

Blount 301 Seminars for Fall 2020

Human Clay: Enlightenment and Education

Dr. Deborah Weiss – T 2:00-4:30 PM BUI 301-011 CRN 49518

What makes us who we are? Is it nature or nurture or some combination of the two? And, if nurture is key, how can we shape children into the adults we want them to be? But what of the lingering impact of nature? How can nurture and nature work together to form happy and socially productive individuals? The origins of our own belief in the power of nurture to mold human character goes back to the beginning of the Enlightenment, as does the conviction that the right kind of education can create the right kind of human beings. Indeed, the Enlightenment—an intellectual movement of the eighteenth century—produced the first modern theories of education as well as the first books designed specifically to mold soft juvenile minds into socially responsible beings. Building on John Locke’s idea of the mind as “white paper” and following his educational manual for parents, authors who were both enterprising and innovative developed a new form of literature designed to shape children into moral members of the larger community. In doing so, however, they largely left nature behind, convinced as they were that children’s minds were entirely malleable. In this class, we will investigate how the emergent genre of Enlightenment-period children’s literature, in tandem with influential educational theories by Locke and Rousseau, sought to mold the soft clay of the child reader’s mind. We will examine the forms and concerns of early literature for children, and evaluate the way the genre sought to elevate nurture far above nature. To conclude the course, we will read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a book about education—as a book that interrogates and critiques the Enlightenment’s belief in the human as a malleable lump of clay.

Robert Johnson and the Birth of Rock

Dr. Joseph Hornsby– TR 12:30-1:45 BUI 301-004 CRN 43867

This course observes the impact on late 20th-century music of blues musicians from the Mississippi Delta of the 1920s and 30s. Our attention will be on Robert Johnson, his legend and legacy. The story goes that in order to become a guitar stud, he sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads. Until the 1990s, apart from this story and 30 or so recordings, that was what we knew about Johnson. We can learn something about his music from his contemporaries, though. We’ll listen to lots of them: Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Charlie Patton, Skip James and more. We’ll also listen closely to artists who took the Delta blues tradition to northern urban areas, for example, Muddy Waters and Howlin Wolfe. Finally, we’ll consider Johnson’s enduring influence on artists like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Stones and Eric Clapton.

This is a course where we listen to old stuff that sometimes sounds crappy. It’s still great stuff, though.

Coming of Age in America

Dr. Fredrick Whiting – TR 3:30-4:45 BUI 301-012 CRN 50499

The course will examine the place of a particular sub-genre of the novel, the bildungsroman—literally, novel of formation or education, more loosely, the coming of age novel—within the context of American cultural production. The principal foci of our discussions will be the ways in which novels that we might designate bildungsromane simultaneously reflect and condition (invent, maintain, impact, critique, etc.) cultural categories at the moment of their production: individual identity, youth, maturity, career, as well as various collective affiliations such as family, region, class, race, gender, and national identifications.

American Wilderness, National Parks and America's Natural Environment

Dr. Stephen I. Schwab– TR 9:30-10:45 AM BUI 301-002 CRN 44101

This course offers a broad survey of attitudes towards America's natural landscape and the gradual emergence of conscious efforts both to preserve and to exploit the American wilderness. We shall ask several questions: What is the relationship between humans and the natural world? Why has nature been viewed variously as a "garden," a "wilderness," a pastoral ideal, and a menace? What is the tension between nature and technology (or progress)? Nature and culture? The countryside and the city? Why and how did American leaders decide to set aside certain areas of "wilderness" as national parks? How and why have these national parks been and continue to be threatened by so-called "developers." When and why did an "environmental ethic" emerge? What contributions have people like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Wallace Stegner, and Stewart Udall (and many others) made to enrich the discussion/debate about preserving wilderness and the American environment?

This is not a lecture course, but rather a colloquium organized around in-depth discussions of the assigned readings. We shall also watch and discuss multiple segments of the Ken Burns video series "The National Parks: America's Best Idea."

Understanding and Deconstructing Television

Dr. Jeremy Butler TR 2:00-3:15 PM BUI 301-009 CRN 41439

Television dethroned the cinema as America's primary entertainment medium and then conventional over-the-air television was itself dethroned by cable TV and the Netflix-ification of our computer and cellphone screens. We are in a time declared to be both "peak television" and the death of TV as a mass medium. How to make sense of it all?

This class provides a toolbox of methods for understanding and deconstructing television, which will be broadly understood to include shows made for conventional networks as well as those released by streaming services. This class covers television's unique storytelling practices and examines how those stories are told through cinematography, editing, set and costume design,

lighting, sound design, and more. This class teaches you to reverse-engineer television to comprehend how it delivers its stories. And it asks you to consider how those stories are imbued with deeply held values surrounding gender, race, ethnicity, class, and national identity. For its texts, the class will range across recent releases such as *STRANGER THINGS* and *BROAD CITY* to network-era standards like *FRIENDS* and *THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW*.

Imagining Social Class in America

Dr. Jolene Hubbs – TR 11:00-12:15 BUI 301-005 CRN 43868

Although many Americans fancy themselves denizens of a classless society, social class distinctions indelibly mark life and literature in the United States. In this course, we will study some of the ways fiction writers engage with socioeconomic status through their characters' experiences as well as their texts' narrative structures and stylistic devices. Reading works by Charles Chesnutt, William Faulkner, Edith Wharton, and other authors, we will ask: How do literary works represent and narrate life in poverty, prosperity, and the points and passages in between? How do class identities intersect and interact with regional differences, gender roles, the mythos of self-making, and racial and ethnic identities

Intro to Screenwriting

Dr. Alan Lazer– M 6:00-8:30 PM BUI 301-001 CRN 44590

Have you ever wondered why some movies make you dream, while others just put you to sleep? In this class, we will seek to answer that question by developing an understanding of dramatic screenwriting. This class will focus on how a scene works by exploring the fundamentals of dramatic storytelling such as conflict, character development, and antagonists. In addition, we will develop the ability to analyze creative writing, and improve it through rewriting. Even if you aren't a film buff or aspiring screenwriter, advancing a knowledge of narrative can be useful in your everyday life: you can figure how to create a more compelling paper or presentation, as well as identify how the stories swirling around social media, the news, and other sources may be squirming their way into your subconscious. There are stories all around you, so how about you try writing a few yourself this coming Fall?

Quest Literature

Nathan Parker – TR 3:30-4:45 BUI 301-010 CRN 46663

The heart of this course will be the study of the archetype of the hero's quest in the mythology and literature of adventure. We will read classic adventure novels such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, as well as stories that challenge the very idea of 'adventure', such as Samuel Beckett's "The Expelled." We will examine the defining aspects of how the literature of adventure shapes our cultural understandings of current society. Through a historical and philosophical lens, we will analyze representations of identity, belief, and class in these novels, as well as contemporary films such as Katherine Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* and David Lynch's *The Straight Story*.

Zen Buddhism and Radical Approach to the Arts

Dr. Hank Lazer – M 2:00-4:50 PM BUI 301-007 CRN 44979

The course will involve an introduction to Zen Buddhism, relying on Shunryu Suzuki's classic *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, and at least one other book (perhaps Octavia Butler's *Dawn*). We'll learn and practice *zazen* (sitting meditation). Through the lens of Zen practice, we will explore a range of experimental arts/artists, with particular emphasis on contemporary music, performance art, environmental art, dance, conceptual and found art. Artists we might consider include George Quasha, John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Andy Goldsworthy, Mei-me Berssenbrugge, Linda Montano, Marina Abramovic, Javanese Gamelan music, Bill Viola, and Kazuaki Tanahashi. Students will both discuss the art we examine and make some related artworks of their own. And we'll do our best to learn to be present.

African Cultures

Toni Copeland – TR 12:30-1:45 PM BUI 301-008 CRN 44873

Africa. What does it mean to us? What images did your mind conjure when you read the word? Was it that Africa is the second-largest continent in land area and population or possible geographic diversity? Or, did the single word summon images of the vast cultural diversity on the continent? Africa is home to more than 3000 ethnic groups. This course provides a study of SUB-SAHARAN African cultures. It is designed to explore some of the many peoples with a focus on traditional cultures, modernization, and culture change. It is impossible to review all of the Peoples of Africa. However, representative cultures from each area are presented—West Africa, Central Africa, South Africa, and East Africa. The course begins with a brief history of Africa, including colonization to provide context. Next, various cultures are explored via readings, class presentations, and multi-media.

Recipe for an Autobiography: The Fundamental Art of Food Writing

Matthew Minicucci – MW 3:30-4:45 PM BUI 301-013 CRN 50555

What is your relationship with food? What might seem like an easy question engages with questions of social, cultural, geographical, and economic identity, and asks you to consider where you're from, the construction of your family, and the habits of food you grew up with. In short, it's the culinary story of your life. In this class, we'll explore, investigate, and write about food, health, and history, and we'll do through a lens of inquiry about the complications/missteps of thinking of food as monoculture in a country where immigration, diaspora, and cross-cultural connections are fundamental to its origins. We'll be examining food from personal, historical, and investigative perspectives meant to give you a better grasp on your own relationship with the topic, your own writing about the topic, and a fundamental grasp of the breadth of American food writing.