



Roberta Gefter: 019LM/089LM

Module II: 30 hours

“Writing the metamorphic and anomalous body: concepts, tropes, representations from William Shakespeare to David Dabydeen”

The module will consider a selection of literary texts from all genres - drama, poetry and the novel – which in different ways foreground the human body as a central trope and metaphor of subjectivity in its normative/heteronormative/ transformative and metamorphic power and agency. The fascination with the idea of corporeal change and transformation – metaphysical, allegorical, scientifically induced or perpetrated through acts of violence and control, is an abiding trait of the cultural imagination: from antiquity to the Renaissance, the Gothic, Romantic and Victorian literature, up to 20th century science fiction and cyber culture, it ties in with issues of gender, power, science and politics.

Through the critical reading of some canonical texts from different literary and historical ages, the module will focus on some related aspects of corporeal anomaly, transformation, and violation, as an inscription of a complex understanding of human subjectivity, challenged by the anxieties generated by philosophical, religious and scientific discourses and by the traumatic legacy of history, particularly colonial history. A variety of related concepts pertaining to literary representations of the body such as the anomalous body, monstrous anatomies, the modern preoccupation with boundaries, the body in pain, the deviant and heteronormative body, the abject, the exchange between the aberrant and the normal body will be examined and situated in their cultural contexts from the early modern to the Gothic, from the ‘monsters of modernity’ to sensation fiction, the fin de siècle and the post-colonial. A specific focus will be devoted to the revisitations of the Greek myth of Philomela from Shakespeare to Coetzee, as a paradigm of the nexus between the female body, violence, desire and voice/voicelessness.

Students will take active part in the close reading of the primary sources and will have the opportunity to reconsider other literary texts they may have approached in previous courses such as *Frankenstein*, *Jane Eyre*, *Dracula* or *The Waste Land*.

Pdf versions of some primary and critical reading will be available to students either on moodle. Further critical references, also to figurative arts and cinema, will be provided during the course.

At the conclusion of the module, students will be asked to write and discuss a paper of approximately 2500 words focussed on a specific topic that will be part of the final assessment.

Primary sources:

W.Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (selected reading, moodle); Titus Andronicus (selected reading, moodle);

J.Donne: selected reading from *Songs and Sonnets* (in *John Donne, Anatomie del mondo, Duello della morte*, ed by G.Melchiori, Mondadori (moodle)

J.Keats: "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (moodle)

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Penguin, with an Introduction by Maurice Hindle.

Matthew Arnold, "Philomela" (moodle).

J.S.Le Fanu: "Carmilla" in J. S. Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, Edited with an introduction by Robert Tracy, Oxford UP.

R.L.Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde*, OUP

W.B.Yeats, "Leda and the Swan" (moodle)

T.S.Eliot: *The Waste Land* (recommended edition: Bur, edited by A.Serpieri; alternatively, Faber)

Rudyard Kipling, "The Mark of the Beast" (moodle)

J.M.Coetzee: *Foe*, Vintage.

D.Dabydeen, "Turner", J.Cape, 1995, repr. in *Pepal Press* 2002. (Department Library/moodle)

Critical Reading:

S.Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècl: Identity and Empire*, Cambridge UP, 1996. (selected reading, photocopies)

B.Clarke. *Allegories of Writing. The Subject of Metamorphosis*. SUNY Press, 1995 (excerpts, photocopies)

P.Fifield, "The Body, Pain and Violence": Sander L.Gilman, "Representing Dead and Dying Bodies, in *The Cambridge Companion To The Body in Literature* Edited By David Hillman and Ulrika Maude, Cambridge, CUP, 2015.

K.Hurley. *The Gothic Body. Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge UP, 1996 (selected reading, photocopies).

Marshall, Gail. "Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Gail Marshall, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 1-12.

P. Brooks. *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (1993) (Excerpts) **Further critical material will be provide during the course.**

