Ever since reader interest, from the immediate postbellum period to the end of the 19th century, ensured a receptive market for writing that explored the national tragedy of the Civil War, war has been a major subject of the American literary and cultural imagination. In this class, we will read closely and analyze a series of landmark American books and films dealing with war in order to understand not only how these works create and define the heroes, villains, and victims of war, but also how they blur, and sometimes even obliterate, these very categories. Since these works often attempt to capture the experience of combat, as well as what war does to people caught up in it, we will investigate how the subject of war encourages writers and directors to seek out aesthetic and formal innovations that mirror the complexity of the topics they represent. As modern warfare becomes ever more frightening because of technological innovations that not only diminish human agency, but also increasingly threaten the survival of humanity, the writing that seeks to represent war becomes markedly experimental, conflating traditional distinctions between fiction and nonfiction writing in an effort to tell the truth about war. Similarly, directors construct ever more harrowingly accurate visual representations of war, while also needing to transcend mere realism in order to capture other insights about the human condition that war reveals. Taken together, these books and films constitute an evolving conversation about what it is to be American, and they do so by recording—and acting as commentaries on—the social and cultural changes within American society, as well as the increasingly ambiguous moral role the United States plays in global affairs.

Texts: We begin by reading a number of short stories and autobiographical sketches by Ambrose Bierce, a writer who served in the Union army during the Civil War. Other works of fiction and non-fiction will be chosen from among the following: Stephen Crane’s The Red Badge of Courage, Ernest Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms, David Hersey’s Hiroshima, John Horne Burns’, The Gallery, Kurt Vonnegut Jr.’s Slaughterhouse-Five, Michael Herr’s Dispatches, Tim O’Brien’s The Things They Carried, and Dexter Filkins’ The Forever War. We will also examine a number of films that may include The Best Years of Our Lives, The Thin Red Line, Empire of the Sun, Dr. Strangelove, Apocalypse Now, and Restrepo.

Requirements: There will be one 3-4 page paper and two 6-8 page papers assigned, but since this course has a writing designation, you will actually be writing six papers total, as each assignment will require a first draft and a substantial revision based on my feedback. Students will be responsible for a single in-class presentation, and vigorous seminar participation is expected and required. Expect pop quizzes throughout the semester that will assess how carefully you are reading or viewing items on the syllabus.
Science is scary. Whether it is global warming, genetic modification, or pandemic disease outbreaks, experimental research evokes both hopes of social innovation but also Gothic fears of violating nature itself. Yet why do Science and the Gothic seem so inseparable? What do test tubes and dissecting tables have to do with fiendish curses and haunted houses? Is the concept of "Gothic Science" a contradiction in terms, or do both fiction and scientific require a mix of magic with empirical reasoning to achieve their effect? Though prior to the publication of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in 1818 Gothic literature typically explored “exotic” or “historic” settings of terror, together we will investigate why this genre subsequently used discoveries in chemistry, biology, and psychology to imagine aberrant, almost human forms of life.

In order to think about these issues, this seminar will examine the experimental origins of various monsters—ranging from vampires to zombies to mutants. These are some of the questions we will consider in each meeting: How does the novel distinguish scientific truth from Gothic superstition and pseudo-science? What kind of knowledge, if any, does fiction provide us with? Do science and the Gothic fiction offer different or complimentary accounts of what it means to be human? In addressing these questions, we will attempt to understand why, during a period in which “reason” promised to overcome the last vestiges of false belief, science itself became the dominant way of imagining a world filled with mystery, magic, and monstrosity. By the end of the course, we should have a good idea of why “Gothic Science” has been, and continues to be, the preferred way of thinking about unknown forces within the world of nature, society, and ourselves.

The superhero, the martyr, the “freak”, the “Chosen One”: why do we find these archetypes so compelling? How do these tropes transform the way we understand the body? What does it mean for a body to be made a spectacle? In this course we will encounter the human body in its most spectacularized forms, and will ask questions about the role of spectacle in marking individual bodies as emblems of collective meaning. From martyr narratives to superhero movies, from Steve McQueen’s film *Hunger* to Suzanne Collins’ dystopian blockbuster *The Hunger Games*, narratives about the transformation of unremarkable human bodies into spectacular ones have fascinated artists and audiences, and have been a staple of an astonishing variety of genres, throughout history. This course will examine a wide range of literature that seeks to understand the ways in which individual bodies become communal spectacle—that is to say, the ways in which the unremarkable body becomes remarkable—and the political, aesthetic, and cultural uses to which these spectacular bodies are put. We will encounter the body in literature, on film, and in performance in a variety of spectacular forms. In addition to the examples mentioned above, our readings will range in period and genre from John Foxe’s 1563 martyrology *Acts and Monuments* to the reimagined superheroes of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, with stops along the way to alternately gawk at, shrink from, and anatomize the spectacular bodies inhabiting a wide variety of texts that might include Shakespeare’s late play *The Tempest*, Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein*, Wim Wenders’ 2011 dance film *Pina*, or Lucy Grealy’s memoir *Autobiography of a Face*. Assignments will include two short critical essays, regular contributions to a collectively curated class blog/virtual gallery, and a final research project which will take the form of a longer original research paper. No exams.
“Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself.”

-Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*

“Inhabitants,” a word typically reserved for the living, is certainly a peculiar name for the slaves at the bottom of the Atlantic. But if we suspend our initial objections to this misnaming of those we know to be dead and take seriously the lives that were lived underwater, terrifically brief as they were, then what emerges is an intensely precarious depiction of being in nature. Indeed, as those drowned in the ocean during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, strung from trees throughout the American South, and sold down river in the age of slavery, African Americans are bound up and entangled in nature in incredibly complex and precarious ways.

This course is an opportunity to explore African American literary engagements with the natural world. Over the course of the semester, we will read slave narratives, fiction, poetry, and short theoretical excerpts. The questions guiding our inquiry will be: What stories do we tell about nature? How are the stories we are able to tell about nature informed by race? And how do these stories shape our understanding of what it means to be human? The dominant tradition of nature writing posits a romanticized and innocent “nature” imagined to be separate from, and in many cases subordinate to, the priorities of human being. This course, however, is primarily interested in the account of nature and human being arising out of the black experience of those who, once considered no more than livestock, *were* the nature over which their masters ruled, and thus, could not as easily imagine their human being apart from nature.

If you were to write the story of your own life, where would you begin? Are you the hero of this story who triumphs against all odds, or are you a bemused spectator on the sidelines, narrating a world that defies logic? If you were to approach a publisher with your autobiography, how would you want your story marketed? Is it a tale of adventure, a bildungsroman about lessons learned, a commentary on the foibles of humankind, an intimate tell-all?

You yourself participate in autobiographical culture as you update your status on Facebook, or write a blog post detailing your daily (mis)adventures. We tell stories about ourselves when we write journal entries, when we recap our day to family and friends. Those stories reveal the choices we make when we decide—sometimes consciously, sometimes not—how we are going to present ourselves to the world. Autobiographies can show us not only what we believe about ourselves, but also how we understand the nature of self and humanity alike. Sometimes, these stories come in the form of social commentary. Frederick Douglass, for example, used the story of his experiences as a slave to comment on institution of slavery; Primo Levi, too, used his autobiography to reveal the horrors of the Holocaust to several generations. Autobiographies can also entertain, offering wry observations on life: David Sedaris’s hilarious short stories about his oddball set of siblings, for example. Whether an autobiography aims to enlighten us, move us, or entertain us, it also allows us to imagine life from another perspective.

This course will cover a wide range of autobiographies, from tragic to uplifting; seething critique to ironic commentary. Together, we will read and write stories about life, asking what autobiographies do for their readers and writers. We will consider the range of autobiographical media, from books to blogs, to film, to music, to poetry. And, as we read, we will consider the culture of autobiography, from the cult of celebrity to social media profiles. There are no prerequisites to this course, and majors and non-majors from any class year are encouraged to join us. Requirements include informal weekly blog posts, two short (4-5 page) papers, and a final, creative project in which you will explore any of the forms we have studied to consider how best to write your own autobiography. No exams.
The goal of the course is to introduce students to the history and practice of literary art in the twentieth century. Reading assignments will offer for inspection the models that have informed twentieth and twenty-first century writing practices, many of these models are, paradoxically, quite ancient: spells, chants, curses, prophecies, letters, hallucinatory visions, dialogues, rants, riddles, character studies, allegories, instructions, satires, graffiti, lists, reveries, dream transcriptions, and prayers. Lectures will provide background about what we are reading, and about the traditions that inform the literature of this century. The course proceeds from the premise that a sharp sense of literary history is critical to the development of any serious writer. Lectures will provide background about what we are reading, but the greater part of the class will be a workshop format: the writings of class members distributed to the class, read to the class, and analyzed by the class. Students are expected to compose a portfolio of works and to keep a notebook, both of which are to be submitted at the end of the term. Students will be expected to read closely, to acquire an overall grasp of key conventions of modern writing, and participate in discussions. Further, students will be expected to investigate the texts towards which their writing leads them. Our main focus will be on the traditions and practice of writing, and on developing both a critical and a generous approach to each others' work.

This course is designed to give students an opportunity to practice and explore three genres of creative writing: fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Part of the class will be devoted to peer critique of student work ("workshopping"), and part to discussions of craft and close reading of published essays, stories, and poems. There will be weekly writing assignments—both creative and critical—and students will also submit a final portfolio of finished work.
Have you ever been curious about the phrase, “the great American novel”? What kind of books deserve such a lofty designation? What makes a novel or work of literature American, anyway? In this class, we’ll study the various themes, literary conventions, and forms that comprise the great American literature of the 20th century. We’ll start with some old classics—by Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald—and round out the century with currently living authors such as Chang-Rae Lee, Edward P. Jones, and Toni Morrison. We will work with different lengths, from novels to short stories, plays to poems.

The breadth of our reading will allow us to work comparatively and sketch a trajectory for American literature of the century. At the same time, we’ll read each work on its own terms, understanding the qualities that make it unique as it responds to and reconfigures established literary traditions. In other words, we will zoom in and out—we will perform close readings as well as consider literary genealogies, in the service of exploring what it means to write an American classic.

Come take part in the cultural conversation. Read the old classics you always knew you should get around to, plus the newer works on their way to classic status. This course is open to non-majors and students who have not yet taken a literature class. Authors may include: Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Vladimir Nabokov, T.S. Eliot, Sylvia Plath, Tennessee Williams, Flannery O’Connor, Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison, Chang-Rae Lee, Edward P. Jones. Students will be assigned two short writing exercises (1-2 pages) and three longer papers. No exams.

Since its inception in ancient Greece, tragedy has almost invariably been considered the highest literary genre, the one that provides the best illustrations of the suffering that human beings have to endure and the heroism that they are capable of. Tragedies have seemed to be representative of entire eras and cultures, showing the religious beliefs, institutions, political ideals, and personal traits that held the most importance and prestige in the communities that produced them. It is often said that we now inhabit an ironic and superficial age in which old pieties are subjected to skepticism and ridicule, but in the best tragic artworks of modernity it is still possible to discern what in the concluding lines of King Lear is called “the weight of this sad time.”

In this course, we will examine English-language tragedy between early modernity and the recent present. Plays and films will be interpreted alongside influential theories of tragedy composed by famous philosophers including Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche, as well as the work of numerous recent critics and theorists. The contradictory range of ideas about tragedy gives ample room for questioning and debate. Does a tragedy have to have a powerful, preponderantly good protagonist? Is tragedy an inherently male genre? Is a tragic catastrophe the result of choice or is it inevitable? Insofar as one argues the latter, does the label “tragic” become a mask to screen powerful people and institutions? Can tragedies be ironic, or must they adhere to a realistic literary mode? In our critical questioning about the generic nature and backgrounds of tragic literature, it will be our goal to see not only what tragedy was but what it is and can be, not only its rules and conventions but the ways in which they have been newly shaped in our own era.

Major texts will include plays by William Shakespeare, John Milton, Lillian Hellman, Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard, Caryl Churchill, and Wole Soyinka, as well as films by Billy Wilder and Lars von Trier. There will be two take-home papers and occasional brief responses to assigned material.
What stories do doctors tell about themselves? What stories are told about them? This class will begin by considering what “becoming a doctor” has meant to people of different genders, ethnicities, social classes and historical eras. We will go on to investigate some of the roles doctors play in modern society, and the ethical dilemmas that accompany those roles. Issues to be discussed include: doctors at the intersection of science and social management; the ethics of empathy between doctors and patients; and doctors as border crossers. Throughout, we will be concerned with the intersection of medical education and practice with the humanities, a field often called “Medical Humanities.” We will read short stories, poems, memoirs, short critical pieces about medical humanities, a few novels, and possibly a play. Readings will may include work by William Carlos Williams, Anton Chekhov, Atul Guwande, Abraham Verghese, Louise Aronson, Na’wal el-Sadawi, Damon Tweedy, Lorrie Moore, Leslie Jamison, and others.

Assignments for the course will include a number of short writing assignments, both critical and reflective, short papers and a final project. No exam.

Over the course of the novel’s 300-year history, there has been a continual stream of “assassinations.” Authors seeking to forge their own place in the literary world have used alternative techniques to place their own writing styles and subjects above those of their forbears, essentially “killing” their rivals. History shows, however, the continued resurrection of the novel through these new attempts to change it. The 21st century’s technological revolution has fostered revolutionary ways to deliver media – through e-readers, fan-fiction sites, and video streaming services – so it is no surprise that literary critics like Will Self are currently writing articles titled, “The Novel Is Dead (This Time It’s For Real).” Does the advent of new technologies spell the novel’s final end, or is it possible that, in order to show what the novel really is, it has to be killed off?

This course will explore a variety of different moments in literary history and cover a wide range of genres. We’ll look at the death of the epistolary novel, of the sentimental, of the gothic, the domestic, gender, and even the death of the individual. Moving between subjects as diverse as dastardly aristocrats, passionate romances, foreign vampires, and zombie apocalypses, this course will also examine a variety of different media: books, radio plays, comics, and films. Assignments will be organized around experiments in the critical form, as we explore ways in which new technologies can also help resurrect criticism.

The introductory level genre specific workshops are for students with some experience in creative writing who wish to deepen their knowledge of their chosen genre and gain increased mastery of elements of craft. Recommended for students who have taken English 110S.

This is an introductory course in writing short fiction. Some background in creative writing, e.g. English 110S, may prove helpful. The class functions both as a seminar in which we read and analyze the work of exemplary fiction writers past and present, and as a workshop, with students offering their stories for oral and written critique before revising and submitting a portfolio of final drafts. We will explore aspects of craft including point of view, characterization, the uses of narrative summary and scene, plot and others.

Be prepared for a good deal of reading, writing and revision: short weekly responses to the assigned reading (200+ words); a daily (six days a week) Writer's Journal; written critiques of others' work; 2-3 revised short stories; a brief reflective essay.
Any phenomenon can be a fascinating topic for non-fiction writing—whether person, place, object, or idea—if readers feel they are encountering it for the first time. In this course we will explore such encounters, and we will approach the process of writing as its own kind of strange encounter: how to render reality in words? how to grasp what is beyond reach or to make the formless familiar? how to connect a distant event with an invisible audience? Together we’ll look at a variety of literary, cinematic, and journalistic pieces, and then identify the specific techniques that compel us to engage with the unfamiliar, enigmatic, impossible, or even threatening. You will develop your skills through a series of short writing assignments that will prepare you for your final project, a long-form article that is at once polished, sensitive, compelling, ambitious, and humane.

Both experienced writers and interested newcomers are encouraged to enroll; this course will help you develop the formal tools to create successful writing in the protean genre of “creative nonfiction,” whether you are interested in journalistic reportage, personal memoir, travel writing, nature writing, or science writing.

This class is open to any student who wants to improve his or her writing and observational skills, but it may be of particular interest and value to those who have gone on or plan to go on DukeEngage or a study abroad program. It is not, however, necessary to have traveled far from home in order to take this class.

Although travel writing has a somewhat romantic history, popularized in part by the works of famous expatriates like Ernest Hemingway, the genre has a less admirable origin in the travel literature of British imperialists who used their impressions of “natives” to demonstrate their own alleged cultural superiority. We will read a few of these historical accounts just to see what we will be working against in our own writing. Mostly, we will read compelling, provocative, and genuinely curious prose by a wide range of contemporary travel writers who seek to deeply understand the cultures and people they encounter.

How does one write critically—or sympathetically—about a foreign culture without being arrogant or elitist? How much can any non-native expect to understand about a country not his or her own? What are the advantages of writing about a culture from the outside looking in? What is the most effective proportion of inward focus and self-reflection vs. outward focus and rich description for the travel writer who strives to vividly bring a particular culture to life for the reader? Above all, what makes good travel writing persuasive and moving? These are only a few of the issues we will explore in the class.

Students will write two final essays, as well as several shorter, more informal exercises. The class will contain a workshop component in which students give feedback to one another on drafts of their essays. We will begin with an exercise of “traveling” to a location, of each student’s choosing, within the city of Durham then writing about what was found there.
American literature is distinguished by the number of dangerous and disturbing books in its canon—and American scholarship by its ability to conceal this fact."

- Leslie Fiedler (Missoula, October 13, 1959)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, reputedly the most Puritan-besotted writer of America’s Puritan-obsessed canon, makes an appearance—at least his words do—in, of all things, a terrific episode of our belated mafia melodrama, *The Sopranos*. The Hawthorne we encounter in *The Sopranos* would seem to be that specialist in the consummately Calvinist terrors of masquerade and self-division: "No man can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude without finally getting bewildered as to which may be true." But the episode in question—when chief mobster Tony takes his daughter on a New England college tour—features a would-be adulterous priest, a communally sanctioned revenge plot, female complicity in male-on-male violence, and the metaphysics of Evil’s daughterly issue. Now where have we seen those narrative conceits before? I have in mind of course Hawthorne’s very own *The Scarlet Letter*, a novel or, to be more precise, a Romantic novella, featuring a diva-class sexual adventuress whose notorious act of transgressive love is at once reproductive and redemptive, a false buddy team of village divine and his pagan avenger locked in a tangle of stalking, persecution, and self-flagellation, and the projected specter of a Protestant Godhead so intent on punishment that the only ideas of “confession” He will abide are communal humiliation and face-to-face abjection. Now what’s up with that? The stunning truth is that Hawthorne borrowed from the treasure-trove of Southern Italian storytelling—cuckoldry, the predator parson, vendetta, bedeviled children at risk, and the omerta—to produce not only a Protestant moralistic turn on the classic Northern European adultery novel but also—if in coy indirection or even (to come full circle) panicked self-denial—the greatest sexual revenge narrative of 19th century America.

Clearly, what I am describing here is not your mother’s *The Scarlet Letter*—it is not even my mother’s *Scarlet Letter*—yet this Pagan Catholic reading of the novel breathe new life into the first and still most canonical of all American tales: resurrects it as it were, responsive to emergent 21st century wisdoms—having to do with race and sexuality, sanctity and violence, the interplay of imperial Calvinist heritage and syncretic religious dissent—yes, but also shedding light to an astonishing degree on the evidentiary detail and emotional pulse of Hawthorne’s conflicted story. I have a couple of dozen such readings up my sleeve from which to choose no more than nine, interweaving warhorses of the postwar white boys’ canon (*Billy Budd*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*), the most revered of the multicultural neo-canon (*Chopin’s* *The Awakening*, *Cather’s* *Professor’s House*, *Larsen’s* *Passing*, *Hurston’s* *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *West’s* *Day of the Locust*), and outliers of an insidiously magical sort (*Harold Frederic’s* *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, *Claude McKay’s* *Banjo*, *Ron Hansen’s* *Mariette in Ecstasy*), with a few films (*The Wizard of Oz*, *Some Like it Hot*, *Blue Velvet*) referenced for queerer measure.

ALL are invited, by the way, whether these novels have gotten to you—or not!
ENGLISH 288-01
AMERICAN DREAMS/AMERICAN MOVIES
INSTRUCTOR: Marianna Torgovnick

A survey course in selected American films that create as well as reflect American national identity. Through lectures, weekly screenings and students’ oral reports, we will study a dozen of the best-loved movies in our popular culture, from THE GOLD RUSH, KING KONG, and IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT to SINGIN’ IN THE RAIN, THE GODFATHER and WALL-E. We will examine how these movies, their directors, and their stars, came to define American mythologies in the twentieth century and how they have collected over time iconic resonance. Attention as well to genre, form, technique, and Hollywood’s history.

ENGLISH 290-7-01
Special Topics in Language & Literature
INTRO SCIENCE FICTION
INSTRUCTOR: Julianne Werlin

As scientific research becomes ever more arcane, dazzling and terrifying technologies occupy an increasingly central role in our lives. Science fiction responds to this basic condition of modern society: by imagining the implications of new discoveries, it helps to make the human impact of scientific innovation visible. Working at the boundary of knowledge and imagination, it gives us insight into the complicated relationship between individual needs and desires and the natural and technological world. In this course, we will examine the long history of science fiction in the context of scientific revolutions, including new cosmologies, evolution, space exploration, and cybernetics. We will ask how narrative forms shape and are shaped by the ideas they convey, paying close attention to character, description, plotting, and suspense. And we will look at the consolidation of science fiction as a genre over the course of the twentieth century, reflecting on the relationship between popular and canonical writing. Authors will include Bacon, Kepler, Shelley, Wells, Borges, Lem, Dick, and Ballard.
This course intends to facilitate a better understanding of major literary monuments across a wide range of periods and cultures, including several with a religious orientation. We will begin with the four great Greek dramatists (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes) and segments of the Bible as well as Hindu sacred writ (The Bhagavad-Gita) and perhaps a Hindu play of the fifth century (Shakuntala). The latter half of the course will (as time permits) cross European boundaries with Dante's Inferno, Chaucer's Tales, Montaigne’s Essays, and Shakespeare’s Othello. In passing, we shall observe instances of the influence of earlier writings on later artists and thinkers – for example, the impact of the Bhagavad-Gita on American Transcendentalists (Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman), and of the Bible in later millennia.

Examinations: Two or three hour exams (no three-hour final exam). Two term papers of 6-8 pages on topics relating to the course syllabus.
ENGLISH 321S-01
INTERMEDIATE WORKSHOP IN THE WRITING OF FICTION
INSTRUCTOR: Christina Askounis

Prerequisite: 110S or one 200-level creative writing course, preferably in fiction, or prior work that merits admission to the class (as judged by the professor). Intermediate workshops present a higher creative standard than beginning workshops in terms of both quality and quantity of work.

This is an intermediate course in writing short fiction for those with some experience in the genre. The class functions both as a seminar in which we read and analyze the work of exemplary writers past and present, and as a workshop, with students offering their stories for oral and written critique before thoroughly revising and submitting a portfolio of final drafts. We will deepen our understanding of the elements of craft including characterization, narrative structure (summary/scene), point of view, setting, pacing, voice and the like, and practice using these elements in short writing assignments that will lead to at least two full-length stories. Because revision is the key to producing fiction worthy of your readers’ time and attention, this critical skill will be emphasized. Be prepared for a good deal of close reading and writing.

ENGLISH 337-01
SHAKESPEARE AFTER 1600
INSTRUCTOR: Joseph Porter

The class will read, write about, and discuss ten plays from the second decade of Shakespeare’s career. We will begin at the end of Elizabeth’s reign with the world’s most famous literary character and his play, Hamlet, after which we will treat ourselves to Twelfth Night, the culmination of the “great comedies,” and possibly “the most beautiful work of art ever created,” in the words of one Shakespearean. Then, as we enter the more doubtful and cynical first decade of the reign of James I, we will read the “problem comedy” Measure for Measure, and then Shakespeare’s least classifiable play Troilus and Cressida. Then we will read the three greatest Jacobean tragedies: Othello (which Professor Porter is currently completing the mother of all editions of, and which seems likely to prove the essential Shakespeare tragedy of our new century), King Lear (still considered Shakespeare’s supreme work), and finally Macbeth, Shakespeare’s deepest plunge into the depths of evil. Finally we read Shakespeare’s final genre, romance, with the experimental Cymbeline, the glorious Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest, Shakespeare’s troubled and troubling valedictory.

Examinations: A final, a 3-4 pp. paper, and a 10-12 pp. paper. Grade to be based on class participation, written work, and final.
Why would anyone want to spend a whole semester studying John Milton’s writings and their seventeenth-century contexts? The answer is the extraordinary scope and utterly brilliant quality of the writing in often very demanding but exquisite poetry as well as in passionate prose. This scope includes explorations in ethics, politics and theology on topics that should still be of central concern to us.

John Milton left Cambridge as an orthodox member of the Church of England. He died (in 1674) as one who had rejected this church, defended the execution of its governor (Charles I) and generated a theological system which included a dense cluster of positions which where startlingly “heretical” in terms not only of the magisterial Reformation but also of Catholic traditions. His unfinished treatise on Christian Doctrine begins with a statement which sets up the inquiry pursued in this seminar: “If I were to say that I had focused my studies principally upon Christian doctrine because nothing else can so effectually wipe away those two repulsive afflictions, tyranny and superstition, from human life and the human mind, I should show that I had been concerned not for religion but for life’s well being.” As both this statement and the title of this class suggest, poetry, politics and theology are inextricably bound together in Milton’s work. We aim to read much of the poetry and areas of the prose that will provide a rich sense of his theological and political reflections and enable us to have well-informed discussions about the complex relations between the great poems and his evolving theology. For Milton’s approaches to theology, ecclesiology and politics belong to a revolutionary moment in which unprecedented thoughts and practices emerged in England. How did Milton and his writing respond to the defeat of the revolution and the restoration of Crown, Church of England, episcopacy and the attempt to suppress nonconforming groups? There has been a strong tendency in recent Milton scholarship to revise the Whig version of Milton into one that fits the narratives of secular postmodernity and some people taking this class may find it offers opportunities to interrogate some of these grand stories.

It will be helpful to read a competent biography on Milton before this class: I suggest Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns, John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought. Because we will be reading substantial, complex works, the more Milton you read before class the better. The set text (required) is The Complete Prose and Essential Poetry of John Milton edited by John Kerrigan and others (Random House). Read Comus, Lycidas, and Paradise Lost together with the divorce tracts over the long vacation.

This course is an introduction to Victorian Poetry. Among the poets we’ll cover, Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Matthew Arnold, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, William Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Alice Meynell, Michael Field, Augusta Webster, Gerard Manley Hopkins. We will mainly use the Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry. Three five-page papers, some short response papers.

Its no coincidence that the psychopathic drug dealer at the heart of Breaking Bad, Walter White, shares initials with the great poet of unrealized possibilities, or that his sublime hymn to cosmic order, “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” gets recited by a chemist in a state of the art underground meth lab. America still doesn’t know what to do with Walt Whitman. Our national bard was, and is, an enigma. He has been seen, variously, as a prophet, a hustler, a madman, a health nut, a spirit guide, a sex therapist, a grief counselor, the flowering of a new kind of human, and the end of civilization as we know it. He is also the best friend you’ll ever have, and he’ll tell you why. This course will pursue the manifold mysteries at the heart of Whitman’s extraordinary poetry. We will read carefully through his magnum opus, Leaves of Grass, its rich array of praise songs, love poems, elegies, satires, its psychic landscapes, its explorations of despair, desire, and tough-minded hope. We will look for him in his time, the America of Transcendentalism and the Civil War, and in the poetry he drew upon, the Bible, the Vedic Hymns, Homer, and in the poetry that draws upon his work, Hart Crane, Ginsberg, and others.

How have American movies represented China in the past? Which movies made in Chinese have become important in the United States, and why? The course will explore the interactions and differences between Chinese and American film traditions. During the first half of the semester, we will view and discuss American films from silent movies through the 21st century that have helped form the China of our imaginations. Then, in the second half, we will view modern films in Chinese by Ang Lee, Wong Kar-wei, Jia Zhangke, and others that have influenced cinema on both sides of the Pacific. The format of the class will be lecture-discussion, with student reports. As in our sister course America Dreams American Movies, assignments will include short papers and a collaborative student film.
Shakespeare’s astonishingly experimental romance The Winter’s Tale has sponsored a fascinating series of literary, philosophical and cinematic reflections. This seminar examines the afterlives of The Winter’s Tale as “the book of second chances”. We will examine together the winter’s tales of Jane Austen (Persuasion), George Eliot (Daniel Deronda), Eric Rohmer (Contes d’Hiver), Jill Paton Walsh (A Desert in Bohemia), Elizabeth Taylor (A Game of Hide and Seek), Almodovar’s Volver and Talk to He, as well as the stunning films of the Dardennes brothers (The Child, The Son). None of these works are adaptations of Shakespeare; rather they are meditations on the themes of reconciliation, romance, time, wonder, childhood and change, (re)-marriage, and the power and possibilities of art that his play sponsors or initiates. What narrative possibilities are engendered by The Winter’s Tale? How do such possibilities morph across the philosophical forms of novel and film? And what thoughts do such works sponsor for thinking about the relation between ethics and the arts? This seminar will grant us the opportunity for a long and loving look at Shakespeare’s greatest play, and an ever deepening encounter with it in the work of a fascinating range of novelists and filmmakers.

Why theory? Why do we still read Marxism and Psychoanalysis? Why do they still matter? In many cases, to ask these questions is to also ask: Why literature? At the foundation of much of modern literature is a conversation between authors, artists, and theorists. These conversations are about: politics, beauty, violence, race, sexuality, and identity. In this course, we will focus on how a broad range of theoretical and literary texts come to inform one another. This approach will allow us to understand important concepts in theoretical language. We will use these models to understand and interpret literature, film, and art. We will gain a basic understanding of Marxism, psychoanalysis, aesthetic theory, critical race theory, and feminism. This course will serve as an introduction to these foundational fields, and we will work together through these texts to define and apply key terms. There will be no final exam in this class. Evaluations will be premised on participation, short writing assignments, and presentations. No prior knowledge of these texts is assumed. Materials may include works by: Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Angela Davis, Walter Benjamin, Diego Rivera, Bertolt Brecht, Amiri Baraka, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Saidiya Hartman, and Nathaniel Mackey.
Climate change, resource exhaustion, an increase in natural disasters: these, we are told, are problems with “the environment.” We are living, it seems, in the Age of the Anthropocene, when humanity has become a geological force. Terrorism, rising crime rates, unprecedented poverty and urban blight: these, too, are problems with “the environment.” The world population has exceeded seven billion; we are putting increasing pressure on each other, as well as on our natural resources.

So what is this “environment,” and why does that question matter? How might a better understanding of how that term is circulating help us to move past our impasses and begin constructively to think about how to live more justly and effectively in our world? This class will address that question by considering the very ground you’re standing on: the Piedmont, Durham, and most specifically the area surrounding the Duke Campus Farm. Beginning with early settlement, when the earth began to get a history of its own, we will consider five historical moments—settlement; slavery, plantation culture and the Civil War; urbanization and modernization; the Civil Rights movement, and the present—to show how science, law, and cultural forms (literary works, films, news media) contribute to the changing idea of “the environment.” We will trace the idea of the environment not only across time, but also across geographical space, as we consider how ideas travel through social, cultural, economic, agricultural, commercial, and other networks, shaping the ever-changing relationship between the local and the global.

The environment prompts us to think of networks of ever-changing relationships across species and geopolitical boundaries, of ecologies and interdependence. We will consider the changing conceptions of “nature” and “the human” and consider how those changes in turn produce categories such as race, gender, and social class—how, that is, they shape humanity’s relationships to our surroundings and each other. This class will be “hands on,” using the space of the Duke Campus Farm to explore specifically the connections among science (geology, evolutionary biology, genomics), law and policy, and cultural forms. Foundational to this class is the idea that literary and cinematic works and literary analyses of non-literary works, landscapes and objects can offer crucial insight into the pressing questions of our moment and should be a significant part of our ethical, legal, and policy debates concerning “the environment.” The course begins with the assumption that literature, film and other artistic and cultural forms can help us see how our ideas circulate through language, images, and stories to shape our lived experience: specifically, our sense of “the environment.” We will consider how we are telling these stories through science, law, and policy as well as fiction, film, and the news media. And we will consider how the story of “the environment” unwittingly shapes our approach to our surroundings. Throughout the class, we will ask what alternative stories we might tell, and how they might affect the practice of science, law, and policy and lead to more productive debate and constructive change. There will be several written requirements for this class (two papers and a blog) as well as a documentary class project involving the Duke Campus Farm.
This course reads two sets of Victorian texts: 1) Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, Collins’s *The Moonstone* and Trollope’s *The Eustace Diamonds*. 2) Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, George Meredith’s *Modern Love* and Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*. The first set of texts lets us think about sensation fiction and realism, in relation to marriage and empire, the second set lets us think about fantastic and romance modes of addressing similar issues, as well the plot of adultery. We’ll also be reading material from recent debates on reading and historicism in Victorian Studies.

Depending on your individual needs and goals, you’ll choose one of two writing options: A) two separate 10-page conference papers, the first due before midsemester, the second at the end. You’ll write abstracts for these papers before the full papers are due, and you’ll revise the first conference paper or B) one 10-page conference paper due before midsemester, to be expanded into a 20-page article that will be revised at least once by the end of the course.

Advanced undergraduates who are interested in learning how to write longer research papers—either because they think they might want to apply to graduate school, or because they want some independent research experience before they write distinction essays—are welcome in this class. They should understand that the reading load is heavy: there are no short Victorian novels.

This course explores the sociocultural-linguistic perspective on dialects and vernaculars, introduces students to the tools of dialectology and sociolinguistics, and examines how these can be linked to theories and methods in other fields that emphasize the study of language. We will start by discussing what ‘vernacular’ means in various fields, then move on to the history and methods of dialectology; an overview of American dialects; and an introduction to some concepts in phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax to facilitate the reading of sociolinguistic descriptions of spoken language. One aspect of the course will entail examining representations of vernaculars in literature and other media as compared with their documentation by linguists, asking questions such as: Why and how are some (but not other) vernacular features chosen to construct a character’s identity or to position them in the text in a particular way? How do these representations relate to the historically contextualized sociopolitical meanings surrounding the vernaculars in question? We will focus on specific American vernaculars/dialects including varieties of Southern US English (including Appalachia, Atlantic Coast, Gulf Coast, and Texas), African American Vernacular English (AAVE), immigrant Englishes and hybrids (e.g. Chicano English), and others, depending on student interest (e.g. Boston dialect, New York vernaculars).

The course invokes examples from dialect research, ethnographic studies, media, literature, education, and politics. The course is targeted primarily at graduate students in English as well as Literature or other related fields, and at advanced undergraduates. The course emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of the study of language, and seeks to offer students interested in the use of vernaculars in literature, media, popular culture, film, etc., a sociolinguistic perspective on this subject. Focusing on American vernaculars, we will learn tools that can be applied to other linguistic contexts (e.g. British English, World Englishes, other languages). We will also discuss how the concept of the vernacular can be interpreted in the context of globalization and superdiversity. Students are encouraged to connect the material with their ongoing research projects, and to share their ideas about these connections in class discussions and papers.
A study of poetry and fiction by African American writers pursuing alternative approaches to form, content, style, coherence and meaning inside the literary work and outside it. The period covered is the 1960s to the present. The authors read for the course are Amiri Baraka, Jayne Cortez, Renee Gladman, Erica Hunt, Bob Kaufman, William Melvin Kelley, Clarence Major, Harryette Mullen, Claudia Rankine, Ishmael Reed, Ed Roberson and Fran Ross.