



COURSE DESCRIPTION

2016 Winter Session (2016-2017 Academic Year)

ENGL 492A-001 - Literature and the Blues - Jerry Wasserman

Senior Honours Seminar - Research**Term 1****F, 12:00 - 2:00 p.m.**

The blues in its various historical modes has played a central role in the evolution of African American literature, and to a lesser extent in the literature of Black Canada and First Nations. As “an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically” (Ralph Ellison), with the capacity to redeem “woe and melancholy ... through sheer force of sensuality, into an almost exultant affirmation of life, of love, of sex, of movement, of hope” (Richard Wright), the blues has afforded a form as well as a structure of feeling and a rich nexus of musical, cultural and historical intertexts to African American writers. Aboriginal writers like Sherman Alexie and Tomson Highway have cross-culturally appropriated the blues into their texts, adapting the form to articulate the aboriginal experience of oppression, endurance and resistance. Through African American literary theory and an extraordinary corpus of music, the blues offers a framework within which to explore a rich variety of 20th and 21st century texts and issues touching on race, gender and cultural hybridity. Primary texts: Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown, selected poetry; August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*; Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*; Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*; Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*; Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*; Walter Mosley, *RL's Dream*; Sherman Alexie, *Reservation Blues*; Tomson Highway, *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*; Djanet Sears, *Harlem Duet*. Requirements: in-class presentation(s); short paper; term paper.