

**Readings in the Humanities
(A CHASS Book Club)**

Tuesdays 7:00-9:00 pm McKimmon Center
Fall 2009

Public/Not-For-Credit Website: ContinuingEducation.ncsu.edu/CHASSBookClub.html

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Why You Should Attend (A Note from Your Instructors)

We'd like to do three things in this course: (1) introduce students to the broad range of scholarship and creative writing produced by faculty at NC State's College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS); (2) give students the opportunity to interact with book authors regarding creative and scholarly processes, students' understanding of works, and views of the work directly from authors; and (3) expose members of the non-university community to the broad range of scholarship and creative writing, and how such work enriches the lives of North Carolinians.

To accomplish these goals, we'll assign original books written by CHASS faculty, give you two weeks to read and react to them, and then have the author of the book talk to our class. The author will use the first 45 min. or so of class time for prepared remarks, and then students who are taking the course for credit will ask questions for about 30-45 min. We will invite people who are joining the course as guests, whether in class or online, to ask questions if time allows. When questions have concluded, we will preview the next book for the course. Students taking the course for credit will submit brief responses to the book to which authors will react. Those who want to participate, but not earn credit, are encouraged to read the book, but will not complete written responses. If time allows, they may ask questions of the author, but students taking the course for credit will have priority for asking questions first.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to do the following:

1. Develop awareness of the content of each book and how the content applies to your personal life.
2. Gain insight into the creative and scholarly processes authors use in writing or editing books.
3. Identify similarities and differences between those who produce creative works, nonfiction, and literary and cultural analyses.

Readings

Those who wish to participate in the course not for credit are encouraged, but not required, to read the assigned text. Books may be purchased at the University Book Store, Quail Ridge Books, or other venues (e.g., Amazon.com). The NC State Library will also place copies of assigned books on 3-day reserve throughout the semester.

Course Schedule

Aug. 25 Introduction to class (no reading)

The first time we convene class, we will introduce ourselves and explore what draws us to the course. I will also share the syllabus, my expectations for the course, and our plan for the semester. We will conclude with a preview of our first book.

Sept. 8 History: Rich Slatta and *Cowboys of the Americas*



Cowboys of the Americas blends historical and contemporary photographs with firsthand accounts to tell the story of the American cowboy. However, this is not just a peek at the cowboy's open-range frontier heyday from the 1860s through the 1880s. It places America's cowboy with a longer historical context, as heir to the Mexican vaquero, and within the broader geographical context of cowboys elsewhere in the world. Here's what a couple reviewers had to say. "An oversized photo tribute which stands out from the crowd, surveying both myths and realities of the cowboy on and off-screen, including assessments of cowboys around the world, ranching roots, cowboy film, and cowboy representation in literature." (Diane C. Donovan, California Bookwatch for *Midwest Book Review*). "The best cowboy book of all times. The author presents an exciting and authentic account of cowboy life around the world." (A Kid's Review). Richard W. Slatta is professor of history at North Carolina State University, where he has taught since completing doctoral work at the University of Texas at Austin in 1980. He previously served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Panama and with the Second Armored Division in Ft. Hood, Texas. He has published 8 books, mostly on comparative ranching frontiers of North and South America. Three prior books have won prizes, *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier*, *The Cowboy Encyclopedia*, and *Cowboys of the Americas*. In 2000, Slatta received CHASS's Lonnie and Carol Poole Award for Excellence in Teaching. Other honors include *Outstanding Writers of the Twentieth Century*, *International Who's Who of Intellectuals*, and *Who's Who in American Education*. In 2008, he was awarded the National Cowboy Culture Award for Writing and Publishing from the National Cowboy Symposium & Celebration, Lubbock, TX (see photo).

Sept. 22 Philosophy and Religion: Jason Bivins and *Religion of Fear*



Jason C. Bivins is an Associate Professor and is Associate Head of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at North Carolina State University. Oxford University Press described *Religion of Fear* in the following terms: Conservative evangelicalism has transformed American politics, disseminating a sometimes fearful message not just through conventional channels, but through subcultures and alternate modes of communication. Within this world is a "Religion of Fear," a critical impulse that dramatizes cultural and political conflicts and issues in frightening ways that serve to contrast "orthodox" behaviors and beliefs with those linked to darkness, fear, and demonology. Jason Bivins offers close examinations of several popular evangelical cultural creations including the Left Behind novels, church-sponsored Halloween "Hell Houses," sensational comic books, especially those disseminated by Jack Chick, and anti-rock and -rap rhetoric and censorship. Bivins depicts these fascinating and often troubling phenomena in vivid (sometimes lurid) detail and shows how they seek to shape evangelical cultural identity. "As the "Religion of Fear" has developed since the 1960s, Bivins sees its message moving from a place of relative marginality to one of prominence. What does it say about American public life that such ideas of fearful religion and violent politics have become normalized? Addressing this question, Bivins establishes links and resonances between the cultural politics of evangelical pop, the activism of the New Christian Right, and the political

exhaustion facing American democracy. "Religion of Fear is a significant contribution to our understanding of the new shapes of political religion in the United States, of American evangelicalism, of the relation of religion and the media, and the link between religious pop culture and politics.

Oct. 6 Film Studies: Marsha Orgeron and Hollywood Ambitions: Celebrity in the Movie Age



Associate Professor of English Dr. Marsha Orgeron traces the Hollywood ambitions of Wyatt Earp, Jack London, Clara Bow, Gertrude Stein, and Ida Lupino in her new book, *Hollywood Ambitions: Celebrity in the Movie Age* (Wesleyan University Press 2008). Dr. Orgeron illustrates the implications of film celebrity during an age in which Hollywood helped shape cultural notions of reputation, success, glamour, and visibility. Jane Gaines, Professor of Literature and English at Duke University said "We know that Hollywood captured the imagination of Clara Bow and Ida Lupino, but Marsha Orgeron surprises us in her revelation that Wyatt Earp, Jack London, and even Gertrude Stein were caught up in the excitement. Here is a most original study of how celebrity aspiration crossed the high-low divide."

Oct. 20 World literature: Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi and The Sacred Door and Other Stories: Cameroon Folktales of the Beba

Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi is Professor of English and Comparative Literature who writes under the pen name "Makuchi." In *The Sacred Door and Other Stories*, Makuchi retells the stories that she heard at home, growing up in Cameroon in West Africa. Makuchi offers readers a selection of oral narratives infused with riddles, proverbs, songs, myths, and legends, using various narrative techniques that capture the vibrancy of Beba oral traditions. This collection of thirty-three folktales of the Beba showcases a wide variety of stories that capture the richness and complexities of an agrarian society's oral literature and traditions. Revenge, greed, and deception are among the themes that frame the story lines in both new and familiar ways. In the title story, a poor man finds himself elevated to king with the condition that he never open the sacred door. This tale of temptation, similar to the story of Pandora's box, concludes with the question, "What would you have done?" In relating the stories her mother told her, Makuchi allows readers to make connections between African and North American oral narrative traditions. These tales reinforce the commonalities of our human experience without discounting our differences. The *Journal of Folklore Research* described *Tales* as "a collection that draws readers into the world of African everyday life and then keeps us there, maintaining a level of excitement while seamlessly providing an enchanting cultural education." *Obsidian* said the stories "encourage readers to think, to find connections, to push beyond their own experiences and values, and to see the world from another perspective." As Isidore Okpewho tells us in the foreword of the book: "Tales like these need to be retold again and again, because



the lessons they yield belong not merely to a long-forgotten historical or so-called primitive past but very much to the present times in which we live.”

Nov. 3 Science Fiction: John Kessel and *The Baum Plan for Financial Independence*

John Kessel teaches in the creative writing program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. A two-time winner of the Nebula Award, the Theodore Sturgeon Award, the Locus Poll, and the James Tiptree, Jr. Award, his books include *Good News from Outer Space*, *Corrupting Dr. Nice*, and *The Pure Product*. His story collection, *Meeting in Infinity*, was named a notable book of 1992 by the *New York Times Book Review*. Writer Kim Stanley Robinson has called *Corrupting Dr. Nice* "the best time travel novel ever written." Most recently, with James Patrick Kelly he edited the anthologies *Feeling Very Strange: The Slipstream Anthology* and *Rewired: The Post-Cyberpunk Anthology*.



The Baum Plan for Financial Independence and Other Stories (2008) contains fourteen stories, published over the previous decade in a variety of science fiction and non-science fiction venues. It contains the James Tiptree Memorial Award winning story “Stories for Men.” The final story in the book, “Pride and Prometheus,” has been nominated for the Nebula Award, the Hugo Award, the Shirley Jackson Award and the British Science Fiction Award. *Publisher’s Weekly* said “These well-crafted stories, full of elegantly drawn characters, deliver a powerful emotional punch.” *Locus Magazine* declared “John Kessel is one of American SF’s finest writers . . . [he] constructs stories of subversive eloquence, their full freight of meaning exploding in the mind a while after reading has ended.” *Booksense* remarked: “This is one of those too rare short story collections that you can recommend with confidence to both the literary snob and the hard-core computer geek.” *Entertainment Weekly* gave it an “A-,” adding “these stories offer a sustained exploration of the ways gender dynamics can both empower and enslave us. Kessel’s wit sparkles throughout, peaking with the most uproariously weird phone-sex conversation you’ll ever read...”

Nov. 17 British Literature: Marvin Hunt and *Looking for Hamlet*

Professor of English Marvin Hunt published *Looking for Hamlet* (Palgrave, 2007), an investigation of Shakespeare's most fascinating character, to outstanding reviews. Kirkus (in a starred review) said: "A riveting primer on the work many deem Shakespeare's greatest.....astute analysis of major issues within the play, accessible overview of the history of their interpretation and a reading of contemporary criticism sure to set alight a few rooms in the ivory tower of Shakespearean studies." Locally, Hunt recently led a discussion of the book at Quail Ridge Books, where he was introduced by *News and Observer* book reviewer Peder Zane. *Looking for Hamlet* appeared in England last February, continuing its positive reception. The Library Journal's *Academic Newswire* reports that *Looking for Hamlet* ranked number 10 among best-selling books in literature, as compiled by YBP Library Services. It was recently released as an electronic book for the Amazon Kindle and Sony readers.



Dec. 1 Poetry: John Balaban and *Path, Crooked Path*



Professor of English John Balaban joins us to share his new book of poetry. *Path, Crooked Path* opens on Highway 61 and moves across America and the world. Whether he writes of driving past Bush's Texas ranch, sitting at a cafe in Vietnam, or trading swigs of vodka with a Bulgarian exile, Balaban's poems look beyond the personal to help make sense of an often chaotic world. Balaban is the author of a dozen books of poetry, prose, and Vietnamese translations. His prizes include the Lamont Award, the William Carlos Williams Award, and two National Book Award nominations. His work has been featured on NPR's "Fresh Air," *New York Times*, and *Utne Reader*.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

I wish to fully include all persons, and in particular those with disabilities, in this course. Please let me know if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to fully participate. I will respect the confidentiality of the information you share with me. My commitment to providing full and complete access to students with disabilities is more than adherence to university policies; my professional career has focused on inclusion of students with disabilities in preK-higher ed.

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this course, please call **919.515.2261** during business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST) or e-mail **ContinuingEducation@ncsu.edu** to discuss accommodations at least two weeks in advance.