ENGL 462.01: British Postmodernism: Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson
TR 11-12:15
Dr. Georgia Johnston

This course is limited to students accepted into the English Department’s Research Intensive track (RIT). Other students can petition to enroll through special permission of the Director of the RIT, Dr. Ellen Crowell (undergradenglish@slu.edu). Limited to 12 students.

“It used to be that the real and the invented were parallel lines that never met. Then we discovered that space is curved, and in curved space parallel lines always meet.”
Jeanette Winterson, from The Power Book

As a course in “British Postmodernism,” this course will foreground the role culture plays in textual production. We will explore the writing of two authors, one (despite the nomenclature of the course) a cultural icon of British Modernism, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), and one, Jeanette Winterson (born 1959), a postmodernist British writer. Studying both writers will allow a thorough understanding of the characteristics literary criticism has labeled as “modernist” and “postmodernist,” and this approach will allow us to think about literary predictions, influences, and indebtedness, production in culture, and changes in the meanings of textuality. We will inevitably focus on questions of gender—in terms of issues such as textual production, transgression, voice, structure, positioning of the "I," and canon formation. The presentation of the story of a life will be highly interesting to us, especially as we think of the genre Bildungsroman.

Our readings will include Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, A Room of One’s Own, Orlando, and The Waves from Woolf’s oeuvre; Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit, Written on the Body, The Power Book, Lighthousekeeping, and Stone Gods from Winterson’s. I intend to conduct part of the course through tutorials, meeting with pairs of students who will present papers in that intense working environment. Other parts of the course will be full class meetings, with lecture and discussion. Additionally, this seminar will host a guest critic, Dr. Jane Garrity of the University of Colorado-Boulder. Dr. Garrity will participate in the seminar, and will offer a lecture open to the public. The course will lead to a fifteen-twenty page final research paper, with written assignments throughout the course helping students toward that final paper.