

English MA Course Descriptions

2018 FALL

ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism

Jeff Cassvan

Class no. 29111

WED 6:40–8:30PM

This course provides an introduction to the main concerns and developments of literary criticism and literary theory. We will begin with a careful reading of a few texts by Plato and Aristotle and then turn to a consideration of the diverse perspectives on literature (including Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Formalism, Structuralism, Semiotics, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Gender Studies and Queer Theory) that have emerged during the twentieth century. The most stimulating and far-reaching theoretical insights very often arise out of reading encounters: Derrida's careful readings of Plato and Rousseau, Lacan's reading of Freud, Freud's own reading of literature and of the German language, Althusser's reading of Marx, Butler's reading of Derrida's reading of Austin, to cite a number of important examples. Accordingly, we will treat the texts of critics and theorists as primary and will attend throughout the semester to the fallout of what Paul de Man has described as literary theory's "necessarily pragmatic moment . . . that adds a subversive element of unpredictability and makes it something of a wild card in the serious game of the theoretical disciplines." While we will make use of the introductory materials and organizational format provided in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, we will resist and question the tendency to produce or rely upon simple summaries and paraphrases of difficult arguments and points of view, and our class sessions will encourage the productive exploration of very specific pages and paragraphs in the assigned works. These primary critical and theoretical texts will often be supplemented with a wide range of literary materials (poems, short stories, essays, translations) made available on Blackboard.

ENGL 701: Seminar in Graduate Methodology

Karen Weingarten

Class no. 29113

MON 4:40–6:30PM

This course will introduce students to the skills they'll need to succeed in graduate-level course work and research. We'll begin by examining scholarship in "English" to

understand the kinds of questions, methods, and ideas that are engaging the field today. Like most disciplines, English scholarship is divided into many sub-fields. Some are organized by historical markers, such as Victorian or Medieval literature, and some are organized by approaches, like cultural studies or historicism. One of the goals of this course will be to help students navigate their interests within the discipline and begin to carve a place for themselves within the numerous conversations. In order to do this, we'll focus on how literary theory, archival work, and close reading (as some examples) are used to generate research questions and intervene in already existing scholarly debates. In part, our work in this course will be technical. We'll spend time exploring journals, books, and databases to learn how to read and manage already existing literary scholarship. Through this work we will also explore the history of English Studies to understand how contemporary conversations emerged within the discipline. Finally, the course will also devote time to students' own writing to prepare them for producing thesis-driven, research-based, and theoretically-grounded papers in their courses, and eventually, for their final research project.

ENGL 681: Special Studies
Difficult Texts, Uneasy Narratives
Maaza Mengiste
Class no. 29112
TUE 4:40–6:30PM

How have novels, plays, and nonfiction books learned to accommodate histories that are too difficult to describe? How have writers begun to construct narratives that take into account the incoherence and confusion of political and personal events? In this class, we will be reading challenging works that seek to embrace complexity. We will be asking ourselves how novels can both verbalize and quiet some of the questions we have been asking as one inevitable occurrence seems to lead to the next. In this class, you will be thoroughly immersed in novelistic exchanges. You will be asked to reckon with the questions that spring from each text, and to set several books in conversation with each other to see what surprising new dialogue emerges. This class is designed to challenge you and your approaches to what you read. It will often be difficult and rigorous but worth it.

ENGL 720: Studies in Renaissance Literature

Britain: From Brutus to Brexit

Andrea Walkden

Class no. 29114

WED 4:40–6:30PM

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that nations are “imagined” as bounded, sovereign, and communal. Our seminar will situate these three elements of a national imaginary in a centuries-long perspective, looking backward from Britain’s present-day Brexit crisis (following the referendum vote to leave the European Union in June 2016) to the historical creation of Britain, through empire and warfare, from a cluster of small islands in the Atlantic Ocean. We’ll consider the desires and fantasies that animate national narratives, beginning with the twelfth-century historian Geoffrey of Monmouth, who mythologized the figure of Brutus of Troy (the ancestor of Aeneas, believed to have founded, and named, Britain), and including the seventeenth-century polymath John Aubrey, whose archaeological and anthropological investigations led him to speculate on the ancient peoples who must have built the great stone circle at Stonehenge. Our aim will be to use these and other, earlier works of literature to inform our understanding of the contemporary political geography of the British Isles, a geography unsettled by the global flow of capital and people, the anticipated rebordering of Northern Ireland, and the movement toward Scottish independence.

Likely primary readings include Shakespeare, *Henry V* (1599), Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), Ben Jonson, *Masque of Blackness* (1605), Hugo Grotius, *The Free Sea* (1607; trans. Richard Hakluyt), John Milton, *Lycidas* (1637), Thomas Browne, *Urn Burial* (1658), John Aubrey, *Templa Druidum* (c. 1663), Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724), Bill Buford, *Among the Thugs* (1992), Hilary Mantel, *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* (2014), Amit Chaudhuri, *Odysseus Abroad* (2015), Zadie Smith, *Feel Free* (2018), and Ali Smith, *Autumn* (2017), heralded in the *New York Times* as “the first great Brexit novel.” In addition to *Imagined Communities*, likely theoretical readings include Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, Carl Schmitt, *Land and Sea*, Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack*, and Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*.

In addition to blogging, leading one week of seminar discussion, and workshopping essays-in-progress, students will submit a research proposal, a literature review, a rough draft, and a final project. The project may be written in a genre and on a topic of the student’s choosing, but it must include research and be related to the texts, themes, and ideas explored in the seminar.

ENGL 726: Studies in Early American Literature

Specters of the Black Atlantic: African American Literature before Emancipation

Duncan Faherty

Class no. 29115

MON 6:40–8:30PM

Building on the work of Paul Gilroy's landmark volume, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), this course seeks to map the "Africanist" presence in the formation of early U.S. culture. In so doing, we will consider the ways in which issues of race, freedom, unfreedom, and personal sovereignty have been and still are the fundamental concerns of the U.S. cultural imagination. By examining how the themes of freedom and individualism have often been cast as the central elements of "American" literature, we will explore how this configuration has in fact always depended upon on a manifestly unfree black population, a population that "came to serve white authors as embodiments of their own fears and desires." In so doing, we will also consider the ways in which African American writers responded to this concept of unfreedom as well to questions of diaspora and hybridity. Our readings will be drawn from a variety of genres and periods, and possible authors include Venture Smith, Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Phillis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon, Charles Brockden Brown, Leonora Sansay, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Wilson, Martin Delany and Toni Morrison. In addition to the range of primary material, we also be engaging with a variety of theoretical readings including work by Paul Gilroy, C.L.R James, Nazera Wright, Christina Sharpe, Ian Baucom, Jesse Aleman, Eric Lott, Robert Reid-Pharr, Kenneth Warren, Fred Moten, Daphne Brooks, Ivy Wilson, and Tavia Nyong'o.

ENGL 729: Studies in Modern Literature

Contemporary American Poetry and Documentary Poetics

Nicole Cooley

Class no. 29116

MON 4:40–6:30PM

Our focus in this seminar will be the strange, bewildering and fascinating field of documentary poetics in American writing. We'll talk about poetic texts as well as hybrid forms as we consider questions about poetry's function in the larger world. How do poets function as historians, journalists or witnesses? What kind of cultural work can poetry do? We'll read a range of texts from twentieth- and twenty-first-century US poetry, beginning with poems by Muriel Rukeyser and Charles Reznikoff and a discussion of modernist poets using "official" history and WPA documents before

turning to a number of contemporary poets who engage in various ways with documentary projects. We will investigate writing from archives, writing from found material and writing from oral histories and narratives. We will discuss the wide range of aesthetic strategies that documentary poems deploy, and we will explore how documentary poems use visual discourses, including photography and film. Readings will also include texts by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, M Nourbese Philip, Paisley Rekdal, CD Wright, Mark Nowak, Molly McCully Brown, Tyehimba Jess, Claudia Rankine and Marilyn Chin.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar

Science Fiction

Seo-Young Chu

Class no. 29124

TUE 6:40–8:30PM

We will explore some of the ways in which works of science fiction (SF) have dealt with race, gender, sexuality, war, history, and the near future. We will also explore the many identities of science fiction itself—as a genre, a mode, a subculture, a marketing tag, as a state of mind, a set of reading protocols, as the opposite of realism, as a type of realism, and as a growing presence in everyday reality. Texts encompass film (e.g., *Blade Runner*, *Aliens*, *The Matrix*, superhero cinema), prose fiction long and short (e.g., tales and novels by Isaac Asimov, Margaret Atwood, Octavia Butler, William Gibson, and Chang-rae Lee), lyric poetry (Emily Dickinson, Jean Toomer, and W.B. Yeats, among others), music (from Gyorgy Ligeti to Radiohead), and visual artwork (e.g., concept art). Specific topics may include postcolonialism, animal sentience, paratexts, metafiction, the uncanny valley, robot rights, xenophobia, terraforming, slavery, techno-orientalism, the gothic, linguistics, aesthetics, globalization, sexual violence, medicine, and climate change.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar

Contemporary Children's and Young Adult Literature

Carrie Hintz

Class no. 29125

WED 4:40–6:30PM

Our seminar will explore recent writing for children and young adults through the lens of recent theories and methodologies (among them feminist and queer theory, critical race theory, dis/ability theory, animal studies and ecocriticism). We will also look at ways that writing for young people responds to—and shapes—social justice

movements (like Black Lives Matter or the #MeToo movement). Current and prospective teachers are very welcome; the class will often engage with pedagogical strategies and questions of curriculum.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar

Superheroes: History, Theory, and Practice

Bill Orchard

Class no. 29126

THU 6:40–8:30PM

In this class, we will examine the superhero as a character, as a genre, and as an industry. As we do this, we will consider the ways in which the superhero has been responsive to shifting attitudes about U.S. national identity, especially as it relates to race, gender, and sexuality. Looking at the superhero across the twentieth century and across various media, we will read history and theory about genre, mass media, and concepts, like trauma, that equip us to interpret these narratives in productive ways. Likely primary texts will include Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen*, Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Morrison, Quitely, and Rich's *All-Star Superman*, Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross's *Marvels*, Gene Luen Yang and Sonny Liew's *The Shadow Hero*, Jaime Hernandez's *Gods and Science*, Ms. Marvel, and *Black Panther: The World of Wakanda*.

ENGL 791: Thesis Course

Class no. 29127

Department consent required. Please email Bill Orchard, the Acting Director of Graduate Studies for Fall 2018, at worchard@qc.cuny.edu if you wish to enroll in this course.

ENGL 795: Independent Study

Class no. 29129

Department consent required. Please email Bill Orchard, the Acting Director of Graduate Studies for Fall 2018, at worchard@qc.cuny.edu if you wish to enroll in this course.