

## ENG 400 Seminars

### Summer 1, 2017

Students can learn about the professor's research interests from their [faculty pages](#) on the department's website.

#### **Toni Morrison: The Trilogy** **Dr. Cherise Pollard**

Toni Morrison is perhaps the most popular contemporary African American woman novelist and cultural critic. Morrison's work has garnered multiple high profile prizes and honors, including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, The Nobel Prize for Literature, and The Presidential Medal of Freedom and her novels and criticism are widely taught. The primary focus of this seminar will be Toni Morrison's Trilogy: Beloved (1987), Jazz (1992), and Paradise (1997). This trilogy is not defined by any shared character or plot line; instead, the connection is thematic. Issues related to American culture, history, memory, spirituality and religion unite these texts. Throughout this seminar, we will ask the following questions: what commentary do these texts make individually and as a group? How might we situate these novels in relation to Morrison's larger body of work, including literary criticism and cultural commentary? How might we position Morrison's late twentieth century work in relation to African American and American literary history? Our inquiry will be informed by Feminist/Womanist, Marxist, Post-structuralist, and Postmodernist discourses.

### Summer 2, 2016

#### **Lives in Fiction and Nonfiction: Race, Gender, Ethnicity, and Language.** **Dr. Bill Lalicker**

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) tells how a Dominican-American college student nerd's adventures in love and popular culture have heartbreaking consequences when the fraught politics of his ancestral land intersect with a curse originating where indigenous culture meets European colonialism. Diaz's narrator observes Oscar (and cultural positions on race and gender) in multiple languages and dialects, with historical footnotes in academic discourse. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) investigates race in America through the life of an African American woman whose cells, taken without her permission, were reproduced after her 1951 cancer death to be traded and sold to create cell lines establishing most of the life-saving cancer research of the past six decades, without her family's knowledge or remuneration. Skloot's riveting, sensitive first-person search for the facts, framed by interactions with the Skloot family, reveal struggles of trust originating in differences of race, class, and dialect, but struggles that bend toward

truth and justice. We'll explore how each book—one fiction, one nonfiction—illuminates complex discursive representations of racial, gendered, and ethnic identity.

## Fall 2017

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### **The Rhetoric and Culture of Gaming** **Dr. Randall Cream**

This course investigates one of the core technologies of our culture: Games. Working from Ancient Greece and Rome to contemporary culture, we'll think about games as a critical technology of life. We'll read about theories of gaming, we'll write about culture, we'll play some games, and we'll think about ourselves in relations to the games that surround us—but mostly, we'll think about the ways in which games provoke a player to act, to think, or to play—in other words, we'll think about the rhetoric of games. My goal is to help you work as a critical reader of digital media, to join you in thinking about games as an inherent element of human culture, and to subject the practice of gaming to the ordinary sorts of critical thinking we reserve for higher forms of culture.

### **Truth & Authenticity in Contemporary Creative Nonfiction** **Dr. Kristine Ervin**

This course will explore the slippery nature of the creative nonfiction genre, with its blurred and blurring boundaries; with its swirling questions surrounding Truth/truth, facts, memory, subjectivity, and aesthetics; and with its often implied contract with its readers. Students will engage with contemporary creative nonfiction texts (memoir and the personal essay) and with current scholarship regarding the central questions of the genre. Additionally, students will investigate the ways in which the postmodern perspective, with its attention to multiplicity and fragmentation, informs the genre's definitions and complexities. Along with exploring the subject of truth and authenticity through a formal research project, students will also practice in the art of writing creative nonfiction, thereby pushing the line of inquiry through multiple lenses to answer or to complicate the question: "What does truth in nonfiction mean and does it even matter?"

### **Introduction to Augmented Reality: Writing and Reading the World** **Dr. Robert Fletcher**

This seminar will serve as a theoretical and practical introduction to Augmented Reality (AR), a digital technology that turns the world into a palimpsest (layered text) for reading and writing. While we have been exposed to depictions of Augmented Reality through literature, TV and movies for many years, the emergence of mobile platforms such as the Apple iPhone, Android-based smartphones, and Google Glass have brought many of these seemingly futuristic ideas closer to becoming part of our everyday reality. Perhaps the best evidence of this potential is the popular success of the *Pokemon Go* game in the summer of 2016.

This seminar will cover the theory and practice of AR, including both world-based and text-based augmentations. The first weeks will offer a brief theoretical introduction to AR, demonstrations, and discussion of various approaches to augmenting reality. Our critical perspectives on this topic will include digital media studies (Manovich), digital rhetoric (Lindhé), and digital literary studies (Borsuk). After this exploration of the range of AR experiences, participants will create and publish a small AR project of their choosing (e.g., a tour of a location, such as the West Chester campus, augmentation of a print text, creation of an AR game), either individually or in small groups. This “proof of concept” will serve as the basis for the seminar essay, which will situate the student’s AR project in the cultural and critical contexts. The AR technologies we use (Layar, Aurasma, perhaps others) will not involve any programming, and no prior experience with digital technology beyond a word processor and web browser will be assumed. Experience with image, sound, and video-editing software (Photoshop, iMovie, Garageband, etc.) will be helpful, but is not required.

### **Theorizing Activism and Activist Rhetoric** **Dr. Seth Kahn**

This course investigates the rhetorics that activists use in their work as educators, organizers, and mobilizers. We will approach activist rhetoric from three directions.

- We will consider an array of theories of persuasion and deliberation, theorizing rhetoric as the basis upon which democracy depends.
- We will take a case-study approach to several activist campaigns, some of which you will select as part of your research for the course (e.g., environmental, human rights, reproductive rights, health care reform, education reform).
- We will study the first-person accounts of activist rhetoricians, who describe their own activist work, and how they understand rhetoric's place in it.
- Research projects may result in either critical/rhetorical analyses of a specific activist campaign; or elaborated arguments that theorize activism, or activist rhetoric. I’m also open to possibilities that haven’t occurred to me yet.

Interested students can learn more about my research (and activist) interests from the English Department website.

## **POSTMODERN FILM**

**Dr. Paul Maltby**

This course will explore the instructor's thesis that postmodern film, in its most characteristic mode, is most productively read as an ironic and critical response to the film and television genres prevalent in a late capitalist media culture. We shall examine such formal and structural features as self-reflexiveness, genre-splicing, and parodic intertextuality, which constitute the art of postmodern film. We shall consider the themes, premises, and formal experiments of some postmodern films as symptoms of a culture defined by consumerism and a weakened sense of historical consciousness. We shall also consider how the themes and formal properties of other postmodern films may be read as a source of critique and resistance to the cultural degradations of late capitalism and to sexist, racist, and homophobic attitudes. We shall look at how the public response to postmodern films has been orchestrated by film journalism, by Internet marketing, and by TV entertainment channels which promote the celebrity status of postmodern film-makers (like Quentin Tarantino, David Lynch, Tim Burton, and Oliver Stone). And we shall examine the extent to which these films are informed by poststructuralist concepts of textuality and subjectivity, and consider how postmodern film theory problematizes the modernist concepts of auteurism and avant-gardism. The principal critical perspectives will be informed by cultural criticism and postmodern theory. The rationale for the course is that given how postmodern aesthetics, epistemology, and politics have, since the 1970s, defined a significant proportion of film production in the US (ranging from mainstream feature films to independent movies and music video), postmodern film merits critical attention and socio-historical analysis.

Students can learn about the instructor's research interests from the English Department's website: <http://www.wcupa.edu/arts-humanities/english/pMaltby.aspx>

## **Orientalism, Empire and the Plays of David Henry Hwang**

**Dr. William 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.

### **Gender and Identity in *The Walking Dead*** **Dr. Merry Perry**

This is a senior seminar for English majors that will provide intensive study and analysis of all 6+ seasons of the award-winning, post-apocalyptic drama *The Walking Dead*. The series begins its seventh season in Oct. 2016 and is one of the most successful television series *ever*, with approximately 20 million viewers (between the ages of 18-49) per episode. Audiences praise the show for its intricate plot lines with surprising twists; cinematic qualities (advanced camera work, special effects, make-up and costumes, etc.) that rival high-budget movies; and a core group of remarkable characters who have joined together to survive in a frightening world. Based on a popular graphic novel, *The Walking Dead* is a fascinating character study that explores the changing identities of the surviving humans and their reactions to violence and danger. As the main protagonist Rick Grimes remarks to his group members, "We *are* the Walking Dead." Instead of focusing on the zombies, the series foregrounds how some humans survive by developing relationships while others become more deadly and bestial than the mindless creatures who threaten to attack them. The zombies are hideous and frightening; however, many of them are recognizable as everyday people you might encounter. For example, the first zombie that viewers see in the pilot episode is a young, blonde-haired girl who is wearing pink pajamas and bunny slippers and is carrying her teddy bear. This surprising defamiliarization of a "monster" lets the audience know that this show will challenge many of their expectations for plot and narrative structure, character development, themes, symbols and motifs, etc.

The theoretical focus of this course will be a cultural studies approach with a focus on masculinity studies, feminist theory, and gender studies. *The Walking Dead* contains characters (both male and female) that represent a variety of identity categories (sex/gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age, education, background, sexuality, etc.), which will provide rich fodder for our analytical focus on gender and identity as portrayed in the show. We will study the television series as a popular culture "text" which reflects ideologies and fears of the twenty-first century, paying special attention to how the series presents a diversity of (and defamiliarizes) character identity by blurring traditional lines separating masculine/feminine, monster/human, etc. In a post-apocalyptic world, do identity categories become obsolete as humans must work together to survive? Interested students can learn about Dr. Perry's research interests from the English Department's website.

## **The Rhetoric of Science: Research and Practice**

### **Dr. Justin Rademaekers**

Science casts a long shadow in contemporary American culture; permeating our every way of doing, knowing, and being. Science is no one person or single institution, but as an arm of pastoral power, is nevertheless authorized to control what actions we take, what we can come to call true, and how we are allowed to live in the world. The increasing power and absolute authority of Science in contemporary American culture calls for closer interrogation of Science by language scholars. This seminar asks students to consider the deeply rhetorical nature of Science by examining the work of scientific “Giants” like Darwin and Einstein, including the rhetorical elements of invention and disruptive innovation; considering the tensions inherent in supposed scientific “conflicts” like climate change; identifying the role of rhetorical style and arrangement in scientific ethos-building; examining the role of public participants and communities in science; and by considering the rhetorical challenges that inter- and trans- disciplinary scientific collaborations pose to traditional “pure science” practices.

Rationale: this class will operate within a postmodern perspective of rhetorical theory, which examines the means by which language structures small and large (linguistic decisions to cultural narratives) play a critical role in producing and reifying power relations. With scientific texts and cultural narratives of Science as artifacts for examination, students will get first-hand experience with textual research seeking to reveal distinct relations between language and power.

Students interested in learning more about Dr. Rademaekers’ research in the rhetoric of science should visit his faculty web page at:

[https://www.wcupa.edu/academics/sch\\_cas.eng/jRademaekers.aspx](https://www.wcupa.edu/academics/sch_cas.eng/jRademaekers.aspx)

## **Photography and the Rhetoric of Commemoration**

### **Dr. Kuhio Walters**

This seminar takes the unsettled relationship between photography and memory as a topic that reveals important questions about the political and moral communities we inhabit. Over the last twenty years, especially, there has been an explosion of photography in every quarter of life, from quick-fading Snapchat photos to iconic scenes of catastrophe. Many philosophers (e.g., Plato, Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag) are concerned that an over-saturation of images will reduce our ability to empathize with others, in both our private and public lives. On the other hand, many photojournalists (e.g., Lynsey Addario, James Nachtwey, Gilles Peress) are optimistic that the proliferation of photographs, even of the worst atrocities, has the power to

show humanity in a radical new light, and to breach the divide between people who have never met. This course will examine what these potentialities of the photograph mean, for both private expressions of self understanding, and for public forms of remembrance.