

English MA Course Descriptions

2021 Summer Session I (4 weeks, June 7–30)

ENGL 719: Studies in Medieval Literature

Imagining the Past in Medieval Heroic Legends

Prof. Edward Currie

Class code 5352

Asynchronous

How was the past imagined in medieval heroic legends? Images of the past involved a complicated interplay between literary tradition and authorial invention. Foundation myths, legendary kings and heroes, and their idealized accomplishments could be retooled by medieval authors depending on their particular methods and intentions. By reading the Old English 'epic' *Beowulf* along with related texts, such as *The Battle of Maldon* and the Old Norse *Saga of the Volsungs*, we shall investigate how medieval authors manipulated the past to conform to their ideological positions (e.g., Christian and pagan) and to promote other ideals, values, and beliefs (e.g., about gender roles and ethnic backgrounds). Though we will consider the historical and cultural contexts of the literature, our discussions will focus primarily on literary representations of the past in a diverse set of heroic legends from the Middle Ages.

This online course will be completely 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.

ENGL 781: Special Seminars

Classics of the American Stage

Prof. Rhoda Sirlin

Class code 5353

MON/TUE/WED/THU 6:45–8:25PM

This graduate-level special topics course will focus on classic American plays of the 20th century. We will explore the connection between these plays with Greek tragedy and with the social dramas of 19th-century playwrights like Ibsen and Strindberg, discovering in the process the use of realism, naturalism, and expressionism in American theater. We will also explore the changing definitions of tragedy, comedy, and

tragicomedy. Some of the playwrights we will be reading are Susan Glaspell, Lillian Hellman, Thornton Wilder, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Lorraine Hansberry, Beth Henley, Marsha Norman, August Wilson, and Alfred Uhry.

This online course will be taught synchronously on Zoom Mondays through Thursdays from 6:45-8:25pm.

English MA Course Descriptions

2021 Summer Session II (6 weeks, July 6–August 16)

ENGL 723: Studies in Romantic Literature

Prof. Richard Marotta

Class code 5373

MON/WED 6:00–8:05PM

For many Romantic writers, the “traces of the first Paradise whence man was driven” (McGann) could be found in the imaginative and mimetic structures surrounding them. Wordsworth and Shelley found these traces in nature; Byron in irony; Keats in aesthetics; Blake in myth and Coleridge in ethics. This course will examine how the search for these traces of paradise, or as McGann put it, the idea “that poetry...can set one free of the ruins of history and culture is the grand idea of every Romantic poet,” forms the core belief that shapes the romantic imagination in its exploration of poetic language, of imaginative experience and of the art of poetry. As the romantics looked at ways of regenerating poetic language and of re-spiritualizing the world, they perceived a parallel between the “ruins of paradise” and the ruins of poetic language in Enlightenment practice. In revitalizing the language of poetry, these poets sought to uncover the traces of paradise contained and expressed by the logos and within the dialectic of negation and transcendence. Our exploration will focus on how the romantic poets layered this quest onto idealized characters, nature and poetry itself. We will also look at how they engaged in the ‘pagan’ act of giving life to all objects around them; how they recovered traces of the Edenic imagination which allowed them to spiritualize the world much in the way pagan imaginative impulse gave life to everything, or as Wordsworth said:

To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life; I saw them feel,
Or linked them to some feeling. (Prelude, III. 130-132)

This online course will be conducted synchronously using Zoom during the regularly scheduled time. We will also use Blackboard for asynchronous work.

ENGL 723 fulfills the pre-1900 requirement for MS Ed and MAT students.

ENGL 781: Special Seminars

American Poetry: From Fireside to Modern

Prof. James Richie

Class code 5374

TUE/THU 6:00–8:05PM

If you asked an American poetry-lover in the 1880s to name the greatest, most representative national poets, they would most likely have immediately listed William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, and with the prime example of the best the US has to offer to be found in the works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The works of these authors are often sentimental and popular, simple in verse form, mostly positive in outlook. If you asked the same question of an American poetry-lover in the 1930s or 40s or 50s, they might note T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound, poets whose complicated, ironic, allusive verse openly disdains notions of popular taste. Or they might propose William Carlos Williams or Wallace Stevens, two poets whose free verse, abstract musings often work to remake the world or renew our sense of place in the world. Or they might point to Edna St. Vincent Millay, the Greenwich Village “girl poet” whose formal and structured love poetry gives subtle signals of her bohemian, bisexual life. Or they might offer Langston Hughes, the African American poet whose works hopefully anticipate a radical social restructuring, one that would allow all US citizens equal rights and opportunities. American poetry, and tastes in poetry, changed radically from the late 1800s to the early 20th century. This class will be an exploration of how and why. We’ll begin by looking at the poetry of 19th-century America, visiting the Fireside as an example of the tastemakers later in the century. We’ll veer backwards to the earlier part of the 19th century to examine the wild variety of verse (and purposes for versification) that proliferated in the young nation. Then we’ll take a look at some of the transitional figures at the turn of the century who anticipate certain tastes for the modernists. We’ll end by looking at a handful of modernists (and other 20th-century poets) to think through how or why a new poetic canon for American writing developed and how that canon, as the canon of the 19th century, is still under review and revision.

This online course will run synchronously via Blackboard Collaborate.