

English MA Course Descriptions

FALL 2021

ENGL 701: Seminar in Graduate Methodology

Prof. Talia Schaffer

Class code 38101

MON 6:40–8:30PM / fully online

When you sit down to write a research paper or a thesis, what does that mean and how can you do it? This course will tell you. We'll investigate which websites are reliable, discuss how to find useful online resources, and explore how to find the best printed articles and books. Not only will we learn how to find the right sources, we will also study how to read and use them properly. We'll figure out what makes an article good (and how to tell if it's good at a glance), and we'll discuss how criticism has changed over the last few decades. You'll work on your own research project, and also do some shorter assignments to learn how to use various research techniques. Weekly short papers, final research paper.

This course will be online, with asynchronous elements via Slack and synchronous meetings via Zoom.

ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism

Prof. Jeff Cassvan

Class code 38098

WED 4:40–6:30PM / fully online

This course provides a thorough introduction to a number of 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 20th and 21st centuries. Since the central insights of theory 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), we will treat the texts of theorists and critics 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 second edition of *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 be devoted to reading encounters with very specific pages and paragraphs in the assigned works. These primary critical and theoretical texts will be supplemented with a wide range of literary materials (poems, short stories, essays, translations) made available on Blackboard.

This fully online course will meet synchronously via Zoom on Wednesdays from 4:40-6:30PM, and we will use Blackboard as our learning management system.

ENGL 681: Special Studies

Literature and Theatre

Prof. Rhoda Sirlin

Class code 38100

WED 6:40–8:30PM / hybrid

This special topics graduate 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. We will also discuss film excerpts of some of these plays, and, if possible, we will see a live production together.

This hybrid course will meet in-person, after the first class.

ENGL 722: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature
Restoration Drama, *Clarissa*, and the Battle of the Sexes
Prof. Ala Alryyes
Class code 38103
MON 6:40–8:30PM / fully online

It may seem natural to assume that the languages of love and politics are mutually exclusive. But a striking aspect of the development of both fiction and anti-authoritarian political discourse in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain (as in today's US) is the thorough interpenetration of the private and public spheres. Where political theorists saw in family relations reflections of the political relations and hierarchies of the state, playwrights and novelists portrayed men and women who negotiate sentiments and power in the political idioms of "liberty," "authority," "tyranny," and "autonomy." The stories of love—and of seduction and sexual violence—could contain much else. These considerations are fundamental to our seminar, which aims to read a number of important (and witty) texts closely and to investigate the central place that literature had (and will always have) for thinking the political.

In addition to introducing you to a number of important Restoration and eighteenth-century plays of various types (heroic drama, comic satire, tragicomedy, She-tragedies and affective tragedies), this course will allow us to read (a substantial part of) Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, one of the most remarkable and influential novels of the eighteenth century, in its own dramatic context. Although we now largely study genres in separate courses, literary kinds were as related then as they are today. Richardson, one of the pioneers of the English novel, admired and was strongly influenced by Restoration drama, both in his characterizations and his fictional representations. For its part, Restoration theatre had a fundamental role in giving form to the Civil War's political conflicts and the aristocracy's particular situation after the monarchy's return (the Restoration). But Restoration and eighteenth-century drama also acted to sentimentalize the hierarchies of politics and power, replacing heroic action with moral action, and in the process preparing the ground for the affective rhetoric of the rising novel.

This course will be fully online and synchronous via Zoom during the class time.
ENGL 722 fulfills the pre-1900 requirement for MS Ed and MAT students.

ENGL 724: Studies in Victorian Literature

Victorian Poetry, Victorian Soundscapes

Prof. Annmarie Drury

Class code 38104

THU 4:40–6:30PM / fully online

The extra time that many of us have spent recently on digital meeting platforms has directed our attention to audio environments in new ways. We can bring this attentiveness to poems! In this course, we focus on the sound worlds of Victorian poetry and on the meanings of nineteenth-century soundscapes, exploring as well the challenges involved in reconstructing sound-worlds of the past.

First of all, as we approach Victorian poetry by ear, we will consider the meaning-making, poem by poem, of such sound-based formal elements as rhyme, meter, alliteration, and assonance; and we will experiment with thinking about the spectacular formal diversity of this poetry in terms of the access poets sought to different ways of sounding. We'll ponder ideas about poetic voice and read some modern work in “sound studies,” asking how we can use those ideas to think about literature of the past. We'll explore sound in poems – all the ringing bells, eerie whispers, shouting figures, singing birds, pounding waves, and musical instruments in Victorian poetry – asking what poets make happen when they represent sound in words.

We will also investigate the sound cultures of Victorian times: the emergence of new technologies, like the phonograph and telephone, presented in the era as having special affinities with poetry; dialect poetry (especially of the Dorset poet William Barnes) and its role in defining local community; and the role of sound in the imperialist project, especially as it connected to translation. We will look at Victorian “sound studies” such as Charles Hindley's *History of the Cries of London* (1881). Poets include Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Tennyson, Robert Browning, Christina Rossetti, Toru Dutt, D.G. Rossetti, Matthew Arnold, George Meredith, Michael Field, G.M. Hopkins, and A.C. Swinburne. Occasionally, listening assignments – together in class or on our own – will be part of our course. We will ask a methodological question: how do we situate such experiences of listening within our reading-based practices in literary studies?

This online course will meet synchronously during our class time using Zoom.

ENGL 724 fulfills the pre-1900 requirement for MS Ed and MAT students.

ENGL 726: Studies in Early American Literature

The Transatlantic Gothic

Prof. Siân Silyn Roberts

Class code 38105

WED 6:40–8:30PM / fully online

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. Rather than assume that British and American versions of the Gothic can be neatly divided along nationally distinct lines, we will consider how circulating ideas and literary forms shaped the Gothic in a transatlantic context. We will examine the Gothic’s early literary origins and its changing preoccupations over the course of the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries to consider how it navigates relations of race, subjugation, desire, knowledge, gender, and emotion in the larger Atlantic World. Authors will likely include Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Shirley Jackson, Ann Radcliffe, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Washington Irving, H.P. Lovecraft, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Toni Morrison, Hugh Blair, the Marquis de Sade, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edmund Burke, Anna Laetitia Aikin, Immanuel Kant, and Sigmund Freud, among others.

This course will be fully online, meeting synchronously during the assigned time. Alternative weeks will meet on Zoom and Slack, but we will modify this format going forward to suit our needs.

ENGL 726 fulfills the pre-1900 requirement for MS Ed and MAT students.

ENGL 729: Studies in Modern Literature

Contemporary American Poetry and the Political Landscape

Prof. Nicole Cooley

Class code 38106

MON 4:40–6:30PM / hybrid

“Poetry is a political act because it involves telling the truth,” June Jordan, poet and founder of the Poetry for the People program at UC-Berkeley, said in 1998. Now, in 2021, the relationship of language, politics and truth is more complicated than ever.

This course will investigate contemporary American poetry's relationship to "truth" by reading a range of poetry published in the last five years in order to think deeply about the intersection of history, voice and politics. We are in the midst of the most vital and inclusive moment ever in American poetry, as contemporary poets engage with and challenge the political landscape. We will begin the semester by reading two new anthologies of poetry which directly take on current political issues, and then will turn to recent individual collections of poems, with an emphasis on writers of color, including Layli Long Soldier, Eduardo Corral, and Patricia Smith. We will also explore the world of criticism and theory that has recently emerged alongside new developments in poetry and poetics.

Poet and essayist Audre Lorde once said, "Poetry lays the foundation for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before." In this class, we will investigate how poetry might transform our world.

This hybrid class will meet in-person at Queens College, except for the first class, which will meet online via Zoom. There will also be a Qwriting course site with an asynchronous discussion board.

ENGL 781-01: Special Seminars

Structural Violence and Literary Form

Prof. Gloria Fisk

Class code 38115

TUE 4:40–6:30PM / fully online

The English language had no name for structural violence until the latter half of the twentieth century. Charles Hamilton and Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) led the way when they coined the term "institutional racism" in 1966. Claiming an activist purpose, they expanded the language we had to describe how white supremacy hurts Black and brown people. They credited 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," to show how injury proves harder to capture in words when nobody needs to lift a hand to make it happen. To bring accountability for that kind of violence that emanates more passively out of the structures that make the world as we know it turn, Hamilton and Ture gave it a name.

The Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung cited their model to deracinate it three years later with the discourse of structural violence. Expanding the category of violence to include injury whose perpetrator is hard to see, Galtung named the ways our life spans correlate to the degrees of access we have to health care, education, and nutritious food. And as he found structural violence lurking in every ordinary day, he

traced its persistence to its resistance to literary form. He was no literary critic, but he wrote a bit like one when he argued that structural violence "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 the late 1960s, the discourses of institutional racism and structural violence have circulated far beyond the academic and activist circles where they began. Speakers of English have honed a rich vocabulary to consider this fact and weigh its implications: The people who have 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. We know this to be true, but that knowledge is historically specific to our time.

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. Our readings may include Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back* (1987), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* (2017), Tommy Pico's *Nature Poem* (2017), Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* (2016), and Magda Szabò's *The Door* (1987/1995).

This online course will meet synchronously during the scheduled class time, although we may use part of our time for small group meetings and workshops.

ENGL 781-02: Special Seminars

Public Writing

Prof. Briallen Hopper

Class code 38116

THU 4:40–6:30PM / fully online

Reviews, op-eds, open letters, newsletters, blogs, how-to essays, advice columns, interviews, profiles.... Public genres like these have surrounded readers for decades or centuries, but they are rarely assigned in literature or creative writing classes. "Public Writing" is a literature course with a practical component, aimed at students who want to start writing in these genres as well as students who just want to engage more deeply with the prose they're reading online or on their phones. We'll read and discuss examples of common genres of public writing, and practice related skills including

pitching, interviewing, and journalistic editing. For their final project, students can write a piece of public writing, an academic analysis of public writing, or a combination of the two.

This online course will meet synchronously on Zoom during the class time.

ENGL 781-03: Special Seminars

Fables of Modernism

Prof. Clifford Mak

Class code 38117

THU 6:40–8:30PM / hybrid

In this course, we will examine why the figure of the animal was so central to modernist literature. We will consider the legacy of the fable tradition in the late 19th century and early 20th century and how that tradition intersected with both evolutionary theory and modernist aesthetic doctrine in often generative ways—providing formal and stylistic fodder for a variety of political commitments (feminist, queer, anti-racist, and anti-colonial, but also imperialist, racist, homophobic, and masculinist). We will also take in account modernist literature’s relationship to other zoocentric media (such as film and animation) and to later animal-obsessed aesthetic moments, including our own in the 21st century.

Authors and artists will possibly include Adorno, J. M. Barrie, Walter Benjamin, Henri Bergson, Bersani, Countee Cullen, Charles Darwin, Derrida, Walt Disney, Sergei Eisenstein, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Chuck Jones, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Charles Kingsley, Rudyard Kipling, D. H. Lawrence, Levinas, Yann Martel, Marianne Moore, Nietzsche, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Sedgwick, Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, and Virginia Woolf. We might also consider the Pokémon franchise.

This hybrid course will be taught in-person, after meeting on Zoom for our first class. Even as we meet in person, we will utilize Slack as a space for asynchronous online discussion outside of class. In the event that we have to switch back to online teaching, then, we will be able to do so with Slack and Zoom without much interruption (hopefully). Please contact me at cmak@qc.cuny.edu once you are enrolled, so that I can easily send you details about our first Zoom meeting and our Slack workspace before the fall semester begins.

ENGL 781-04: Special Seminars

Experiments in Autobiography

Prof. Jason Tougaw

Class code 38118

TUE 6:40–8:30PM / hybrid

Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014) is a memoir in verse. "To try to write a straight narrative would have been dishonest," she explains. "The memory of my childhood is a lyrical one. . . . Look at the line breaks. It's like, here's this memory, and now let me take you to the next moment in time. I feel like in poems I'm showing the great simplicity and the utter complication of the moment." Discussing her memoir *Woman Warrior* (1976), Maxine Hong Kingston makes a related observation about autobiography and truth: "I felt that to write truly about somebody you have to know what they were dreaming about, and a dream is fiction." Woodson and Kingston are in good company. For many memoirists, writing an honest account of life means asking difficult questions about truth, memory, and writing. These writers mix or blend the conventions of multiple genres, including poetry, fiction, journalism, diary, and visual art.

In this course, we'll survey memoirs that experiment with form to tell life stories that reach beyond simple or received truths about identity, culture, history, politics, psychology, emotion, physiology, family, aging, illness, migration, sex, work, and art. We'll read and watch autobiographical writing by James Baldwin, Frank O'Hara, Joe Brainard, Gloria Anzaldúa, Jacqueline Woodson, Ellen Forney, and GB Tran; we'll watch autobiographical stand-up comedy and YouTubers; and we'll read theories of autobiography by Philippe Lejeune, Nancy K. Miller, Paul John Eakin, Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson. Students will have the opportunity to experiment informally with writing both memoir and literary criticism.

This hybrid course will meet in-person about every three weeks, and the rest of the time will meet synchronously via Zoom. Students will receive a schedule by the start of the semester. Please email Jason.Tougaw@qc.cuny.edu with any questions.