# English MA Course Descriptions
# 2020 SPRING

**ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism**
Prof. Seo-Young Chu
Class no. 27016
WED 4:40–6:30pm

A nonlinear history of literary criticism and theory. Authors/sources will range from Aristotle to Sianne Ngai, from Walter Benjamin to Instagram, from Gloria Anzaldúa to Chanel Miller. Topics will include aesthetics, authorship, canons, disability, environmentalism, feminism, genders, globalizations, the relationship of theory to reality, rhetoric, science fiction, sexual violence, technology, translation, the uncanny valley, and war.

**ENGL 701: Seminar in Graduate Methodology**
Prof. Annmarie Drury
Class no. 27020
THU 4:40–6:30pm

What does literary scholarship in graduate school look like? When your graduate instructors ask you to write a research paper, what do they mean? In this course, we practice methods in research and writing that will be valuable in all your graduate classes. As we work, we'll create a reflective practice by thinking together about how knowledge is created in the discipline of "English": about what kinds of questions generate knowledge and about the values that inform those questions. By examining the work of others – of established scholars outside our course and of one another – we collect a toolkit of thinking, reading, writing, and research strategies. We give special attention to the academic essay as a flexible, sophisticated form that affords opportunity for creativity. We aim to develop a new sense of our own proclivities as literary scholars and a new competence in pursuing our interests: to leave the course knowing which strategies for reading, posing questions, and researching each of us finds most engaging and knowing how to research and write in ways convincing to fellow scholars. Literary texts will include Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, poems by Christina Rossetti and Michael Field, and Margaret Oliphant's *Library Window*.

**ENGL 702: Graduate Methodology for English Education Students**
Prof. Judith Nysenholc
Class no. 28066
THU 6:40–8:30pm

This course provides current and future secondary-school teachers with an opportunity to study literary criticism from a pedagogical perspective. Besides reflecting on the selection process of a text appropriate for a secondary-school curriculum, we will examine research methods and theoretical perspectives currently used in the field of literature. We will focus on *Macbeth*, examine that text through a variety of critical approaches, and discuss how these reading strategies could be incorporated in a high school literature classroom; in particular, we will address how they can be used in differentiated instruction with special populations, such as English Language Learners. Independently, you will also research and synthesize existing interpretations of a novel or play of your choice. The ultimate goal of the course is to enrich and deepen your understanding of literary study, as well as to broaden your pedagogical content knowledge. The shift to the Next Generation Learning Standards, with a renewed emphasis on complex texts, is meant to develop students' higher order thinking skills. This course equips you with essential tools to address these new standards in your teaching.

**ENGL 681: Special Studies**
**Literature and Theatre**
Prof. Rhoda Sirlin
Class no. 27017
WED 4:40–6:30pm

This course will focus on American theatre since 1945. We will explore some classic Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwrights like Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller. We will then move on to more contemporary award-winning dramatists in an effort to reveal how theatre acts as a mirror to American culture, dramatizing important social problems that we as a society need to face. In the process, we will explore contemporary theatre's link to Greek tragedy and to the 19th-century social dramas of Ibsen and Strindberg. We will try to define modern tragedy, comedy, and tragicomedy as well as the modern uses of realism, naturalism, and expressionism. Some of the playwrights we will read are Lillian Hellman, Marsha Norman, Beth Henley, Paula Vogel, John Patrick Shanley, Quiara Hudes, Martyna Majok, Ayad Akhtar, August Wilson, and Lynn Nottage. If possible, we will see the new Broadway production of Paula Vogel's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *How I Learned to Drive*.

**ENGL 736: Studies in Criticism**
**Feminist Criticism and Victorian Fictions**
Prof. Talia Schaffer
Class no. 27021
WED 6:40–8:30pm

In this course we will explore two subjects: the landmark Victorian novels that have shaped feminist criticism for the past half-century, and feminist theories as they have changed over that period. We will, for instance, read Brontë's *Jane Eyre* along with the first "recovery" feminist work: Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Spivak, to ask how Brontë's novel sustained certain forms of reading, but how those techniques then constrained us to certain kinds of interpretations. In George Eliot's great mid-Victorian panorama, *Middlemarch*, the cultural feminism in the 90s (Armstrong, Gallagher) found a perfect case, but might Middlemarch challenge some of those new historicist models? We will end by showcasing either Austen's *Mansfield Park* or Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* along with film adaptations, using criticism by Marcus, Ehnenn, Ahmed, and Kate Manne, thinking about how contemporary feminist criticism can be activist, theoretical, queer, postcolonial, and technologically savvy. Students will have a chance to select one novel for their own feminist critique.

**ENGL 742: Studies in Shakespeare's Plays**
**Mediating Shakespeare**
Prof. Miles Grier
Class no. 27024
MON 6:40–8:30pm

This course begins from the premise that Shakespeare becomes available to us in pieces, parts, fragments, and reproductions. There are few records in the archive of his existence; none of his plays comes to us in his hand. Both his biography and his literary legacy come to us through mediations: carefully (or hastily) compiled books, speaking bodies on stage, the moving images of film, casual allusions, and digital code. How can your investigations of archives, editorial practice, media history and theory add to your understanding, study, and teaching of Shakespeare in the twenty-first century? What are the best practices for you and for students to engage this media Colossus known as Shakespeare?

**ENGL 781-01: Special Seminar**
**The Gothic Imagination**
Prof. Siân Silyn Roberts
Class no. 27089
MON 4:40–6:30pm

Authors have long experimented with the languages of fear, persecution, loathing, and imprisonment to produce the style of writing popularly known as "Gothic." To understand why readers throughout the Atlantic found this changing, complex form so compelling from the middle of the eighteenth-century onward (beyond its obvious sensational appeal), we will consider Gothic fictional writings as an arena in which different notions of national community and individual subjectivity enter into conversation, confront, and revise one another. We will examine the Gothic's early literary origins and its changing preoccupations over the course of the eighteenth through twenty-first centuries to consider how it navigates relations of race, subjugation, desire, knowledge, gender, and emotion in the larger Atlantic World.

**ENGL 781-02: Special Seminar**
**Structural Violence and Literary Form**
Prof. Gloria Fisk
Class no. 27090
TUE 6:40–8:30pm

The English language had no name for structural violence until the late 1960s. That's when Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton coined the term "institutional racism." Claiming an activist purpose, they expanded the language we had to describe how white supremacy hurts Black and brown people, beyond the transitive verbs that enable the report "when a Black family moves into a home in a white neighborhood," for example, "and is stoned, burned, or routed out." Injury proves harder to put into words when nobody needs to lift a hand to make it happen. To confront that institutional racism, Carmichael and Hamilton gave it a name.

The Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung cited their model four years later, when he coined the term "structural violence." Expanding the definition of violence to include all manner of harm whose perpetrator proves hard to see, Galtung named the ways our life spans correlate to our degrees of access to police protection, for example, medical care, and nutritious food. He also traced the persistence of structural violence to its resistance to literary form, noting that it "defies our ideas of what drama is" as it defies our grammar, "in (at least Indo-European) languages: subject-verb-object, with both subject and object being persons."

Since then, speakers of English have honed a rich vocabulary to consider this fact and weigh its implications: The people who wield the most power in social and political terms—because they belong to a relatively privileged race, gender, nation, language, class—live longer and better than the rest. This way of thinking about our relative vulnerability to harm has become expressible in English only over the last half-century, when it must find some expression in our literature, too. What new literary forms emerge to represent it, to debate it, and to negotiate the anxieties we feel about it?

Those are the questions that we'll raise in this course. We'll think about the ways that contemporary writers adapt the literary forms they inherit—character, for example, setting, plot, and voice—to represent life as we live it in an age that recognizes the reality of structural violence without always agreeing how and when we see it. Our readings will include Anne Boyer's *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate* (2018), Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* (2015), Anna Burns's *Milkman* (2018), Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* (2018), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).

**ENGL 781-03: Special Seminar**
**Sentimental Modernisms**
Prof. Clifford Mak
Class no. 27091
THU 6:40–8:30pm

Why is it important that literature makes us *feel*? And not just *feel*, but feel *that we are feeling*? Furthermore, what is it about some of these feelings in particular that elevates a text to a position of virtually universal significance? In this course, we will explore these questions within the framework of modern culture, from literature beginning in the nineteenth century to contemporary films, examining sentimentality's aesthetic mechanics and cultural functions. Though such feelings are often dismissed as excessive, sickly, or trite, we will, through close readings of texts, grapple with how sentimentality and other broadly "universal" yet ultimately *vague* affects, aesthetics, and sensibilities related to it (such as the kitschy, the campy, the soulful, the winsome, the vital, the exquisite, even the indeterminate sensibility of "books that will restore your faith in the human spirit") might be understood as ostensibly real effects produced by discrete, concrete, formal techniques. On the other end, we will consider how these sentimentalisms have historically been central to our understanding of ourselves as *modern* in a number of different ways; this will include thinking about sentimentalism (and antisentimentalism, and countersentimentalism) as a function of race (especially whiteness), gender and sexuality (its role in femininity and male homosexual panic), liberal ideology ("sympathy," "empathy"), discourses of development and age (children's literature, nostalgia), and institutional and market prestige ("Oscar bait").

Authors include Oscar Wilde, Gustave Flaubert, Virginia Woolf, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fannie Hurst, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Yone Noguchi, Li Bai, Langston Hughes, W. H. Auden, Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, J. M. Barrie, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Muriel Spark, and Toni Morrison. Films include *Show Boat*, *Schindler's List, Brokeback Mountain*, and *Crash*. Theoretical and critical readings include texts by Nietzsche, Bergson, Adorno, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lauren Berlant, Leslie Jamison, James Baldwin, Fred Moten, Maurice Sendak, Carol Mavor, and D. A. Miller.

**ENGL 781-05: Special Seminar**
**Child/Adolescent/Adult: Rethinking the Boundaries of Children's Literature**
Prof. Carrie Hintz
Class no. 39518
WED 6:40–8:30pm

What makes a children's book different from one written for an audience of adults? How do cultural institutions and the conventions of publishing create—and enforce—these differences? How have the definitions of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood changed through time? How have race, class, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability shaped our understanding of childhood and its literature? With these questions in mind, this seminar will consider—and challenge—the historical and cultural construction of "children's literature" as a separate category of literary production. We will read works originally intended for mixed child-adult audiences, like oral fairytales, and crossover phenomena like the *Harry Potter* books. We will also look at works explicitly tailored to the needs of specific age groups, like the board books produced for infants and toddlers, the children's picture book, early readers, middle grade chapter books, and young adult literature. One class session will be devoted to a collaborative exercise about the texts you have read over the course of your English major that exemplify the concerns and needs of adult readers, grappling with what cultural forces have marked these works as unsuitable for children. Students will write a final paper and participate in a course blog.

**ENGL 791: Thesis Course** and **ENGL 795: Independent Study**

*Department consent required. Please email Prof. Caroline Hong, Director of Graduate Studies in English, at caroline.hong@qc.cuny.edu if you wish to enroll in these courses.*