CORNELL UNIVERSITY
Department of English
Graduate Courses

Spring 2019
Graduate

6021+ Literary Theory on the Edge
4 credits. (Also COML 6159, COML 3021, ENGL 3021)

This course juxtaposes the exciting theoretical advances of the late 20th century, including structuralism and post-structuralism, with current developments in 21st century theory such as performance studies, media theory, digital studies, trauma theory, transgender studies, and ecocriticism. Taught by two Cornell professors active in the field, along with occasional invited guests, lectures and class discussions will pay close attention to the differences among mediatonic systems in the texts we read as well as the uniqueness and complexity of language in its various forms. The course may involve presentation of performance art.

6050 Archives and Artifacts
1 credit.

Taught by curators and archivists in Cornell Library's Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, this seminar provides an introduction to the analysis of books and unique archival documents as physical objects. Students will work hands-on with rare materials in the Carl A. Kroch Library to learn the skills necessary to pursue original research dependent upon locating and studying primary sources such as rare books, archival collections, photographs, and other unique artifacts. Topics covered will include descriptive bibliography and the analysis of books (their manufacture, distribution, and audiences), an introduction to archival arrangement and description, and how to navigate institutional repositories of rare materials. Students will also have the opportunity to discuss strategies and methods for locating materials related to their own projects or areas of study. Class meets Tuesdays twice a month, 4:00pm-6:00pm, for a total of 8 class meetings. In 2019, the class will meet: January 22, February 5, February 19, March 5, March 19, April 9, April 23, May 7.

6120 Beowulf
4 credits. (Also ENGL 3120, MEDVL 3120, MEDVL 6120)

*Beowulf* has received renewed attention in popular culture, thanks to the production of recent movies and riveting new translations. The poem's popular appeal lies in its complex depictions of monsters, its accounts of heroic bravery, and its lavish portrayals of life in the Meadhall. Through close readings we will also explore the "darker side" of the poem: its punishing depictions of loss and exile, despairing meditations on unstable kingship and dynastic failure, and harrowing depictions of heroic defeat and the vanities of existence on the Middle-Earth. Attention will be given to the poem's cultural contexts, its literary heritage, and its layered pagan and Christian perspectives. A bilingual edition of the poem will be assigned so that students may read in Old and Modern English.

6145 Race and Gender in the Middle Ages
4 credits. (Also ENGL 4145, MEDVL 4145, MEDVL 6145)

If “the past is a foreign country,” is it a country full of oppressed women? We can, with some smugness, agree that it may have been dreadful to be a woman or sexual minority in the Middle Ages, but it’s nowhere near that simple. Also un-simple are medieval notions of race. Scholars long assumed that the European Middle Ages were entirely white and/or that since “race” as a concept hadn’t been invented yet, it wasn’t an issue. But both racial and gender difference matter tremendously, then as now. Together, we will think about race and gender as imagined at a time before the world we now know came into being, asking what the pre-history of difference might have to do with us and our future.

6207 Black Feminist Theories: Sexuality, Creativity, and Power
4 credits. (Also ASRC 6207)

This course examines black feminist theories as they are articulated in the cross-cultural experiences of women across the African Diaspora. We will explore a variety of theories, texts and creative encounters within their socio-political and geographical frames and locations, analyzing these against, or in relation to, a range of feminist activism and movements. Some key categories of discussion will include Black Left Feminism, Feminist Movements in Latin America and the Caribbean and African feminisms. Texts like the Combahee River Collective statement and a variety of US Black Feminist positions and the related literature as well as earlier black feminist articulations such as the Sojourners for Truth and Justice will also be engaged. Students will have the opportunity to develop their own research projects from a range of possibilities.

6255 Theorizing Fiction in the Early Modern World
4 credits.

What kind of thing is a fiction? How do imaginary creations exist in relation to the “real” world? What are the points of contact between actual and imaginary experiences? Is fiction immaterial (an idea) or material (words on a page)? What kinds of knowledge can a fiction produce? Are fictions nothing but lies? This seminar investigates such philosophical problems in the context of pre-modern theories of fiction: what it is, how it works, and why it matters. We will survey drama, poetry, romance, utopia, travel narrative, philosophical prose, and the familiar essay. We will also explore how various technical discourses define “fiction,” including poetics, natural philosophy, natural history, faculty psychology, ethnography, mechanical philosophy, and legal theory.
"I am interested in language because it wounds or seduces me," the critic Roland Barthes once wrote. How do we take pleasure in a text, even when it appears to betray us? How do we speak of the erotics of style beyond the mere thematic interpretation of sexual representation? Has such an erotics even been written yet? To explore a methodology for contemplating this elusive embrace between the aesthetic and the erotic, we will consider influential works of psychoanalytic, deconstructive, feminist, and queer theory alongside a survey of great modernist novelists whose innovative experiments in prose style have proved most sensual and most challenging, among them Oscar Wilde, Henry James, Gertrude Stein, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Ronald Firbank, and Djuna Barnes.

6554 Modernist Fiction and the Erotics of Style  
W 2:30 - 4:25  
Hanson, Ellis

4 credits. (Also FGSS 6554, LGBT 6554)

6660 Twentieth and Twenty-First Century American Ecocriticism and the Environmental Imagination  
M 12:20 - 2:15  
Hutchinson, George

4 credits.

What, today, is the state of eco-critical theory and the environmental humanities? This course will explore recent work at the edge of literary criticism shading into ecological thought and questions of social justice alongside particularly suggestive twentieth century literary texts. We will also read earlier iterations of eco-criticism from the 1940s, a birth time of the modern environmental movement in the United States. A crucial question will be what relevance, if any, the “humanities” might have for global sustainability. Authors will include Richard Wright, William Carlos Williams, John Steinbeck, Rachel Carson, Leslie Marmon Silko, A. R. Ammons, Rob Nixon, Stephanie LeMenager, Lawrence Buell, Amitav Ghosh, Ursula LeGuin, Ramachandra Guha, Timothy Morton, and others.

6710 Law and Literature  
TR 2:30 - 3:55  
Anker, Elizabeth

4 credits. (Also ENGL 3762, GOVT 6045, LAW 6710)

What can lawyers and judges learn from the study of literature? This course explores the relevance of imaginative literature (novels, drama, poetry, and film) to questions of law and social justice from a range of perspectives. We will consider debates about how literature can help to humanize legal decision-making; how storytelling has helped to give voice to oppressed populations over history; how narratives of suffering cultivate popular support for human rights; the role played by storytelling in a trial; and how literature can shed light on the limits of law and public policy.

6715 The Idea of Black Culture  
W 4:45 - 6:35  
Spillers, Hortense

4 credits.

This course examines the major theoretical and conceptual currents of Black thought as it unfolds in the political and historical context of the post-slavery, post-colonial world; we will read texts by C.L.R. James, W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Saidiya Hartman, Nahum Chandler, Fred Moten, R.A. Judy, and other contemporary thinkers on the question of black culture and the African Diaspora.

6741 Sustainable Forms  
M 2:30 - 4:25  
Levine, Caroline

4 credits.

This course explores questions of politics and literary studies in an unusual way. We will experiment with turning away from moments of disruption, innovation, and exception to take up the problem of sustainability–how to keep social worlds going over time. This will involve thinking about literary and social forms that have not been traditionally valued in our field, such as routine, shelter, and infrastructure. We will focus on nineteenth-century and contemporary realism to ask how some traditional realist techniques, including description, repetition, and closure give us ways of thinking about the sustaining of collective life over time. We will ask about how we might create a canon of sustainability, and we will read a range of theorists, including Susan Fraiman, everyday life studies, Birmingham cultural studies, recent work in queer antinormativity, and ecocriticism.

7810 MFA Seminar: Poetry  
T 2:30 - 4:25  
Fulton, Alice

5 credits.  
Required course for MFA poetry students only.

7811 MFA Seminar: Fiction  
T 2:30 - 4:25  
Quiñonez, Ernesto

5 credits.  
Required course for MFA fiction students only.

7890 Pedagogical and Thesis Development  
R 2:30 - 4:25  
Van Cleave-Stefanon, Lyrae

4 credits.  
This is a required course for students pursuing an MFA degree in Creative Writing. The course will focus on the pedagogical methodology and philosophical approaches to teaching creative writing. The workshop format will include readings, guest speakers, lesson plan development, and the vetting of syllabi. Graduate students in both poetry and fiction will share ideas on teaching and thesis development.
Over the last few decades, numerous strains of legal scholarship have leveled sweeping critiques of law. Scholars have criticized law for deep-seated failures involving class, gender, sexual orientation, race, citizenship, etc. This course explores the history of these critique-based movements and approaches, while also examining their contemporary status. It focuses on Critical Race Theory, Critical Legal Studies, the Law and Economics Movement, and Feminist and LGBT Jurisprudence. Our goals will be not only to understand the genesis of these important grounds for critiquing law and to consider how they may intersect, but also to question the potential limitations confronting such critique-based perspectives on law.

Interested students will need to complete the Non-law Student Course Request form found on our website at https://support.law.cornell.edu/students/forms/Non-law_student_course_request.pdf. The form should be sent to the Law School Registrar at law.registrar@cornell.edu.