a full 15% toward your final grade.

I'll provide more details (and a separate handout) later in the first week of classes.

Response Papers & Quizzes
I frequently ask you to prepare informal response papers, which are usually due in class and are a way to focus the class discussion. Please have these with you on the date assigned and be prepared to read portions to the class. I usually don’t accept late response papers. I also give brief quizzes on occasion. Even if you miss a class you’ll want to find out if any adjustments were made to the reading schedule so you can be ready for a quiz or other in-class activity.