

# English Graduate Course Selections

## Fall 2027

Updated 10/20

*The English MA degree requires 30 credit hours: 6 hours of thesis research plus 24 hours of coursework. At least 15 of the 24 hours of coursework must be in courses numbered 700 or above; the remaining 9 hours can be at the 600 or 700 level.*

### 700-Level Graduate Seminars

#### Literary Criticism

**ENG 765 A**

**Prof. Jennifer Greiman**

**W 1:00 - 3:30 PM**

Debates about the practice that lies at the center of the profession of literature in the academy have spawned countless articles and books, social media debates and podcasts in the last few years. But for all the method wars and resource crises, literary criticism in the twenty-first century has seen a remarkable consistency of attention on the methods of critical reading itself and all that these methods can do. What is the critic's relationship to the social, the political, the ecological? What methodologies and assumptions are common to all critical models and practices? And what is the critic's responsibility to aesthetic form? In this course, we will study five influential books of literary criticism from the past two decades, tracing the theoretical traditions and critical histories that these books both expand and challenge. The class will be organized around critical keywords that have shaped contemporary literary criticism – Blackness, Aesthetics, Form, Affect, and Ecology – as we closely examine books by Dan Sinykin and Johanna Winant, Caroline Levine, Sianne Ngai, Christina Sharpe, and Timothy Morton, alongside essays by Cleanth Brooks, Victor Shklovsky, Frederic Jameson, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lauren Berlant, Saidiya Hartman, Bruno Latour, and others. We will also anchor our discussions of theory and criticism in a slow, close reading of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. (Students will be expected to present once to the class, write a short midterm paper out of their presentation, and produce a longer final paper.)

Required Books:

Dan Sinykin and Johanna Winant, *Close Reading for the Twenty-first Century*

Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*

Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*

Recommended listening:

Matt Seybold, "[Criticism LTD](#)," *The American Vandal* podcast

#### American Literature and Aesthetic and Political Form

**ENG 771 A**

**Prof. Dean Franco**

**T 2:00 - 4:30 PM**

This course will explore the interaction of literary form, racial formation, and forms of democracy in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century American literature. We will examine how literary form (literature's aesthetic surface, its generic shape, and its intellectual depth) legibly represents and is also determined by the broader field of American racialization; and we will examine how racial formation fundamentally deforms or transforms American literature's democratic project. We will read novels and short stories by Ralph Ellison, Lore Segal, Sandra Cisneros, Ben Lerner and others as we explore problems of aesthetic

and political representation, democratic pluralism, and the borders and boundaries of nation and text. In addition, we will read current criticism and theory on aesthetics and democracy as we seek understanding of literature's salience for exploring democracies' futures.

## **Introduction to Graduate Studies II**

**ENG 788 A**

**Prof. Zak Lancaster**

**R 2:00 - 3:30 PM**

Introduces students to the expectations and resources of graduate study in English. We'll focus on scholarly habits, research orientations and methods across English Studies, and professional practices such as conference participation and project planning. The course also serves as a structured space for cohort-building and mutual support.

## **600-Level Literature Courses**

### **“To tell her glories with a faithful tongue”: Black Women Writers and the Archives**

**ENG 602 B**

**Prof. Rian Bowie**

**WF 2:00 - 3:15 PM**

**Satisfies Race and Realization & American Literature overlays**

What strange and wondrous developments have Black women writers inspired? Black women writers pioneered pathways for being and becoming through literary and activist participation, often against the grain of conventional norms used to silence or malign them, their complex identities, and their political desires. This course examines the role of public media in the flourishing of Black women's authorship and public activism across the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Readings for this course will draw attention to how their works and their situatedness within newspaper, periodical, and magazine culture contributed to shifting social and cultural landscapes. Across the semester, we will explore various resources beyond our assigned books, including engagement with Special Collections, print culture, and digitized media archives, to investigate how Black women's involvement as editors and contributors to public media transformed those virtual spaces into sites of resistance, self-fashioning, and collective empowerment.

Writers for this course will include Phillis Wheatley, Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, Lorraine Hansberry, Audre Lorde, to name a few. This course will also draw on Print Culture studies and Black Feminist scholarship to enrich the study of these important authors and their works.

### **The Legend of Arthur and the Seductions of Chivalry**

**ENG 611 A**

**Prof. Gale Sigal**

**TR 3:30 - 4:45 PM**

**Satisfies Pre-1800 Literature overlay & Medieval and Early Modern Requirement**

Journey into the shadows of Camelot, where knights, blood, sorcery, romance, and betrayal collide. For nearly a millennium, the legend of King Arthur has enchanted writers, artists, and filmmakers -- and its spell is far from broken. In this course, we explore the mythic heart of the British Isles to uncover how a charismatic wartime leader became the immortal national embodiment of England. From the prophecies of Merlin and the enchanted realm of Avalon to the quest for the Holy Grail, we will explore how generations and ethnicities re-envision the Arthurian legend to mirror their deepest desires, social anxieties, and ideals of the heroic. Our readings will draw from histories (Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*), romances (the Lancelot tale), an anti-romance (*The Quest for the Holy Grail*), the monumental masterpiece of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, and finally selections from Tennyson's majestic

19th -century *Idylls of the King*. The viewing of specific films will also enhance our concepts of the modern medieval and the haunted landscapes of Britain. The course requires active engagement and discussion, short presentations, engaging creative/analytical projects, and exams.

## **Hidden Messages: Riddles, Ciphers, and Secrets in Medieval Literature**

**ENG 612 A**

**Prof. Amy Clark**

**TR 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM**

**Satisfies Pre-1800 Literature overlay**

What has a sniffing snout, a wagging tail, and two sharp sticks stuck through its head? What does COAFAH spell? And who scrawled the name "EADBURG" over and over again across the pages of a precious medieval manuscript -- in invisible ink?? Medieval people left behind all kinds of literary and textual mysteries in Old English and Anglo-Latin literature, both on purpose and by accident. In this class we will focus on a new poem, riddle, or cipher each week as we work to decode both the playful and serious secrets of the medieval world.

All texts will be provided in translation; no Old English language skills are required (though always welcome).

## **Tyranny, Revenge, and Revolt: Shakespeare on Power**

**ENG 623 A**

**Prof. Sarah Hogan**

**TR 12:30 - 1:45 PM**

**Satisfies Pre-1800 Literature overlay requirement**

In this course we will examine Shakespeare's monumental body of work, sampling several of his dramatic genres: comedy, tragedy, English history, Roman history, romance, and "problem play." But our focus will be on Shakespeare's insightful, psychologically oriented portraits of power and its abuse: tyrannical rulers, would-be kings, remorseless villains and rapists, blind followers and complicit apologists, but also the victimized, vulnerable, scapegoated, revenger, and rebel subjects who dare to name corruption and pursue its end.

We'll find much of interest here: remarkable, eloquent examples of subjectivity in early English literature; characters who highlight the very human condition (and flaws) of all who govern; meditations on various political formations and ideologies; theatrical machinations within the plays themselves that rather overtly suggest the political nature of theater and the theatrical nature of the state; plenty of deceit, gore, and splatter-farce that will have us considering the psychic and social relationship between literature and violence; a surprising obsession with the supernatural in a Protestant moment; worldviews that verge on nihilism, atheism, or existentialism, though often simultaneously Christian; and personal and communal acts of rebellion that look ahead to the republican revolution and civil war of the mid-seventeenth century. Students in this course should expect rigorous historicism in the analysis of our Shakespearean texts, then, but the plays will also prompt us to reflect on the role of the arts in times of crisis and censorship, while we debate what it means to live justly in our own maddening times.

Primary works will likely include *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth* or *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*. A handful of contemporary cinematic adaptations on Shakespeare's plays will also help facilitate our analytical leaps into discussions about tyrannical ambition and the struggle against it in more contemporary contexts.

## **The English Novel from Defoe to Coetzee**

**ENG 635 A**

**Prof. Kevin MacDonnell**

**WF 9:30 - 10:45 AM**

**Satisfies Pre-1800 Literature overlay requirement**

This course will survey the origins, character, and politics of the English novel through two alternating perspectives. First, we will read the novels of Daniel Defoe, an eighteenth-century British writer often associated with the beginnings of the English novel who was embedded in a moment of emerging—and rapidly intensifying—capital accumulation and imperial expansion. Second, we will read these novels against, and alongside, the novels of J. M. Coetzee, a contemporary South African writer who is both a successor to Defoe in terms of his formal commitments and an inheritor of the colonial-capitalist world that Defoe and his contemporaries helped establish and refine. Defoe and Coetzee lived in different worlds, separated in space and time by hundreds of years and thousands of miles. Yet by reading their work together, this course will examine the origins and afterlives of the English novel and situate this distinctively modern literary genre in relation to the colonial and postcolonial worlds inhabited by these respective Writers.

## **Studies in Poetry: Contemporary Irish Poetry**

**ENG 644 A**

**Prof. Jefferson Holdridge**

**TR 2:00 - 3:15 PM**

Reading the poetry and prose of Seamus Heaney will help us map the sites of contending discourses in the consciousness of this Nobel-Prize winning poet from Northern Ireland. Most importantly it will also provide a stable narrative for discussion of the work of other poets from Ireland, North and South, whose work will be considered at strategic moments for comparison with Heaney's. Heaney's life and career, in short, will provide a center of continuity for a larger understanding of contemporary Irish poetry.

Heaney's early volumes consist of sensuous memories of nature and childhood on the family farm. Through them, the poet evokes the Irish countryside and comments on the care and skill with which ancestors farmed the land, while contemplating how such a life must stand the cruel tests of nature. Here pastoral meets anti-pastoral. The middle poetry often addresses the history of social unrest in Northern Ireland and considers the relevance of poetry in the face of violent political upheaval. This period is an intersection of myth and history, of aesthetics and politics. Later work includes parables of Irish family life or meditates on spirituality in the face of a menacing political history. In his last twenty years, Heaney diverged somewhat from themes of political and civic responsibility, returning to childhood experience and Irish communal rituals. Many critics have cited the stylistic and technical virtuosity of this late period as well as the imaginative qualities and the focus on visionary transcendence experienced through the quotidian. The practical emphasis will be on close reading as a pathway to the contexts of Irish cultural life in the postwar period.

## **Tech Attack!**

**ENG 653 A**

**Prof. Melissa Jenkins**

**MW 12:30 - 1:45 PM**

**Satisfies Race & Racialization overlay**

In March 2026, Bloomberg published Martha Gimbel's essay "The Best Guide to the AI Revolution May be Victorian Fiction." Gimbel, of course, points to Elizabeth Gaskell and other greats of industrial fiction, suggesting that the turbulence and excitement of the Industrial Revolution is our best preview for what is to come in the twenty-first century. We are indeed living in unprecedented times. As we watch the AI Renaissance (or apocalypse) unfold in real time, this class will ask about the roots of what got us to this

moment. Over the course of this semester, we will investigate how technologies of travel, communication, and industry evolved during the reign of Queen Victoria, and how writers of fiction responded. What we are likely to discover is not dissimilar from what some Victorian authors discovered, that, as Tamara Ketabgian argues in *The Lives of Machines*, “the most potent human feelings are rooted in the nonhuman – in practices, communities, and identities marked by animal, mechanical, and prosthetic traits” (Ketabgian 167). Similarly, (WFU Grad) Paul Fyfe’s book *Digital Victorians* offers “a prehistory of the digital age in the nineteenth century” (Fyfe 3), as he watches George Eliot examine “the distributed surveillance of a data-driven culture” (Fyfe 27) or Stevenson offer “a record of professional convulsions in a shifting media landscape” (Fyfe 138).

This class will examine fiction and nonfiction prose from the Victorian era about new technologies for travel, industry, learning, and writing. Texts will include short fiction, journalism, essays, and novels by Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Samuel Butler, Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, Oscar Wilde, and Edith Nesbit.

Assignments: reading journal, presentation, research paper.

## **African American Fiction: Colson Whitehead**

**ENG 687 A**

**Prof. Chris Brown**

**TR 12:30 - 1:45 PM**

In this course we will survey the work of Colson Whitehead, perhaps America’s most prominent contemporary novelist. Reading his novels, essays, and criticism, this seminar will situate Whitehead’s work amidst the changing political and literary landscape of the 21st century and celebrate the extraordinary inventiveness and pleasure of his fiction. We will pay careful attention to Whitehead’s reimagining of the African American literary tradition. And we will explore the ways in which his work attends to the idea of “blackness” in his particular narratives of African American identity and to the formal innovation and craft of his prose.

## **Cyborgs & Sorcerers: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Multicultural America**

**ENG 695 A**

**Prof. Derek Lee**

**TR 9:30 - 10:45 AM**

**Satisfies American Literature overlay**

Modern audiences typically read ethnic fiction through the lens of realism—the autobiographical slave narrative, the immigrant memoir, and so on. However, what is the role of multicultural fiction that embraces the fantastical, the futuristic, the alien, and the posthuman? How do they differ from “traditional” science fiction and fantasy novels? How do they confirm or challenge our expectations of ethnic literature? Most importantly, how can they help us gain a better understanding of twenty-first century political life? We will attempt to answer these questions by reading and watching some of the very best works in ethnic science fiction and fantasy, including Rivers Solomon’s *The Deep*, Ken Liu’s *The Paper Menagerie*, and Victor LaVelle’s *The Ballad of Black Tom*. Along the way we will address issues of race, power, social justice, and scientific progress. In addition to reading and analyzing speculative fiction, we will also design our own magical objects as a means of reconsidering contemporary life.