

Spring 2025 MA Course Descriptions

ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism

Wed 4:40pm-6:30pm

Prof. Bill Orchard

Course Code: 45532

Theory is hard, but worth the attention we pay it. Theory provides us with tools for connecting our interpretations of literary texts to larger questions about history, culture, politics, and philosophy. This course examines a wide array of literary theory. We will consider the ways in which thinkers from diverse disciplines and intellectual traditions have provided answers to the following questions: What is literature? How do we determine the meanings of a text? What is the relationship between an author, a text, a reader, and a context? What role does a text play in representing or even producing our conceptions of reality? The readings will combine some foundational figures in theory—such as Saussure, Foucault, Althusser, and Lacan—with more recent work by writers like Sianne Ngai, Lauren Berlant, Fredric Jameson, Christina Sharpe, and Jose Esteban Muñoz.

ENGL 643: Young Adult Literature

Tue 4:40pm-6:30pm (ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS)

Prof. Carrie Hintz

Course Code: 45238

Our seminar will consider post-war and contemporary YA literature. The emergence—and cultural construction—of the concept of “the adolescent,” will be our point of departure, as we explore how YA literature is imagined as a cultural response to the needs of young people. We will also consider the robust adult readership of YA. Generic precursors to YA (especially the *Bildungsroman* and melodrama) and early adolescent literature like the post-war Junior Novel will help us position the YA category within literary history. We will also reflect on the shaping force of genre, especially New Realism, the problem novel, fantasy literature, science fiction, and dystopia. By studying graphic novels and emergent forms like the verse novel, we will consider cutting-edge approaches to critical visual and multimodal literacy. Primary sources for the class will include Mary Stolz’s *To Tell Your Love* (1950), S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967), Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* (1974), M. T. Anderson’s *Feed* (2002), Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* (2006), Nnedi Okorafor’s *Akata Witch* (2011), Benjamin Alire Sáenz’s *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012), Meg Medina’s *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (2014), Elizabeth Acevedo’s *The Poet X* (2018), and Akwaeke Emezi’s *Pet* (2019). In our last two weeks, we will consider ways to incorporate contemporary YA into the rather static high school curriculum, as a way of diversifying the texts available to young people. For this unit, we will consider *To Kill a Mockingbird* in dialogue with Lila Quintero Weaver’s *Darkroom* (2012) and Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give* (2017).

ENGL 701: Seminar in Graduate Methodology**Mon 6:40pm-8:30pm****Prof. Omari Weekes****Course Code: 45531**

This course is designed to introduce graduate students to key methodologies, practices, tools, and skills that we use in literary studies. We will begin by reading a canonical text together as a class: William Faulkner's 1936 novel, *Absalom, Absalom!* We will then read biographical sketches of and nonfiction written by Faulkner in order to learn more about his considerations of race, gender, sex, religion, and labor in the U.S. South and explore the secondary literature around Faulkner's perhaps most ambitious novel and its place within his larger body of work. In this endeavor, we will ask questions: Which aspects of this text have literary scholars most/best engaged? How have the conversations around this text shaping or responding to changes in the text's popular and critical reception? How have the conversations around this text responded to changes in literary critical methodologies? Along the way, students will have the opportunity to build scholarly community around a single textual object while also exploring their own unique research interests in a series of structured assignments that will lead to a final research paper or project. We will explore how literary critics form research questions as we read past and current literary criticism to identify what makes for good scholarship. We will figure out which research tools and resources are available to us as we make meaningful contributions to longstanding conversations around Faulkner's work. We will devote time to both writing and discussion in order to model for ourselves and each other how we do this thing we call literary studies.

ENGL 719: Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales***Mon 4:40pm-6:30pm****Prof. Glenn Burger****Course Code: 45530**

In this course we will read Chaucer's most experimental work, *The Canterbury Tales*, in the original Middle English, taking up a variety of interrelated historical, social, and aesthetic questions. How, for example, does Chaucer represent the relations and conflicts among the various classes of late-medieval society, and what effects does Chaucer's own class position—as bourgeois civil servant with strong ties to the aristocracy—have on the production of the *Canterbury Tales*? How might the *Tales* work to re-present and critique dominant medieval forms of medieval gender and sexuality do the *Tales*, and why is sexual violence so often linked to various modes of masculine self-identification in the *Tales*? How does Chaucer explore the intersectional nature of medieval categories of identity such as race, religion, class, gender, and sexuality? Why—of all the writers of the English Middle Ages—is it Chaucer whom we are most likely to read? What factors have especially contributed to canonizing Chaucer as the so-called "father of English poetry?"

This course satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MAT and MSED students.

ENGL 729: Studies in Modern Literature**Tue 6:40pm-8:30pm****Prof. Cliff Mak****Course Code: 45529**

This course will examine the arc of modern literature from the heyday of Western imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century to its decline in the wake of the Second World War. This course will therefore aspire to something like a global scope: we will read writing from numerous national and transnational contexts, including the British, American, South African, Antiguan, and Lebanese. We will read across a variety of modern literary genres, mediums, and formats: not only fiction and poetry, but also manifestoes, essays, creative nonfiction, and government surveillance files. We will also think about with a number of aesthetics, styles, and affects central to modernity, from earnestness and edginess to camp and kitsch. Writers in this course will include Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, Mina Loy, James Joyce, Olive Schreiner, T. S. Eliot, Kahlil Gibran, Langston Hughes, Jean Rhys, and Jamaica Kincaid.

ENGL 733: Asian American Graphic Narratives**Thu 4:40pm-6:30pm (ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS)****Prof. Caroline Hong****Course Code: 45237**

In this graduate course, we will explore a wide range of comics and graphic narratives created by and/or about Asian Americans. We will examine both how Asians and Asian Americans have historically been racialized as caricatures and orientalist stereotypes in mainstream comics and how Asian American comics creators have grappled with, resisted, and moved beyond this racist visual legacy. We will familiarize ourselves with comics as a medium and read independent and mainstream comics in a variety of genres. We will study these works alongside theoretical and critical readings that deal with comics and visual cultures. Over the course of the semester, we will think about how comics in general, and these texts in particular, complicate our understandings of literature and history, as well as of race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, class and labor, (dis)ability, trauma, imperialism, and so on. And, hopefully, together we will discover how this hybrid visual-verbal form is uniquely equipped to tell Asian American stories.

Artists/writers we may read include (but are not limited to) Rina Ayuyang, Lynda Barry, Thi Bui, Mike Curato, Trinidad Escobar, Huda Fahmy, Laura Gao, Malaka Gharib, Kiku Hughes, Mira Jacob, Shing Yin Khor, Derek Kirk Kim, Henry (Yoshitaka) Kiyama, Marjorie Liu and Sana Takeda, Miné Okubo, Meg O'Shea, Bishakh Som, Tak Toyoshima, Jillian Tamaki, Mariko Tamaki, GB Tran, Yao Xiao, Wendy Xu, and Gene Luen Yang, among others.

Course requirements will include weekly discussion posts on Slack, a presentation on one of the course texts, an annotation and close reading assignment, and a final project (with three options—an academic essay, a multimedia scholarly or pedagogical project, or an original minicomic).

ENGL 781: American HIV/AIDS Narratives**Wed 4:40pm-6:30pm****Prof. Megan Paslawski****Course Code: 45244**

This special topics course is a multifaceted exploration of the enduring impact of HIV/AIDS on the U.S. landscape. Traveling from the queer activist urgency of the early AIDS crisis to the present-day normalization of HIV/AIDS as a sociomedical complication disproportionately affecting some Americans, our readings will include theory, memoir, fiction, poetry, and histories as we grapple with the implications of a pandemic that continues to highlight inequities that create what activist/writer Sarah Schulman called “people in trouble.” We will discuss strategies of cultural response to HIV/AIDS that range from mourning to militancy and from denial to direct action. As our understanding of one pandemic’s legacy within the US deepens over the semester, we will also work to understand the significance of HIV/AIDS narratives in understanding to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on our lives.

ENGL 781: Gothic, Horror, and the Weird**Thursday 6:40pm-8:30pm (ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS)****Prof. Siân Silyn Roberts****Course Code: 45243**

In this course, we’re going to consume the creepy, the ghostly, the horrific, and the bizarre: in other words, we’re delving into the capacious literary histories of Gothic, Horror, and (New) Weird fiction. Putting aside their indisputable sensational appeal and resisting the urge to reach for overcooked psychoanalytic explanations, what has compelled writers and readers, from the eighteenth century to the present, to experiment with the languages of fear, loathing, reverie, and the grotesque? What innovations and narrative techniques distinguish Gothic, Horror, and (New) Weird, and how do they reproduce, update, and challenge their cultural conventions across literary histories and within Anglophone contexts? How have a diverse range of authors responded to and adapted these conventions? By exploring these questions and more, we will examine how sensational tales, from the eighteenth- to twenty-first centuries, may be read as arenas in which different notions of community, race, environment, gender, and individual subjectivity enter into conversation, confront, and revise one another.

Authors may include Edgar Allan Poe, Tananarive Due, Tochi Onyebuchi, Herman Melville, Cherie Dimaline, Morgan Talty, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, W. W. Jacobs, Nathaniel Hawthorne, our very own Alaya Johnson, China Miéville, Michael Chabon, Shirley Jackson, Ridley Scott (dir.), and Jeff Vandermeer. This course is fully online (synchronous), and students will participate over Zoom and Slack. Course requirements include several writing assignments and a final scholarly or creative (critical or pedagogical) project.

This course satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MEd and MAT students.