Departmental Course Proposal

Title

ENGL 2500: Women Writers of Color in the Global Nineteenth Century

Description

How did women writers of color shape—and subvert—a range of literary genres in the nineteenth century in order to comment on the sociopolitical power dynamics of the period? In this introductory course about nineteenth century literature, we will learn about the era through Anglophone texts produced by women from the African, Asian, and Indigenous diasporas who lived within and against imperial rule, such as Toru Dutt, Sui Sin Far, E. Pauline Johnson Tekahionwake, Sarojini Naidu, Mary Prince, Mary Seacole, Zitkála-Šá, Anne Spencer, and Onoto Watanna. While we will refer to texts that their European contemporaries produced, these women form the core for each unit. We will explore how they engaged with four literary genres and sociopolitical structures that were central to the nineteenth century: (1) life writing and slavery, (2) the novel and Empire, (3) the dramatic monologue and race, and (4) the short story and the New Woman Movement. Along the way, we will produce academic and public writing about these women and their literature, and examine the affordances and limits of framing these women as writers of color. Assignments include a collective close-reading annotation project through an online tool, COVE studio, a 5-page pamphlet about a writer or a text on the syllabus that will be published as a public-facing encyclopedia entry on Wikipedia, and a 15-page final paper.

This course fulfills the College of Arts and Science's second writing requirement as well as the 2500-level course requirement for the major.

Rationale

This course addresses three needs in UVa's English Department and in literary studies more broadly. First, although the English Department offers 2500-level introductory courses about nineteenth century literature, these typically focus on white British writers like Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot. There is a real need to offer a course that invites students to learn about nineteenth century literature from a perspective that is not only global, but also attuned to the power dynamics of class, race, and gender. Moreover, my past teaching experiences and my current work on two teaching projects ("Teaching Writing and Anti-Racism in the ENWR 1510 Classroom" and *Undisciplining the Victorian Classroom*) have shown me that our undergraduate population is becoming increasingly diverse and politically engaged, and they have expressed a desire for more courses that explicitly consider topics like race. Second, there is also a need to shape literature courses in ways that assist students with developing academic and non-academic skills. During my tenure as the Graduate Representative to the Department's Writing and Rhetoric Program in 2020-21, I worked with faculty on the Curriculum Committee to prepare a proposal for a new Minor in Public Writing

and Rhetoric, which is currently under review by the College of Arts and Sciences. The minor intends to respond to the need for students to learn how to write publicly as well as academically, and the sample assignments I have proposed—such as the Wikipedia entry, which is adapted from my journal article about the subject—align with this larger departmental mission. Third, English departments more broadly tend to focus on writers of color only when teaching courses about Postcolonial or Contemporary Literature, and this inevitably creates the impression that these writers are only relevant post-1945. (Long Le-Khac and Kate Hao, for example, have produced a recent study about this "contemporary bias" (2021) with respect to Asian American literature.) *Undisciplining the Victorian Classroom*—a project that I am a part of—attempts to partially address this problem by creating new teaching materials for instructors who want to teach courses in the long nineteenth century through a race-conscious lens. If this course is approved, I hope to submit the syllabus to *UVC*'s Sample Syllabi category after I have taught it, as there is not yet a document that models how instructors might teach nineteenth century literature by centering women writers of color. Thus, this course would not only address a number of departmental needs, but a need in literary studies as a whole.

Course Objectives

- To introduce students to the central genres and themes of nineteenth century literature
- To introduce students to foundational concepts like race, gender, sexuality, and class as they relate to the nineteenth century, and explore the range—and the limits—of categories like "women writers of color"
- To help students develop strong close-reading and research skills
- To help students develop strong academic and public writing skills

Learning Outcomes
At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Identify and analyze different genres of nineteenth century literature
- Articulate why the contributions of women writers of color matter to our understanding of nineteenth century literature, culture, and politics more broadly
- Construct an academic argument backed up by close-reading analysis, about a literary text
- Construct a piece of public writing that introduces a literary text to a broad audience

Sample Assignments

1. The close-reading annotation project invites students to contribute their thoughts about a single text (determined by class vote) on the syllabus through COVE studio, a digital tool that supports the teaching needs of instructors in literary studies. The primary goal here is to encourage students to practice their close-reading skills and prompt them to respond to their peers so that they can see how the creation of knowledge is a collaborative effort, rather than an individual one.

2. The 5-page pamphlet invites students to introduce a writer or a text on the syllabus to a non-expert public, which they will then upload onto Wikipedia as a series of encyclopedic edits. The primary goal here is to encourage students to practice writing for public audiences and explore how student writing more broadly can shape communities outside of the classroom.

3. The 15-page paper invites students to compare and contrast a keyword, theme, or concept that appears in a text written by any of the writers on the syllabus, with a text written by another writer of their choice from the nineteenth century or another time period (with instructor approval). The only stipulation is that the paper must focus on two texts from the same genre (eg. comparing two poems or two novels, rather than comparing a poem and a novel). The primary goal here is to practice constructing a robust academic argument based on close-reading analysis and external research.

Sample Topical Outline (across 15 weeks)

Introduction: History and Theory

- Chatterjee et al, "Undisciplining Victorian Studies" (2020), Carolyn Betensky, "Casual Racism in Victorian Literature" (2019), Lisa Lowe, "Chapter 1," *The Intimacies of Four Continents,* (2015), Anne McClintock, "Introduction: Postcolonialism and the Angel of Progress," *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), Sumana Roy, "Beyond the Guilt Tax," *The Point,* (2021).

Unit 1: Life Writing and Slavery

- Primary Texts: Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831), Mary Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole* (1857)

- Secondary Texts: Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," (2008), Cedric Robinson, excerpts from *Black Marxism* (1983), Christina Sharpe, excerpts from *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016)

Unit 2: The Novel and the British Empire

- Primary Texts: Anonymous, *The Women of Colour* (1808), Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

- Secondary Texts: Elaine Freedgood, excerpts from *Ideas in Things* (2006); Gilbert and Gubar, excerpts from "The Madwoman in the Attic" (1979); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), Benita Parry, "Two Native Voices in *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Mary Poovey, excerpts from *Uneven Developments: The Ideological*

Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (1988).

Unit 3: The Dramatic Monologue and Race

- Primary Texts: Toru Dutt, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882), E. Pauline Johnson, *The White Wampum* (1895), Sarojini Naidu, *The Golden Threshold* (1905), Anne Spencer, *Time's Unfading Garden: Anne Spencer's Life and Poetry from 1882-1975* (1977)

- Secondary Texts: Thomas Macaulay, "A Minute on Indian Education" (1835), William Blake, "The Little Black Boy" (1789), Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover" (1842), Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses" (1842), Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1850), Edward Said, excerpts from *Orientalism* (1978), Gauri Viswanathan, excerpts from *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989), Lorenzo Veracini, excerpts from *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (2010), Manu Samriti Chander, excerpts from *Brown Romantics: Poetry and Nationalism in the Global Nineteenth Century* (2017).

Unit 4: The Short Story and The New Woman Movement

- Primary Texts: Sui Sin Far, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), Onoto Watanna, *A Japanese Nightingale* (1901), Zitkála-Šá, *American Indian Stories* (1921)

- Secondary Texts: Elaine Showalter, "Introduction," *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle* (1993), Anne Anlin Cheng, "Ornamentalism: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman" (2018), Xine Yao, "Oriental Inscrutability: Sui Sin Far, Chinese Faces, and the Modern Apparatuses of U.S. Immigration," *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth Century America* (2021), Kate Chopin "An Egyptian Cigarette" (1897), Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), Olive Schreiner, "Three Dreams in a Desert" (1889).

College Engagements Course Proposal

Title

EGMT 1510: Emojis, Memes, and Hot Takes: The Everyday Art of Internet Language

Engagements Theme

Engaging Aesthetics

Description

How have emojis changed the way we tell (and text) our stories? What do "Karen" memes or the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag expose about the rapidly evolving politics of class, race, and gender in our time? And why do "hot takes" wield so much social impact? In this course, we will draw on key concepts and thinkers in contemporary aesthetic theory and digital media, such as Lauren Berlant, Pierre Bourdieu, Sianne Ngai, Gretchen McCollough, and Marshall McLuhan, in order to describe and analyze a set of everyday internet tropes. We will reflect on how these tropes shape our cultural, moral, and ethical responses to the world, and ask questions such as: How do they exploit aesthetic qualities like humor, irony, or cuteness in order to provoke political change? How do they gain or lose their social power online? How do they shape—or undo—individual or collective identities, over and against the lines of cultural or geographical difference? And what communicative possibilities do they offer that more traditional and "high-brow" artistic mediums—like paintings, films, or novels—cannot? Each week, these questions, along with our theoretical readings, will guide our discussions about a single internet trope (emojis, memes, hot takes, hashtags, "Instagram-face," and the "Notes App Apology"). Assignments include brief written responses, and a collaborative class project focused on creating an online pamphlet that introduces each internet trope to an expert and non-expert audience and explains why the trope matters to our understanding of contemporary culture and politics.

Rationale

This course addresses three needs in the College Engagements Curriculum. First, by focusing on internet language, this course diversifies the auspices of what Engagements Curriculum considers as "human creativity." At present, a few courses in "Engaging Aesthetics" contain a partial focus on the internet and digital media ("Covers, Karaoke, and Memes: Imitation in Music" and "The Aesthetics of Infrastructure"), but this course expands that focus by explicitly centering internet language as a primary topic. Students today likely encounter (or create) internet tropes like memes more frequently than a painting at the Louvre, so it makes sense to train them with the skills to analyze those tropes, in the same way that we would train them with the skills to engage with, say, an impressionist portrait. Second, this course brings the Engagements Curriculum's overall focus on fostering engaged citizenship to bear on the internet. Prompting students to analyze how power dynamics such as class, race, and gender shape the internet tropes in this course will inevitably open up space for reflecting on the moral

stakes of online communication at a time when global cyberbullying and digital crime are at an all-time high. Third, this course will help students build a solid foundation of aesthetic concepts that will help them ask questions that the Engagements Curriculum has emphasized—the questions of value, beauty, history, and ethics—but are also transferable across other courses that they will take in the future, be they within the College Curriculum or outside of it.

Course Objectives

- To introduce students to foundational and transferable concepts in aesthetic theory that will help them ask new questions about internet tropes, and other artistic mediums
- To use questions about internet tropes as a starting point for introducing students to the way scholars frame inquiry, analyze problems, and create knowledge
- To help students describe and analyze everyday aesthetic objects like internet tropes, and how these tropes engage with concerns about race, gender, and class
- To help students reflect on their own aesthetic responses to those internet tropes, and the moral, ethical, and global power that these tropes contain

Learning Outcomes
At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Identify the aesthetic qualities of different internet tropes, and other artistic mediums
- Engage with concepts in aesthetic theory to develop a strong analysis about the cultural, moral, and ethical impact of different internet tropes, as well as describe their own responses to those tropes
- Develop a strong awareness of how these tropes impact other individuals and communities

Sample Assignments

1. Students will write brief reflections about the internet trope that we are exploring, and their responses will form the starting points for class discussions. They will formulate their responses according to two questions: when they have encountered the trope, and how the theoretical reading extends, complicates, or opposes their own experiences with the trope. The primary goal here is to encourage students to address points one to four of the College Curriculum's six guiding principles (shedding new light on enduring and emerging questions; encouraging a sense of intellectual wonder; orienting students to learning as a process; introducing students to how scholars frame inquiry) by practicing how to link analysis, personal experience, and theory together, in order to think critically about their everyday internet practices.

2. The collaborative class project invites students to create an online pamphlet (format to be decided by a class vote) that introduces the internet tropes in this course to an expert and nonexpert audience and explains why these tropes matter to our understanding of contemporary culture and politics. The assignment, which will involve collaborative

work, addressing principles five and six (invite students to encounter the liberal arts and sciences as an intellectual community; equip our students to articulate provisional analyses that reflect an openness to debate).

Sample Topical Outline (across 7 weeks)

Introductions: Context and Theory

- Gretchen McColloch, "Informal Writing," *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language* (2019), Daniel Silver, "The Logic of the Like: Bourdieu or Dewey," *The Point,* (2021), Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1967).

Emojis

- *The Emoji Story* (a film, 2019), Sianne Ngai, excerpts from "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," *Our Aesthetic Categories* (2012), Crystal Abidin and Joel Gn, "Between art and application: special issue on Emoji epistemology," Soojin Lee, "Emoji at the MoMA: Considering the "original emoji" as Art," *First Monday* (2018).

Memes

- Gretchen McColloch, "Memes and Internet Culture," *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language* (2019), Nicholas Whittaker, "What's So Bad About Digital Blackface?" *Aesthetics for Birds: Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art for Everyone* (2021), Helen Lewis, "The Mythology of Karen," *The Atlantic* (2020)

Hot Takes

- Elspeth Reeve, "A History of the Hot Take," *The New Republic* (2015), Sianne Ngai, excerpts from "The Zany Science," *Our Aesthetic Categories* (2012), Kris Cohen, "Broken Genres," *Never Alone, Except for Now: Art, Networks, Populations* (2017)

Hashtags

- Sarah Jackson, Moya Bailey, Brooke Foucault Welles, excerpts from *#Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Justice* (2020)

"Instagram Face"

- Lauren Berlant, "Introduction: Affect in the Present," *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Jia Tolentino, "The Age of Instagram Face," *New Yorker* (2019), Teju Cole, "There's Less to Portraits Than Meets the Eye, and More," *Art Essays: A Collection* (2021)

The Notes App Apology

- Lindsey Weber, "How We Apologize Now," *The New York Times* (2019), Evan Ross Katz, "The Notes App Apology? So Last Year" (2021)