

English MA Course Descriptions

2022 Summer Session I (4 weeks, June 6–30)

ENGL 681: Special Studies

20th- and 21st-Century American Women Playwrights

Prof. Rhoda Sirlin

Class code 2442

MON/TUE/WED/THU 6:45–8:25PM

Fully online / Synchronous

This special topics course will focus on 20th- and 21st-century American women playwrights, many of whom have won Pulitzer Prizes for Drama or whose work has been finalists for this prize or whose work created an important cultural controversy. We will explore the connection between these plays to Greek tragedy and the 19th-century social dramas of Ibsen and Strindberg, discovering in the process the use of realism, naturalism, and expressionism in American theater. We will also explore the changing representations of tragedy, comedy, and tragicomedy by contemporary women playwrights. Some of the writers we will read are Susan Glaspell, Lillian Hellman, Clare Booth Luce, Lorraine Hansberry, Beth Henley, Marsha Norman, Paula Vogel, Rebecca Gilman, Sarah Ruhl, Quiara Hudes, Lynn Nottage, and Martyna Majok. If possible, we will see a live production together on or off-Broadway.

This online course will meet synchronously via Zoom.

ENGL 719: Studies in Medieval Literature

Violence in the Middle Ages

Prof. Edward Currie

Class code 2388

Fully online / Asynchronous

Medieval literature is often thought to reflect an era of massive bloodshed. But what did 'violence' mean in the literature of the period? As we read depictions of conflict in Old English, Middle English, and Old Norse texts, we shall analyze and interpret how medieval authors represent violent words and deeds that have deep historical, literary, and cultural meanings. Was violence always thought of in moralistic terms? How is violence tied to the representation of individualistic heroes and heroines? How can

violence promote group identity and ideology? How should we interpret *flytings*: that is, scenes in which characters exchange personal insults? How can conflict shape and reflect gender roles? Our investigations of depictions of quarrels will shed light on the divergent ways authors imagined violence, which can be wholly alien to modern meanings of the word.

The readings will probably include the anonymous *Dream of the Rood*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Beowulf*, Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale," "The Miller's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale", and texts from the Norse *Poetic Edda*, such as "Lokasenna" and "Atlakviða." The literature will be read in translation. Students will turn in weekly responses and write two papers: the first will require close readings of a text; the second will be a research paper that involves engagement with scholarship.

This online course will be asynchronous. Class discussions will occur on our Blackboard site, on which required lectures and other course materials will also be available.

ENGL 719 fulfills the pre-1900 requirement for MS Ed and MAT students.

English MA Course Descriptions

2022 Summer Session II (6 weeks, July 5–August 15)

ENGL 721: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Literature

Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Prof. Richard Marotta

Class code 2392

MON/WED 6:00–8:05PM

Fully online / Synchronous

This course will focus on Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a major example of the visionary epic. We will examine the intellectual, theological, and mythical contexts of the poem and then move on to such issues as sexual politics, the emergence of gender identity, the authority of the Divine voice, the rhetoric of the Satanic voice, the birth of the Human voice, the "contradictory energy" (Smith) between paganism and Christianity and the various configurations of Adam and Eve. Milton made a number of poetic choices in the context of an epic poem that have endeared him to some readers and alienated him from others. We will look at these choices in the context of an epic poem that is very much heir to a non-Christian classical epic tradition and, at the same time, the recipient

of various Christian theological positions. Examining this poetic dynamic will bring us to an examination of the theology of uncertainty, which seems to permeate Milton's poetry. These conflicted imaginative moments engender some of the more problematical and visionary elements in *Paradise Lost*.

This online course will be synchronous on Zoom. We will use Blackboard for announcements, supplemental material, and for Discussion/Forum.

ENGL 721 fulfills the pre-1900 requirement for MS Ed and MAT students.

ENGL 781: Special Seminars

What Goes Into an Ashbery?

Prof. James Richie

Class code 2424

TUE/THU 6:00–8:05PM

Fully online / Synchronous

The poetic career of John Ashbery spans the second half of the 20th century and while Ashbery's style was really fairly original and unique, his work is also in conversation with everything else that was going on (socially, politically, aesthetically) at the time. This is a course that takes Ashbery's work as a starting point to think about the development of American poetry throughout the second half of the 20th century. We'll start by examining the New Critical moment in which Ashbery began writing, thinking about his work in relation to what James Longenbach calls "modern poetry after modernism." The early works will be put side by side with contemporary authors from which Ashbery drew (like Elizabeth Bishop) and authors whose works are radically different (Lowell, Plath, and other "confessionals"). We'll examine the "schools" approach to poetry (and Ashbery's poetry) and think through the gains and losses of approaching a poetic moment from that lens. We'll address the broad poetic response to civil rights and the Vietnam War and examine Ashbery's oblique positions on these major issues and put his work in contrast with the works of "engaged" poets like Rich or Merwin. We'll take a look at the watershed moment of *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* and think about what changed to allow a seeming outsider like Ashbery to be feted as a major poet. Finally, we'll take a look at the long later period to see what happens when an outsider becomes an insider and what poets do when previously experimental verse is now taken as a norm. Other poets considered may include Wallace Stevens, Richard Wilbur, James Merrill, Allen Ginsberg, A.R. Ammons, Frank O'Hara, Amiri Baraka, James Tate, Jorie Graham, Mark Doty and Carl Phillips.

This online course will be taught synchronously.