

Seminar: Thirteen Ways of Looking at Things (ENGL 401-01)

College of the Holy Cross, Spring 2010

M 3:00-5:30 pm, O'Kane 370

Instructors: Paige Reynolds and Sarah Stanbury
Office Hours: R: Fenwick 228, M 1:00 –2:00, TR 11:00-12:00 or by appointment
S: Fenwick 312, M 1:00 – 2:00, TR 1:30-2:30, R 1:30-3:30 or by appointment
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Texts: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Pelican)
J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (Penguin)
Edgar Allan Poe, *Great Tales of Edgar Allan Poe* (Simon and Schuster)
Christine Montross, *Body of Work: Meditations on Mortality from the Human Anatomy Lab* (Penguin)
Edith Wharton, *House of Mirth* (World Classic Oxford)
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, Pearl, ed. Marie Borroff (W.W. Norton)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Scribner)
J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World* (Dover Thrift)
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Hill and Wang)

ERES Password: ENGL 401

Course Objectives: What do we want, the idea of the thing or the thing itself? This question has been foundational in western thinking from Plato to Wallace Stevens, and has emerged as well as a central concern in contemporary cultural studies. This team-taught seminar, in thirteen weeks, introduces thirteen ways of thinking about material culture. The first part of the course considers bodies—animal, female, slave, and corpse. The following weeks explore loved things: relics and icons; fetishes; bling and fashion. A third section takes an historical look at things medieval to postmodern. In addition to readings in “thing theory,” texts will include *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Great Gatsby*, Wharton’s *House of Mirth*, Glaspell’s *Trifles*, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*—and the film “Sex and the City.”

Coursework:

Class participation (10%): Come to class having read the material closely and be prepared to participate actively in discussion. Unexcused absences jeopardize your grade; more than two absences mean you likely will not pass the course.

Weekly Postings and Presentation (20%): Each week, you will enter into a conversation on Moodle prompted by some question related to the readings. Everyone must post a total of 300 words a week of thoughtful, engaged commentary on the question and/or responses posted by your fellow students. You will also direct the discussion of one poem with a fellow student later in the semester.

Two Short Papers (first one, 10%; second one, 20%): At the end of the first two units, you will write a 5-7 page paper that applies a concept drawn from a critical essay we’ve read to a primary text. These papers must be written in proper MLA form with proper citations.

Abstract and Bibliography (10%): For the final class, you will bring a working bibliography of your final paper so that students might draw from the wealth of materials.

Final Paper (30%): This 20-page paper will be an original critical analysis of a primary source using secondary sources that engage with the on-going scholarly discussion about “things.”

IMPORTANT NOTE: For these written assignments, your paper must be in proper MLA form. These papers will be typed, double-spaced, stylistically and grammatically correct.

Reading and Assignment Schedule:

M 1/25 Introduction

Bill Brown, "The Idea of Things and the Ideas in Them," from *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (1-12)
Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," from *The Social Life of Things* (64-91)
Williams, "A Sort of Song"; Stevens, "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself"; Hall, "The Things"

Bodies as Things: Objectification

M 2/1 Slaves

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
Jonathan Gil Harris, "Shakespeare's Hair: Staging the Object of Material Culture," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52:4 (Winter 2001): 479-491. (on-line)
"Reasons for Colonization" (1585), from *The Elizabethans' America*, ed. Louis B. Wright (26-36)
Bartolomé de Las Casas, "In Defense of the Indians"
Image, "The Natives of Florida Worship the Column Erected by the Commander on his First Voyage"

M 2/8 Women

Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*
James Joyce, "Araby"
John Updike, "A & P"
Alice Walker, "Everyday Use"
Siri Hustvedt, "The Blindfold"
Patricia J. Williams, "On Being the Object of Property," from *Writing on the Body*
Rita Felski, "Object Relations," *Contemporary Women's Writing* (2007)
Martha Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1995)

M 2/15 Animal

J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*
Marianne DeKoven, "Why Animals Now," *PMLA* 124:2 (March 2009) (361-369)
Rosi Braidotti, "Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others," *PMLA* (526-531)

M 2/22 Corpse

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Tell Tale Heart," "Black Cat," "Ligeia"
Christine Montross, *Body of Work: Meditations on Mortality from the Human Anatomy Lab*
Jessica Mitford, from *The American Way of Death*

F 2/26 Paper One Due

M 3/1 Spring Break

Loved Things: Fetish

M 3/8 Props and Costumes: Identity

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*
Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "Lily Bart and the Beautiful Death," *American Literature* 46:1 (March 1974) 16-40.
Field Trip to Newport

- M 3/15 **Fetishes: Desire**
Sex and the City (dir. Michael Patrick King, 2008)
 Karl Marx, Vol. 1, "The Fetishism of Commodities" [web]
 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
 Thornstein Veblen, "Conspicuous Consumption"
- M 3/22 **Icons and Relics: Worship**
 Anonymous, *Pearl*
 Sarah Stanbury, "The Body and the City in *Pearl*"
 David Freedberg, "On Consecration: Making Images Work," in *The Power of Images*
- M 3/29 **Souvenirs: Nostalgia**
 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
 Scott Donaldson, "Possessions in *The Great Gatsby*," *Southern Review* 37:2 (Spring 2001) 187-210.
 Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire," from *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (132-169)
- W 3/31 Paper Two Due**
- M 4/5 **Easter Recess**
- T 4/6-F/9 Final Paper Conferences with Prof. Reynolds or Prof. Stanbury
- Things in Time**
- M 4/12 **Medieval Things**
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
 Marcel Mauss, "The Gift and the Potlatch," from *The Gift*
 Susan Crane, "Chivalric Incognito" and "Talking Garments," from *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity during the 100 Years War*
- M 4/19 **Victorian Things**
 J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*
 Selected images from *My Wallet of Photographs*
 Anne McClintock, "Soft Soaping Empire," *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*
 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*
Abstract and Bibliography Due
- M 4/26 **Modernist Things**
 Gertrude Stein, selections from *Tender Buttons*
 Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of a Jar," "The Snow Man," "Idea of the Thing"
 W. B. Yeats, "Byzantium," "Sailing to Byzantium"
 Marianne Moore, "The Mind is an Enchanting Thing," "The Fish"
 Ezra Pound and F. S. Flint, Imagist Manifesto
 Darryl Mansell, "Materiality as Metaphor"
- M 5/3 **Posthumanist Things**
Avatar, dir. James Cameron (2009)
 Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto"
- R 5/6 Study Period**