

English MA Course Descriptions Spring 2023

ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism

Prof. Kevin Ferguson

Class code 33633

THURS 6:40 to 8:30 pm/ in person

This course is an introduction to literary theory, which we can broadly define as a variety of practices that ask us to reconsider commonsense ideas about the world around us, such as “words have specific meanings,” “men are different from women,” or “novels are meant to be interpreted.” To give students a foundation in literary theory, we will survey a wide range of ways of thinking about the relationship between literature and culture, including structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction, psychoanalysis, feminism, gender studies, political criticism, historicisms, and various cultural studies. While much of the material will be challenging, the emphasis throughout will be on praxis (practice)—literary theory is important not for its own sake, but because it allows us to better approach the world we occupy and which occupies us. So while we will work to apply theory to literature, we will also work to see how literary theories can inform other aspects of our lives.

ENGL 701: Seminar in Graduate Methodology

Prof. Karen Weingarten

Class code 35545

MON 4:40–6:30PM / in person

This course will introduce students to the skills they’ll need to succeed in graduate-level course work and research. We’ll begin by examining scholarship in “English” to understand the kinds of questions, methods, and ideas that are engaging the field today. Like most disciplines, English scholarship is divided into many sub-fields. Some are organized by historical markers, such as Victorian or Medieval literature, and some are organized by approaches, like cultural studies or historicism. One of the goals of this course will be to help students navigate their interests within the discipline and begin to carve a place for themselves within the numerous conversations. In order to do this, we’ll focus on how literary theory, archival work, and close reading (as some examples) are used to generate research questions and intervene in already existing scholarly debates. In part, our work in this course will be technical. We’ll spend time exploring journals, books, and databases to learn how to read and manage already existing literary scholarship. Through this work we will also explore the history of English Studies to understand how contemporary conversations emerged within the discipline. Finally, the course will also devote time to students’ own writing to prepare them for producing thesis-driven, research-based, and theoretically-grounded papers in their courses, and eventually, for their final research project.

ENGL 702: Graduate Methodology for English Education

Prof. Judith Nysenholc

Class code 35420

THURS 4:40–6:30PM / hybrid

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. (*This class is primarily for English Education students. Students in the English MA program should take 701 instead.*)

ENGL 719: Studies in Medieval Literature

Prof. Michael Sargent

Class code 35419

TUES 6:40–8:30 PM / hybrid

The theme of this course will be Multilingual Early Medieval Ireland/–Britain/England, and we will be looking at a number of works in which differences between peoples and languages play intriguingly complicated roles. *Beowulf*, for example, is thought of as the quintessential Old English poem, yet it is set in Denmark and its hero is from Sweden. The Britons, ancestors of the modern Welsh and lowlands Scots, had their own legends—the tales of the *Mabinogion*, for example—and heroic poems of their eventually unsuccessful battle to keep the Anglo-Saxons from turning Britain into England. And Norse sagas record the viking attempt—successful for a time—to turn York into the capital of a Scandinavian country (while some of the vikings fought on the side of the Saxons against the Norse king). And the history of all of this was recorded in a fourth language, Latin. The aim of this course is not to sort out this complexity, but to revel in it. (*This course satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MEd and MAT students.*)

ENGL 722: Studies in 18th Century Literature

Prof. Ala Alryyes

Class code 35544

MON 6:40–8:30 PM / in-person

Gender, Tradition, and Revolution

This graduate seminar will examine selections from British poetry, drama, and prose texts from the Restoration and the eighteenth century, an age both of political and cultural revolutions and attempted reaction. Generally known for the novel and comedy, Restoration and eighteenth-century literature comprises numerous genres, including Augustan satire, literary criticism, philosophical poems, pastoral and georgic poetry, science writing, philosophical fables, autobiographical writing, philosophical treatises, and historical narratives. While surveying this wide variety of literary modes, we will ground our thinking about this period in how writers

related humanity, personal identity, and gender representations, founding an enduring, and problematic, tradition of the battle of the sexes. Throughout, we will also keep in mind that our writers considered literature to be a central “science,” essential to ethics, knowledge, human expression, and politics—and not a mere outlet for individual “creativity” or “originality.” Readings by John Dryden, John Locke, Eliza Haywood, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Samuel Richardson, and others. (*This course satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MSED and MAT students.*)

ENGL 729: Studies in Modern Literature

Prof. Cliff Mak

Class code 34877

TUES 6:40–8:30 PM / in-person

This course will examine modern literature through the lens of the British Empire, following an arc from its heyday at the end of the nineteenth century to its decline in the wake of the Second World War. We will explore how numerous developments in literary production during this period shaped how we think of literature today, following writing from the imperial center out to a number of its colonial outposts: South Africa, Trinidad, Antigua, India, and others. Along the way we will pay attention to the different modes of writing from this period around which modern literature has been formed—realism, naturalism, modernism, magical realism, satire, and children’s literature—and discuss how they magnetized or responded to different feminist, queer, anti-colonial, and anti-fascist commitments. Writers in this course will include Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Jamaica Kincaid, P. G. Wodehouse, Olive Schreiner, Jean Rhys, R. K. Narayan, Sam Selvon, and Christopher Isherwood, among others.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar: Profane Illumination: The Art of Elizabeth Bishop

Prof. Jeff Cassvan

Class code 35423

TUES 4:40–6:30PM / fully online

Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) is widely considered to be one of the most imaginative, innovative and influential American poets of the twentieth century. In this online-synchronous course, which meets via Zoom on Tuesdays from 4:40 PM to 6:30 PM, we will read most of Bishop’s published poetry, a number of her unpublished poems and her translations, and a representative selection of her prose, including short fiction, a number of important letters and essays. We will also consider the role of the visual arts in her work and the relationship between her own paintings and her poems. We will explore Bishop’s relationship to her literary predecessors (the Metaphysical poets, the Romantics, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens), to contemporaries such as Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, as well as her importance for James Merrill, John Ashbery and a range of more recent American poets. A central goal of the course will be, as Robert Frost once explained in a reflection on what it means to be a reader of poetry, “to get among the poems where they hold each other apart in their places as the stars do.” The immersive experience of engaging with her poems in this way will help us chart Bishop’s complex exploration of questions of home, travel and identity. We will be guided throughout the course by newer theoretical and critical approaches to gender and sexuality, posthumanism, ecocriticism, and the role of the image in poetry. This will make possible a deeper appreciation

of the social, political, and historical dimensions of a body of work usually praised for its reticence. MA and MFA students with interests in poetry and poetics, American literature of the second half of the twentieth century, the relationship between the visual arts and poetry and translation studies will find the course particularly useful.

This online course meets synchronously via Zoom on Tuesdays from 4:40 PM to 6:30 PM. We will also make use of the Blackboard learning management system for course readings, discussions and other types of assignments.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar: Young Adult Literature at the Cutting Edge

Prof. Carrie Hintz

Class code 35542

WED 4:40–6:30PM / fully online

Our seminar will explore YA works—and young people’s cultural production—written in hybrid, experimental, and multimodal forms. How is formal innovation aligned with cultural and social change, and when do those alliances break down? How can we use theoretical tools like critical race theory, feminism, queer theory, dis/ability studies, and media studies to critically analyze works in new and emerging genres? Readings/ viewings will include graphic novels, digital and interactive fictions, augmented/ diminished reality games, verse novels, fanfiction, and slam poetry. Course requirements include blog assignments on the CUNY Academic Commons and a final 20-page research paper.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar : Queer American Lives in the Twenty-First Century

Prof. Megan Paslawski

Class code 35421

THURS 4:40–6:30PM / fully online

This course explores significant themes and strategies of American LGBTQ life writing from 2000 to the present that include autotheory/autofiction, witnessing, mediations of archival silences, intersectionality, and online autobiographical collage. While considering the reverberations of twenty-first century landmark moments that include federal recognition of same-sex marriage, the media’s announcement of a “transgender tipping point,” and the rise of new technologies of life narration, we will also visit recent critical interventions in autobiographical studies and some of this century’s major contributions to queer theory. Some of the life writers we’ll study may include Carmen Maria Machado, Bryn Kelly, Ocean Vuong, and Janet Mock. Expect to find Leigh Gilmore, Anna Poletti, Saidiya Hartman, and José Esteban Muñoz represented among the theorists and critics we engage. As we contemplate queer lives and queer ways of writing them, we’ll join Ocean Vuong in seeking the “larger vision made of small things” that in *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* he suggests life writing could be.