UE031: 20th Century Genre Theory & Practice: Modernist Literary Genres & Photography

Course Description
This course uses photography (its history and critical discourse) to explore how literary genres were invented, challenged and re-written in modernist contexts. How does such literature look under the ‘eye’ of photography? And what does it do? How does it portray modernity? Or how does such literature place the individual in the modern city? Interactions and parallels between photography and literature are studied through a survey of the origin of detective fiction, the rise of poetry of the modern city, and the further development of detection and memory in modernist novels. The course introduces a basic history and discourse of photography, which begins at the time the first detective fiction was “invented” by Edgar Allan Poe, and ends by examining how photographs work when inserted into prose fictions like Virginia Woolf’s Orlando or the contemporary novels of W.G. Sebald. Students, after study in this course, will be more prepared to enjoy and to analyze literature and photographic images in their world.

Class Requirements
Three short essays are to be written during the semester on specific authors, texts, and materials. Each essay is worth 20% of the course grade. An oral presentation during the term is worth 15% of the course grade. A final, longer essay will be due in the last week of the semester and account for the last 25% of the grade.

Texts
Edgar Allan Poe, Selected Tales
Charles-Pierre Baudelaire, The Flowers of Evil
Walter Benjamin, Writer of Modern Life
Virginia Woolf, Orlando
Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida
Susan Sontag, On Photography
Franz Kafka, The Trial
W.G. Sebald, Austerlitz