

# Duke English Department Graduate Course Descriptions

## Fall 2021

**ENGLISH 546-01**  
**VICTORIAN LITERATURE**  
**Kathy Psomiades**  
Monday 12:00 - 2:30pm

This is a course about gender and sexuality in Victorian literature and in Victorian Studies. Its aims are literary, historical, and theoretical. That is, we'll be reading a range of Victorian literary works—novels, non-fiction prose, short fiction, poetry—, Victorian extra-literary writing about gender and sexuality, and scholarship in Victorian studies from the late 1970s to the present that takes gender and sexuality as its object.

What books to order: Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, Mary Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man*, Michelle Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*.

We'll also read poetry by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Michael Field. Fiction and/or essays by Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde. And a range of scholarly articles and book chapters on Victorian lit.

This course is also designed to help you develop your scholarly writing skills in two forms—the conference paper and the article-length graduate seminar paper. 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 ten-page conference paper due before midsemester, to be expanded into a 20 page article-length paper that will be revised at least once by the end of the course. There will also be some in-class presentation.

Advanced undergraduate English majors 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. Be prepared for a heavy reading load, and a lot of writing.

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**ENGLISH 590S-3-01 SP TOP SEMINAR IN CRITICISM, THEORY OR METHODOLOGY**  
**DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: PERSPECTIVES ON COMPOSITION IN BLACK MUSIC AND POETRY**

**Tsitsi Jaji and Stephen Jaffe**

Friday 10:15am - 12:45pm

When W.E.B. Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, he juxtaposed a poetic and a musical epigraph from the sorrow songs to begin each chapter, laying a template for theorizing the lived experience of race in the U.S. in lyric terms. In the next decades writers like James W. Johnson, Alain Locke, and Zora Neale Hurston foregrounded sound in conceptions of Black cultural production while composers like Harry T. Burleigh, and Shirley Graham Du Bois investigated history as grist for their expression in song. This class will take their approach as a starting point for investigations of contemporary music and the literary imagination to ask, how do poetry and music speak to each other?

In this co-led seminar open to undergraduate and graduate students, we consider the fusion of words and music in a participatory space that welcomes scholars, creative writers and composers in productive conversation. We want to investigate the ways that the composer and the poet inhabit artistic and poetic discourses, reflecting lived contemporary experience. We will do this by considering different types of vocality to explore songs of poetic and political witness (including composers like Florence Price, William Grant Still and Wendell Logan); sacred music (Mary Lou Williams *Mass*) and works such as Kanye West's *Blood on the Leaves*, a double-coding of Billie Holiday's anti-lynching blues anthem, *Strange Fruit*). Music and words attuned to the documentary tradition in music of the 1990s such as T.J. Anderson's *Slavery Documents* and the *AIDS Quilt Songbook* will represent one area of inquiry, and another will be the collaborative practices with new media and experimental-visual and performance vocal presentation, such as Pamela Z's *Bagadada* and/or Tommy de Frantz' *Cane*. Theater pieces by Anthony Davis (*The Central Park 5*) and Steve Reich/Beryl Korot *The Cave* will allow us to explore contemporary approaches to the stage in which visual signals are forefront. These investigations will be supplemented by study of two new works commissioned by Duke Performances: David Garner's *Middle Passage*, and Jeff Scott's new creation for the Imani Winds. More regularly our seminar will be enriched by the regular participation of guest singers who will perform new music by graduate composers based on poems by writers enrolled in the class, and by guest speakers.

For students of African American literature, the course offers a window into aurality as a theoretical space; for practitioners of the other arts the course offers an encounter with theories of contemporary practice, including Brent Hayes Edwards, and Anthony Reed, and Daphne Brooks. For creative writers, composers and performers, the seminar will offer a compositional forum: to collaborate and to explore words, music, and contemporary public life.

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**ENGLISH 590S-4-01 SP TOP SEMINAR IN CRITICISM, THEORY OR METHODOLOGY  
PSYCHOANALYSIS, THE WORLD AND THE NON-HUMAN**

**Ranjana Khanna**

Tuesday & Thursday 12:00 - 1:15pm

This course addresses how psychoanalytic theorists and practitioners have conceived of the non-human. “Psychoanalysis” constitutes a body of theoretical texts with the aim of providing regular therapeutic care to patients by addressing the manner in which conscious life interacts with the unconscious and repressed desires, fears, and emotional reactions. Even as it is a model that was constitutionally developed with an idea of regular, frequent, and long-term sessions with individual humans with the ability to speak paying for their service, it necessarily created techniques with certain ideas of the individual in mind—their relation to the group and the social; ideas of property and self-possession; concepts of sexual difference; the relationship between the neurological and the psychological; the vexed notions of phylogeny and ontogeny and their symmetries; the status of the spiritual and the religious; cultural norms in civilization; and the constitution of desire. The varied and changing body of psychoanalytic theory that has developed over the last 120 years and all over the world has approached these ideas in a variety of ways. And while ideas of the human were proffered, psychoanalysis itself had multiple ways of addressing elements that were apparently in excess of existing ideas of the human, and that had non-human components.

This course will address the “non-human” aspects of psychoanalysis through its history and focus then on the uses of psychoanalysis today in the context of different and distinct ways of conceiving some of its basic categories. What can psychoanalysis give us today to help think of the issues that plague our time like the post-human, climate change, pandemic, technological shifts, racial injustice, and poverty? What is a world and what is life according to psychoanalysis?

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**ENGLISH 822S-01  
WRITING IS THINKING**

**Toril Moi**

Wednesday 1:45 - 4:15pm

Writing is a fundamental part of academic life. This course aims to teach graduate students at any level, from first-year students to dissertation writers, how to write well and with enjoyment, and how to make writing a part of their daily life as creative intellectuals. The course starts from the premise that writing is thinking: that we develop our own thoughts in the act of trying to express them, and that the more we learn to use writing

at every stage of our work, the more we increase the range and depth of our thinking, and the more likely it is that we will get our writing published. On this view, writing is always rewriting; revision is integral to the process of writing.

In this course, the sentence is the key building block for writing. If every sentence you write make sense, you will find it easier to build paragraphs, and larger units too.

When is note-taking useful, and when is it a waste of time? What is the difference between taking the usual reading notes, and taking the kind of notes that will help us as writers? By practicing different kinds of note-taking, we can integrate writing in our research.

We will learn to read as writers by working closely with selected examples of academic and non-fiction prose. This means learning to read not just as consumers of ideas, but as crafters of sentences, paragraphs, essays and books. What is the difference (if any) between good academic writing and good non-fiction writing? Do academic writers need to care about the shape and structure of their sentences, or paragraphs? Should they? What is “voice”? How do we take the audience’s needs into account?

We will learn to cut our own texts. We will discuss how best to use quotations, and consider the differences between different academic genres: what is the difference between a seminar paper and a published article? An MLA panel paper and a full-scale invited talk? What is the point of footnotes (or endnotes for that matter)?

We will also discuss and practice different types of writing groups. Learn how to ask for the kind of feedback you need, and how to use feedback.

The course will use one writing handbook: Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences about Writing*. The class as a group will also gain an overview over a wide range of other useful handbooks.

The course will be writing intensive. You will have several weekly deadlines for short pieces of writing. You will also get detailed feed-back on your writing every week. Students need to commit to collective discussion of writing. In return they will learn how to work with suggestions and feedback in a professional manner, and how to use comments creatively.

**Assignments:** Weekly writing assignments of various kinds; participation in exploratory writing groups, participation in collective editing and rewriting in class. A short final essay.

**How to apply:** Send an email to Professor Moi at [toril@duke.edu](mailto:toril@duke.edu), in which you explain why you want to take the course. Why do you need it? What do you hope it will do for you? This course is registration by permission only. You cannot register until you get a permission no. from Professor Moi. **New deadline for applications for Fall 2021: Monday July 5, 2021 by 5 p.m.**

**Admission:** This class usually has a long wait list. Ph.D. students get preference over MA students. Students in Literature and English also get some priority, but not to the exclusion of all other disciplines.

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## **ENGLISH 890S-02 SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR**

### **History of Contemporary Literary Criticism**

**Corina Stan**

Wednesday 12:00 - 2:30pm

This course provides students with a concise historical and theoretical overview of university-based literary criticism, with the goal of enabling graduate students to better understand--and hence, situate their own projects within--the history of their discipline. (The desire for such a course has been expressed at several recent graduate department meetings, and this course is the response to those requests.) We will focus on a number of key twentieth- and twenty-first century methodological orientations and movements, such as new criticism, structuralism, deconstruction, Foucauldian poststructuralism, new historicism, postcolonial criticism, critical race studies, and distant reading. We will also consider how these movements relate to both the changing structure of the university and to non-university publics across this period. Rather than aiming for an exhaustive survey of twentieth- and twenty-first century modes of literary criticism, we will focus on those modes that have had the most impact on current practice.

In addition to providing a historical survey of literary criticism, this course also focuses on several key skills for navigating successfully the first few years of graduate school, including time management strategies; project abstract writing (useful for conference and fellowship applications); and locating, and positioning oneself within existing academic debates/discussions (useful for minor exam creation and articles).

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## **ENGLISH 890S-01 SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR**

### **REFORM AND REVOLUTION: John Milton in Christian Tradition**

**David Aers**

Thursday 12:00 - 2:30pm

This is a class in Historical Theology, but it is a somewhat unusual one. How and why? It is unusual in that we will be working across poetry, theology, politics, and ethics as well as crossing widely diverse genres. It may also be unusual in that while our inquiries will certainly be diachronic, seeking to understand how Christian tradition works in changing, profoundly contested circumstances (such as the English Civil Wars), it will be shaped by some of my own convictions about grand narratives (or in their less grand form, surveys of theological and intellectual history). I have come to think that because grand narratives are so often composed at a level of sweeping generality, they tend to abstract doctrines from their situatedness within complex texts and social practices, and to compose these abstractions into an orderly, often teleologically shaped story (e.g. the origins of modernity, from Ockham to Hobbes into the 20th century; the origins of the individual; the decline and fall of the Thomistic synthesis; the recovery of freedom from the persecutory medieval church). The results of such manipulations are often a persuasive story of ideas, but one in which the hard ground of specific texts is avoided so that what we may actually end up reading is a grand narrative composed of thoughts that nobody actually thought. And given the constitutional role of specialism (period and disciplinary) in our academy, who will be in a position to call the narratologists back to the solid earth of specific texts?! (For an engagement with just such a gripping and eloquent grand narrative, see the special issue of *JMEMS*, vol.46, no.3, on Brad Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation*, particularly the Introduction to this issue).

An alternative model to the grand narrative, and the model we will pursue together, will be one defined by the attempt to develop a history which concentrates on particular texts belonging to complex traditions that are confronting specific, sometimes unprecedented, challenges. Such a history must try to take seriously the ways ideas are embodied and explored in thoroughly complex, intellectually and affectively demanding texts, texts such as those John Milton wrote to address, increasingly critically, the

Reformation in which he was nurtured. Perfectly licit aspirations to write grand narratives must try to remain responsible to the specific texts and human lives that constitute traditions. It is this model we shall seek to pursue in this course: always back to the hard ground, the minute particulars.

Given this commitment, it will not be surprising that we will continually work outwards from an intensive reading of the poetry, theology, and politics of John Milton, a seventeenth-century writer who produced the greatest Christian poetry in English. In addition to the epic poems *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, we will study his final poem, written while Milton was blind and in defeat, the poetic drama *Samson Agonistes*, published alongside *Paradise Regained* (an account of Christ in the wilderness). These extraordinary, profound poems are replete with Milton's own explorations of Christian teachings and practices as he responded to the Reformation and the Revolution to which he had committed nearly twenty years of his life. His great work, *Paradise Lost*, is his version of Augustine's *City of God*, his version of the earthly city and the city of God as he found it manifest and hidden in contemporary history. One of the issues which will preoccupy us is Milton's changing relations to Calvin and the Calvinist traditions within which he had been brought up in the Church of England as well as Milton's complex relations to Quakers and to various kinds of antinomianism and anti-Niceneism emerging in the Revolution.

Milton also wrote innovative, passionate works on the doctrine and discipline of divorce which forced him to re-think the normative Protestant biblical hermeneutics he had assumed. It also forced him to begin articulating a range of issues involving gender, ethics, and Christian teachings on liberty. We will read one of these works published in 1644. But Milton also wrote a formal theological treatise, *De Doctrina Christiana*. While this text advocates many heresies, strenuously argued, it is also a perfectly recognizable work of systematic theology from within Reformed (Calvinist) tradition, one that not only claims to be based on Scripture alone, but also asserts itself to be *more* scriptural than any previous work of Reformed dogmatics. In reading this text closely, we will see how Milton's own astonishing linguistic learning and textual criticism generated a host of problems perhaps in excess of his, or any orthodox Protestant's, intellectual resources within their inherited hermeneutic tradition. The *De Doctrina Christiana* was not published before its discovery in the 1820s: its heterodoxy made publication impossible after the defeat of the Revolution and the re-establishment of the Church of England and Stuart monarchy from 1660. Nevertheless, Milton himself described this treatise in these ringing terms:

“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.”

This statement exemplifies how theology and politics were inextricably bound together in Milton's thinking and in the culture to which he belonged. Throughout this seminar, I want us together to engage so closely with his poetry and prose that we learn a somewhat alien language: how it works across genres, and to address a wide range of challenges to Christian tradition (it is worth recalling here that Hobbes's *Leviathan* was published in 1651, a work Milton knew and against which he had to work out his own emerging forms of Christian materialism). Perhaps, too, we will be able by the end of the course to consider how Milton's work relates to contemporary narratives of secular modernity, narratives to which some contemporary scholars have sought, perhaps over-hastily, to assimilate Milton.

The **SET TEXT** for this course is:

*The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed., William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (Random House, 2007). This includes an English translation of substantial selections from *De Doctrina Christiana*. For those wanting to read the full text of the treatise, there is a fine two volume edition of both the

Latin text and an excellent English translation in the Oxford University Press's *Complete Works of John Milton* (volume 8, 2 parts).

**Important:**

In order to allow us to begin our seminar with the rigour and specificity we intend to pursue throughout, please read **before the first course meeting** the entirety of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, together with the short poems "Lycidas" and "Epitaphium Damonis" (in the English translation). It will also be very helpful to read the biography of Milton by Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

For further background and context to Milton's life and work, students are encouraged (but not required) to consult perhaps the best introduction to the seventeenth century revolution: Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution: 1625-1660* (Oxford University Press, 2004), especially parts 3 - 6. There have of course been many and conflicting attempts to describe Milton's theology in his poetry and prose but the following may be especially relevant to this course:

David Aers, *Versions of Election: From Langland and Aquinas to Calvin and Milton* (Notre Dame University Press, 2020), esp. Introduction and chapter 5.

Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge University Press, 1982)

Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cornell University Press, 1991)

Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (Harvard University Press, 2003)

Russell M. Hillier, *Milton's Messiah: The Son of God in the Works of John Milton* (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss on Paradise Lost* (Princeton University Press, 1941)

Michael Lieb, *Theological Milton: Diety, Discourse, and Heresy in the Miltonic Canon* (Duquesne University Press, 2006)

William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)

James Simpson, *Permanent Revolution: The Reformation and the Illiberal Roots of Liberalism* (Harvard University Press, 2019)

**A note on class format, expectations, and grading:**

This class is a seminar, so attendance and participation are mandatory. Laptops (and other electronic devices) are not to be used in class. A seminar is a dialogic form of learning, very different to a lecture class. In my experience, laptops act as an impediment to the kinds of attention and communication I consider essential to a flourishing seminar. Also, since we will have more than enough to chew on already, please refrain from eating during class.

The grade will come from one essay of not more than 25 pages to be handed in during or before the final class.

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**ENGLISH 890T: JOB MARKET WORKSHOP**

**Julianne Werlin**

Friday 1:45 - 4:15pm

## **CROSSLISTED CLASS OF INTEREST**

### **LIT681S.01/ENG582S.01/PHL681S.01: Wittgensteinian Perspectives on Literary Theory**

**Toril Moi**

Monday 3:30 - 6:00pm

The course offers an introduction to Wittgenstein's late philosophy, and asks what its relevance for literary studies might be. We will focus on a detailed reading of important sections of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. We will try to understand Wittgenstein's vision of language, of philosophy and philosophical inquiry; the relationship between the inner and the outer (for example, the soul and the body; our pain and its expressions), and aspect-seeing ("seeing as"). To deepen our understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy and what we can do with it, we will also read relevant texts by J. L. Austin, Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, and Jan Zwicky, as well as Toril Moi's *Revolution of the Ordinary*. We will also examine some major text in literary theory (by writers such as Saussure, Barthes, Derrida, Fish, de Man, Felski, etc.), and one literary text, to see how Wittgenstein's philosophy enables us to respond to them. The course aims to give students interested in philosophy and literature, and literary theory a solid foundation for further work in these fields.