

SPRING 2018
ENGLISH MA COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism

Kevin Ferguson

Class no. 2022

WED 6:40 – 8:30 pm

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 638: Modern Drama

Rhoda Sirlin

Class no. 2023

TUES 4:40 – 6:30 pm

This special section of Modern Drama will focus on contemporary American theater, including Pulitzer Prize-winning playwrights, exploring themes and approaches of contemporary dramatists and what their plays reveal about American culture. We will discuss the plays of both male and female playwrights, discovering any similarities and differences. This graduate course asks students to think creatively and analytically about literary texts alongside other media, discourses, or modes of critical inquiry and to reflect upon the broader implications of literary studies in relation to other academic disciplines and the world beyond. This smaller graduate-level course will allow for increased student participation and more ambitious individual projects. Texts include Susan Glaspell’s *Trifles*, Lillian Hellman’s *The Children’s Hour*, Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*, Edward Albee’s *A Delicate Balance*, Beth Henley’s *Crimes of the Heart*, Marsha Norman’s *Night Mother*, David Mamet’s *Glengarry, Glen Ross*, August Wilson’s *Fences*, Alfred Uhry’s *Driving Miss Daisy*, and Ayad Akhtar’s *Disgraced*.

ENGL 662: The English Language

Michael Sargent

Class No. 2024

THU 6:40 – 8:30 pm

The structure and development of modern English, including the historical evolution of the English language, current ideas on language acquisition, geographical and cultural diversity in language use (dialects, pidgins, and creolization), standard English phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

ENGL 701: Seminar in Graduate Methodology

Annemarie Drury

Class no. 2025

TUES 4:40 – 6:30 pm

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. We make this a reflective practice, because we think 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 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 realizing our interests: to leave the course knowing which strategies for reading and posing questions each of us finds most engaging *and* knowing how to research and write in ways convincing to other literary scholars.

ENGL 719 Medieval Literature

Religious Difference in Medieval and Early Modern Literature

Steven Kruger

Class No. 2026

MON 4:40 – 6:30 pm

In medieval and early modern England (and Europe more generally), religion operates in significant ways to shape individual and community identities. England officially expelled its Jewish communities in 1290; in 1656, Parliament debated a proposal to readmit Jews (which was never officially adopted, although *de facto* Jewish communities began to reestablish themselves in England at this moment). Islam, throughout the long period from the twelfth to the

seventeenth century, remains a strong ideological presence for Europeans, and confrontations between Christians and Muslims – in the period of the Crusades, at Nicopolis in 1396, at Constantinople in 1453, and in the long Ottoman-European struggle – often impinged in intensely real ways on lives in Western Europe (even when the crucial events in this confrontation remained at some considerable distance). Fractures within European Christianity, too – the Reformation, of course, but also earlier “heretical” and popular devotional movements – strongly shaped medieval and early modern societies and cultures.

In this seminar we will look at a wide range of work that considers questions about religious difference, interreligious confrontation and cooperation. The texts read will range from the more canonical – Chaucer’s *Prioress’s Tale* and *Man of Law’s Tale*, Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* – to more obscure and often anonymous works: seventeenth-century pamphlets produced during the debate over Jewish readmission; early modern pamphlets identifying Native Americans with the ten lost tribes of Israel; plays about Christians “turning Turk”; pro-Christian polemic produced by Jews who had converted to Christianity; late-medieval drama in which religious difference is placed center-stage; romances of Christian-Muslim confrontation like *The Sultan of Babylon*. Alongside these primary texts, we will consider some historical materials that help place this literary-cultural work into perspective. We will also read some theoretical and critical writing that considers how religious identity operates: Is medieval and early modern religion parallel in certain ways to modern race? How is it shaped by and intertwined with questions about gender and sexuality? In a period when the idea of the modern nation is born, how important is religion to that formation?

ENGL 736: Criticism

Disability Studies

Talia Schaffer

Class No. 2027

WED 4:40 – 6:30 pm

This class will introduce you to the field of disability studies and enable you to practice doing disability-theory readings of literary texts. We will ask what it means to be disabled – or to be ‘able’ or ‘normal’ – and who decides who qualifies for each category. How might ideas of the body and mind have changed over time, determining certain conditions as normative or disabling in different eras? How much do social attitudes and built environments shape our sense of ability? Why are hearing aids seen as prosthetics while glasses aren’t? Why do we regard highly mediated, enhanced bodies as ‘normal’? How might we rethink our social and political responsibilities if we see ourselves as enmeshed in care relations, rather than autonomous beings? And what happens if we see disability as a universal experience that everyone cycles in and out of throughout their lives, rather than an identity limited to a small population? We’ll answer these questions in two ways. First, we’ll have short focused theoretical units on such issues as blindness, autism, cognitive disorders, and mobility issues. Second, we’ll read fiction that considers disability in a radically different way, because it comes

from cultures with alternative ideas of bodies and minds. We will use *The Disability Studies Reader* and readings from Blackboard for our theoretical work, plus case studies from nineteenth-century fiction, which may include Austen's *Persuasion*, Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family*, Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, and possibly some contemporary fiction as well. Presentation and long research paper and blog.

ENGL781: Special Seminar

Special Seminar: Asian American Literatures of the Twenty-First Century

Caroline Hong

Class No. 2035

THU 4:40 – 6:30 pm

The term “Asian America” has been and continues to be used by writers, readers, and scholars of Asian American literature. But where or what or who is Asian America? As a construct, it encompasses diverse, and often contested, visions of identity, culture, and belonging. We will read twenty-first-century Asian American works to explore the most contemporary of these visions, which demonstrate the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of Asian America. We will frame our readings with theory and criticism from the field of Asian American studies and within/alongside their historical, political, social, cultural, and economic contexts, focusing on issues of gender, sexuality, class, citizenship, imperialism, globalization, etc., in addition to race and racism. Texts will include, but is not limited to, recent fiction by Celeste Ng, Lisa Ko, Ruth Ozeki, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Rakesh Satyal, and Patricia Park, as well as poetry and short comics.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar

The Golden Age of Children's Literature in Britain 1865-1924

Veronica Schanoes

Class No. 2036

TUES 6:40 – 8:30 pm

Our current idea of what children's literature should be—imaginative, exciting, and fun—is almost entirely the creation of the Golden Age of children's literature, beginning in 1865 with Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and ending in 1924 with A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*. These years produced the majority of what we regard as children's classics today. Whereas previous decades had stressed the importance of moral improvement and education for young readers, the children's literature of the Golden Age brought into being an awareness of the child as a reader to be entertained with adventure, magic, and wordplay. How did these two ideas about how children's books should be written interact? How did the ideas of childhood and what it meant to be a child change? How were these ideas of childhood related to gender and class? And given that the Golden Age coincides

quite closely with the height of British imperial power, how did imperialist ideologies influence children's literature—and did the influence run only one way?