

Duke English Department Course Descriptions  
FALL 2023

## **ENGLISH 89S.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**

### **MIGRATION MEMOIRS**

**Dominika Baran**

Migration, whether voluntary or forced, planned or unexpected, whether prompted by war, violence, political instability, economic pressures, or, more positively, a passion for discovering new places, has been an enduring feature of the human experience since the dawn of history. Stories of migration can describe suffering, loss, and grief, or, alternately, joy and hope for the future. Sometimes, they describe both. Migration takes many forms: refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, long-term travelers, international students, nomadic peoples and, more recently, digital nomads, can all be classified as migrants. Similarly, migration paths vary from easy and fun – such as when digital nomads board a plane for dream destinations where they will work remotely – to traumatically turbulent – such as when refugees, in desperation, board unsafe vessels to cross the Mediterranean or Caribbean Seas, or wait for days with just a few belongings at the Ukrainian-Polish border. In this class, we will explore migration memoirs: the stories written by the migrants themselves as they recount their experience. We will consider a range of migration contexts and geographical and cultural settings, as well as different storytelling formats, including memoirs written by acclaimed authors, and personal stories collected from everyday immigrants. We will discuss the complex relationship between memory and narrative, and memory and self. Some themes that we will explore include loss, grief, and trauma, language barriers and multilingualism, discrimination, self-discovery and the remaking of identities, and belonging. In addition to written memoirs, we will discuss multimodal texts, digital stories, and stories told through social media.

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## **ENGLISH 90S.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**

### **SEX, WRITING, ART**

**Britt Edelen**

Sex is, undeniably, everywhere. Despite its prevalence, there seems to be little consensus about what exactly sex is. This course will not attempt to answer that once and for all, but use this confusion to ask more questions.

To do so, we will turn literature and other arts, which have always been inspired by cultural anxieties concerning sex. Our primary texts will include novels, poetry, films, and music from different time periods and cultures. Whether we're considering Flaubert's "Madame Bovary," Kubrick's "Eyes Wide Shut," or Lil Nas X's "Montero," we will analyze how these texts depict sex in all its paradoxes and ask questions like: What is the nature of sexual difference (male/masculine vs. female/feminine)? Is sex biological or social? Who can have sex? How is sex related to sexuality and gender? Why is sex so hard to define?

Additionally, we will bolster our literary and artistic readings with selections from foundational texts in sexual thought, including philosophy, sexology, psychoanalysis, gender studies, and queer theory. Reading thinkers like Freud, Foucault, Butler, Spillers, and more, we will examine significant theories of sex throughout history to see how they may bear on our contemporary context. Assignments will include weekly reading responses (250 words), a mid-term paper (4–5 pages), and a final paper (6–8 pages). As a writing-focused course, there will be time devoted to workshopping and opportunities for revising. No prerequisites or exams.

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**ENGLISH 90S.02 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**  
**HAUNTED HOUSES: THE MODERN GHOST STORY**  
**Chadd Heller**

Why do we tell ghost stories? And why are ghost stories so often about a house? What is so enduring and provocative about the idea that a place is haunted that continues to fill seats in movie theaters and unable to put books down? This course will take a tour through the haunted houses of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century literature and films. Along the way, we'll encounter the uncanny, doppelgängers, apparitions, ghostly occupations and other unexplained phenomena as we try to reckon with why we love to be terrified, and what we find terrifying can reveal about us and our society.

Beginning with Henry James's *Turn of the Screw*, we will trace a history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century preoccupation with the haunted house leading to our contemporary moment. Our survey of literature and film will consider a variety of haunted locales like remote Irish country manors in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*, plantations in the Caribbean and the U.S. South in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, desolate hotels and motels in the American West, and modern mansions in South Korea as we consider who—and what—has been haunting these dwellings. We will question what it means for some place (or even *someone*) to be haunted, and what this can tell us about our past, present, and future. We will end by considering films like Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, and Bong-joon Ho's *Parasite* to think about how even in an age of increased skepticism we have not been able to give up the ghost story and grapple with the conditions that create ghosts in our lives.

Evaluation: Class participation, weekly blog posts (250 words), close reading assignment (4-5 pages), and final paper (8-10 pages).

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**ENGLISH 90S.03 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**  
**THE END OF AMERICA: 20TH CENTURY APOCALYPTIC LIT**  
**Victor Jeong**

If politically biased news outlets and social media memes have taught us anything, it's that the "doomer" mentality is undoubtedly "in" right now. We seem to inhabit a moment where it's near impossible to go a day without being reminded of America's impending implosion—whether it be nuclear war, the melting polar ice caps, or the thriving underbelly of the Internet in the form of incel and fascist culture. But what if we were to discover that all of these concerns were aptly foreshadowed by literature from the previous century?

This course looks towards works of American literature from the 20th Century that, in some way, imagined the downfall of American society as they knew it. In each novel, we'll note familiar tropes of the apocalypse while also expanding our notion of what "apocalypse" can be as we analyze the political and cultural justifications for yet another end of the world. As we watch America crumble over and over again, we'll see how these authors point to shockingly familiar problems, from the mechanization of American culture in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939), to the

problem of mass incarceration and race in Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), to censorship and government control in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and even the poisoning of our environment and bodies in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). We'll also incorporate a few films like George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and Francis Lawrence's adaptation of *I Am Legend* (2007) to bridge our inquiry to the visual medium as well.

While we witness the carnage unfold, however, we'll pay special attention to the idea that, to break something down, you have to build something up. How do each of these authors imagine a particular vision of America before its inevitable unraveling? And in this perpetual process of collapse, is there a vestige of hope—some decipherable message that might jolt us onto a timeline where America isn't certainly doomed?

**Assignments:** Weekly short discussion posts (250 words) and two writing assignments (one 5-6 pages, one 7-8 pages). No prerequisites, no exams.

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**ENGLISH 101S.01 THE ART OF READING**  
**INTRODUCTION TO POETRY**  
**Julianne Werlin**

This class offers an introduction to English poetry from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present. We'll look at a wide range of forms, from riddles and runes to sonnets and songs, considering the powerful experiments in sound and sense that have shaped the English poetic tradition. We'll read the work of some of the most influential and exciting poets in the language, such as Shakespeare, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, and Langston Hughes. In addition, we'll discuss the writing of contemporary poets, exploring the poetry communities that have grown in the last few years and taken new forms with the onset of the pandemic. Along the way, we'll learn techniques for understanding and analyzing poems, including cutting-edge theories at the intersection of literary criticism and linguistics. Students will also engage in creative experiments and responses to poetry.

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**ENGLISH 101S.02 THE ART OF READING**  
**HOW NOVELS THINK**  
**Nancy Armstrong**

This course takes a careful look at what it means to say that the human being is a thinking being. More specifically, what does it mean to make that claim *now* rather than in centuries past? We will begin by seeing how that claim was put on trial in classic novels spanning the period from 1719-1958 (in four of the following): Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Austen's *Emma*, Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*). How do some of the most memorable characters in literature "learn" to think within the norms of self-expression appropriate to their positions in a modernizing society? We must also extend our inquiry beyond these major characters to those who think differently: What non- or subhuman monsters do "others" become by thinking outside the box?

During the second half of the semester, the class will turn to novels that appeared after philosopher of science Donna Haraway's *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* (1985). In her still timely argument, Haraway

suggests that the monsters of science fiction—whether they think with their animal instincts or with forms of artificial intelligence—were even then on the way to becoming the new normal. We will want to see if this claim is borne out by more recent novels like Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, Miéville’s *The City and the City*, and Whitehead’s *The Intuitionist*. How do their protagonists process, store, access, and respond emotionally to social experience in the age of the 24/7 internet?

Writing requirements for the course include regular participation in class; 5 out of 10 one-page single-spaced response papers; and a longer paper developed from the best of the short papers.

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**ENGLISH 101S.03 THE ART OF READING  
SMALL MAGAZINES & AFRICAN LITERARY MODERNITY  
Chris Ouma**

One of the things that has come to define what literature is in postcolonial Africa is the debate on genre. The establishment of what was called the ‘African novel’ (alongside poetry and drama) meant the continent’s entry into modern institutions of literary production, circulation and cultural value. However this is one perspective. The small magazine as a form and therefore genre provides a much more complicated dimension of the development of African literature, culture and imagination. This course will focus on the small magazine as a generic form that exists besides and below the other genres. The course will specifically focus from the period after World War 2 and draw from magazines such as *Transition*, *Black Orpheus*, *Lotus*, *Drum* which dominated this moment of towards decolonization all the way up to the new millennium, curated by forms of digital imagination in magazines such as *Kwani?*, *Jalada* amongst others.

At stake in this course is the claim that the small magazine provides a more complex and dynamic picture of African literary modernity, often creating intersections with broader black struggles, but at the same time evolving towards what is our digital present. We will be asking ourselves interesting questions like: what does it mean to be designated ‘small’? in relation to what? is the quality of ‘smallness’ metaphorical for a phenomenon writ large? We will not only examine both paper and digital forms of this genre, but also do some exciting archival research, and include activities such as website reviews, while learning how to navigate digital archives related to some of the magazines we will be looking at.

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**ENGLISH 101S.04 THE ART OF READING  
HOMOSEXUALITIES  
Taylor Black**

This course focuses on U.S. popular culture and literature in a time when being queer and homosexual meant essentially the same thing: that something was wrong. Hovering around the era of the Stonewall rebellion (1969) and the first part of the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s-mid-90s, we will consume and contextualize modes of queer/homosexual self-representation and media that, each in their own way, have something to teach us about how it felt to bear and transcend the burden of this “something wrong.” To do so, the course will seek out the widest (and wildest) possible visions of homosexual subculture and queer self-presentation. We will read and analyze

modes of homosexual expression, style, and aesthetics designed to force us into a confrontation with our own presentist assumptions about what it meant to be seen as and to see oneself as sexually abnormal in this not-too-distant queer past.

Our syllabus will be populated with some names that are recognizable and even quintessential (James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Susan Sontag, Andy Warhol) and others that are more obscure and marginal in nature (Quentin Crisp, Dorothy Dean, Valerie Solanas). We will also seek out campy, so-called gay icons from popular culture (Judy Garland, Liberace, Little Richard, Grace Jones), reading them as figures that move between straight society and the homosexual subcultures that exist in its shadows. We will learn how to place these texts and personae in context and ask ourselves what it means to consume them in a way that shows fidelity to their own internal, admittedly sometimes strange and estranging, styles and logics.

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**ENGLISH 110S.01**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**JP Gritton**

Although this introduction to creative writing will feature (some) poetry, students who enroll in this class should be focused primarily on composing works of prose—in particular, works of fiction. In addition to exploring elements of the craft—setting, characterization, voice, point of view, and so on— this class seeks to explore the ways in which storytellers are engaged in ongoing “conversations” with one another. As a class, we’ll explore explicit responses writers have made to the work of others. In poetry, for instance, the first line of Langston Hughes’ “I, Too” forms an “answer” to Walt Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing.” In fiction, we might read Joanna Pearson’s “Riding” as a response to “Little Red Cap” by the Brothers Grimm, or explore how Nathan Englander’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank” replies to Ray Carver’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” (a story which is itself a “cover” of Plato’s *Symposium*). Through our own writing and through the careful reading of others’, we’ll explore a literary “grammar” before situating ourselves in ongoing and ever-evolving conversations of storytellers.

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**ENGLISH 110S.02**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Cathy Shuman**

The word, the line, the sentence; the image, the thought, the story – these will be our building blocks as students explore and experiment, write, workshop, revise, and polish substantive work in three genres: poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. Along the way, we will analyze published examples of each genre for inspiration and ideas.

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**ENGLISH 110S.03**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Toby Martinez de las Rivas**

A multi-genre course designed for students who have little or no previous experience producing imaginative literary texts. This course does not count toward the English major, but would count toward the minor in creative writing. Taught by Blackburn Distinguished Artist Toby Martinez de las Rivas.

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**ENGLISH 110S.04**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Akhil Sharma**

This course will introduce students to the three dominant forms of creative writing: poetry, creative non-fiction, fiction.

The goal of the class is to teach the student sensitivity to language, character, and narrative. There will be a writing assignment every day. The expectation is that the writing will build a certain muscle memory that will make real some of the theoretical things we will discuss in class. Expect one and a half hours of work a day.

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**ENGLISH 190FS-2.01**  
**FOCUS PROGRAM SEMINAR IN LIT: SOUTHERN GROTESQUE**  
**Taylor Black**

This course will reckon with representations of the region of the United States that, as William Faulkner describes in *Absalom, Absalom!*, has been “dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts.”

The historical lens of slavery produces a condition of grotesquerie that itself has blossomed into fields of insanity. Our tour of the South will seek these out, focusing in on the unsavory, haunted and peculiar figures we meet along the way—figures, who, according to O’Connor, are “not images of the man in the street...[but] images of the man forced out to meet the extremes of his own nature...the result of what our social history has bequeathed to us, and what our literary history forces our writers to attempt.”

So, rather than consider works that romanticize or apologize for the South’s sordid history, our syllabus will be populated by works that offer distorted visions of Southern life, history and culture.

We will consider depictions of the South in fiction (novels, plays and short stories), music (country, blues, bluegrass, gospel), film and television. This evolving character analysis of the region will tend toward the fantastic, terrible and estranged. With this in mind, your assignments will help you

develop strategies for understanding and writing about forms of representation that are, in and of themselves, uncanny and highly stylized.

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## **ENGLISH 190FS-2.02**

### **FOCUS PROGRAM SEMINAR IN LIT: FICTIONALITY & VIRTUALITY**

**Aarthi Vadde**

This course uses literary works (mainly novels) and popular culture (video games, TV shows, social-media born fiction) to introduce two key concepts for literary and digital cultural study: fictionality and virtuality. The fictional and the virtual explain how stories immerse us in their worlds: why we can't put a book down, binge watch our favorite shows, and game for hours. Whatever your pleasure (reading, watching, playing), your immersion in a familiar art form is usually preconditioned by the knowledge that it is not real even if it feels real. But what about when art forms are new? In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, novel readers did not yet know what they were reading. They thought novels were autobiographies and characters were real people. Today, when we go online and use social media, we encounter real people who behave like fictional characters. We see parody accounts, curated personas, avatars, deep fakes, and all sorts of other techniques for virtualizing the self. In thinking about the entwined history of fictionality and virtuality, we will gain perspective on a contemporary world in which readers and viewers, for better and worse, have become players and participants.

**Possible Texts (not all will make the final cut):** Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*; *Minecraft* (game); Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*; *Ever, Jane* (game); Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*; *Sherlock* (TV show); H.P. Lovecraft stories; Victor LaValle, *The Ballad of Black Tom*; *Lovecraft Country* (TV); William Gibson, *Neuromancer*; Teju Cole's Twitter projects; Ayad Akhtar, *Homeland Elegies*. **Short writing assignments;** critical and creative options with opportunity for revision.

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## **ENGLISH 190S-1.01**

### **SPEC TOPIC IN LANG & LIT: RENAISSANCE THEATER**

**Astrid Giugni**

*Greed, Vanity, and Laughter: Renaissance Theater and the Urban Vices.*

Renaissance London was crowded, expensive, and in the middle of a commercial and social revolution, where gallants, rising merchants, refugees from continental wars, and greedy criminals uneasily shared the same urban landscape. This course uses traditional literary methodologies alongside some computational tools to study how Tudor and Stuart playwrights, such as William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Middleton, used satire, comedy, and even tragedy to criticize city-life.

The computational approach will teach you—from the ground up—how to explore and track how these innovative writers reshaped and redeployed classical rhetorical texts (from Aristotle to Horace to Quintilian) to better understand their times. We will study how elements and characters common to these plays—the perpetual busybody, the “city-vices,” and the focus on the urban



landscape itself—were used by different authors to construct moral vocabularies to criticize real-life problems. We will pair this computational approach with interpretive techniques central to literary studies, learning about the history of Tudor and Stuart England, the development of commercial English theaters, and the bewildering, but fascinating landscape of Renaissance London and its literature.

**No** mathematical prerequisites and **no** prior familiarity with Renaissance literature necessary.

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**ENGLISH 212S.01**  
**WRITING ACROSS BORDERS**  
**Faulkner Fox**

This creative nonfiction course centers on the idea of crossing borders. What kinds of borders should an ethical, empathetic person attempt to cross in writing, in life? Are there borders that should remain uncrossed? If so, how do we know?

While the class is open to any student who wants to improve their writing and observational skills, it may be of particular interest to those who have participated in—or plan to participate in—DukeEngage, a study abroad program, or Duke's Hart Leadership Program. These students may wish to focus at least some of their writing and thinking on geographical border crossing and the questions that raises, such as: how does one write critically—or sympathetically—about a culture outside one's own without being arrogant or elitist? How much can any non-native expect to understand about a country--or culture--not their own? What is the most effective, as well as ethical, proportion of inward focus and self-reflection vs. outward focus and rich description for the writer who strives to vividly bring a particular culture to life for the reader?

Over the course of the semester, students will write multiple drafts of two essays, as well as weekly shorter, more informal exercises and reading responses. The class will include “workshopping,” in which students discuss drafts of each other’s work, as well as individual conferences with the professor, peers, and the Duke Writing Studio. Trips to hear visiting writers will also occur.

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**ENGLISH 220S.01**  
**INTRO TO THE WRITING OF POETRY**  
**Tsitsi Jaji**

This course will engage in creative reading and writing to develop familiarity with widely sweeping traditions of poetry. We will spend significant time thinking about craft – the choices that writers make about what words to use, how to arrange them, and what alternatives they have discovered – as we seek to join a writing community that stretches across time and space. Because we are living through a pandemic that has disproportionately impacted poor and working class people, the elderly, and Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, we will be particularly attentive to the creative example of writers of these backgrounds. This class is open to all students regardless of their experience with reading and writing poetry, but the expectations for participation will be high. Students will write multiple versions of poems and learn to give and receive feedback anchored in

observation rather than preference and interpretation. The culmination of the class will be a chapbook length portfolio of poems (roughly 25 pp) and a reading.

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**ENGLISH 220S.02**  
**INTRO TO THE WRITING OF POETRY**  
**Akhil Sharma**

Poetry, as Mill wrote, is feeling confessing itself to itself. A comma, an ellipse, a sudden line-break, each express emotion.

This class will attempt to inculcate sensitivity to poetry both through a great deal of writing and by examining certain genres and sub-genres. There will be a writing assignment every day. There will be a number of close reading assignments every week. Expect one and a half hours of work a day.

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**ENGLISH 221S.01**  
**INTRO TO THE WRITING OF FICTION: WRITING THE UNSPEAKABLE**

**Amin Ahmad**

As writers of fiction, we try to go beyond the surface and delve deep into uncomfortable emotions: desire, sexuality, loss, belonging, madness, personal and historical trauma. We start with our own raw experiences, but all too often end up self-censoring or resorting to clichés and conventional narrative strategies. How then do we create fresh works of insight, clarity and narrative power?

In this class we will learn from contemporary writers who have successfully engaged this difficult terrain. Reading like writers, we will take apart published work to learn craft issues like point-of-view, time management, characterization, and dialogue. Since writing the unspeakable depends on creating innovative forms, we will also learn to re-invent classic story structures.

Readings include contemporary writers such as Zadie Smith, Jhumpa Lahiri, Sam Shepard, Haruki Murakami, Lauren Groff, Edward P. Jones, and Justin Torres.

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**ENGLISH 221S.02**  
**INTRO TO THE WRITING OF FICTION**  
**Mesha Maren-Hogan**

This is an introductory level fiction writing workshop. No previous experience is required. A workshop differs from other courses in the fact that in a workshop, we are able to look at works in progress. Therefore we will focus on process and productive feedback. Keep in mind that the word “workshop,” in its most traditional sense, refers to a place (such as a cobbler’s workshop) where things are built or repaired, not torn down and destroyed. However, also keep in mind that the repairing may necessitate taking something apart and reassembling it.

In this course, we will study, discuss, and practice all of the fundamentals of fiction: setting, tone, character, dialogue, point of view, scene, symbols, and plot. Throughout the semester, you will build a repertoire of fundamentals, a sort of toolbox that you can carry with you for the rest of your writing life.

Reading is just as important to this course as writing. There is no better way to learn to write than to read deeply and broadly. We will read, dissect and discuss short prose pieces during each class period.

We will use Josip Novakovich's Fiction Writer's Workshop as well as a series of selected short stories that I will upload to Sakai.

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## **ENGLISH 222S.01 INTRO TO THE WRITING OF CREATIVE NONFICTION**

### **Writing your World**

**Cathy Shuman**

Our focus will be on the essay as you explore and experiment with techniques, structures, and themes for describing the places, stories, and things you care about. Over the course of the semester, students will work on creative exercises leading through workshops and revision to the production of three longer essays. Along the way, we will read and discuss selected examples of published creative nonfiction to help us develop techniques for creating our own. No previous creative writing experience is required for this course.

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## **ENGLISH 271.01**

### **CLASSICS OF AM LIT: 1915-1960**

**Victor Strandberg**

This course in modern American literature will begin with major figures of the WWI period and will move through the decades up to the 1960s. Most of the course will be devoted to novels, but we shall also look at such major poets as T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Edna St Vincent Millay, and William Carlos Williams. Although our primary interest will be to understand and appreciate the specific works we study, we shall also consider the larger cultural and intellectual context relevant to each writer. In addition to the poets already mentioned, this course will study prose works by Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway, Carson McCullers, Saul Bellow, Richard Wright and/or Toni Morrison, and John Updike.

Exams: Three hour-long exams and a terminal quiz. There will be NO 3-hour final.

Term papers: One term paper, about 5-7 pages.

Grade to be based on: exams 75%, term paper 25 %.

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## **ENGLISH 276.01**

### **AFRICAN DIASPORA LITERATURE: BLACK LIVES MATTER**

**Tsitsi Jaji**

Black lives have always mattered to Black people, and literature has been a crucial way to articulate the beauty and power of Black culture within and beyond its bounds. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 crisis police violence, and incarceration call for the study of Blackness from a cultural, historical perspective. The term “Black” has been used in multiple ways since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by race-thinking, colonization, and slavery. This course will focus on how diverse Black cultures think with and about each other. Beginning with the 17<sup>th</sup> century biography of an Ethiopian nun who resisted colonization, we will turn to writers like Phillis Wheatley, Mary Prince and Maria Stewart who used their words to call for Black freedom in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. How did African, Caribbean, and U.S. Black women envision freedom. What are the connections between their work and black women’s leadership in today’s Black Lives Matter movement?

In the wake of emancipation and the struggle for full civil, and human rights involved thinking Blackness in an international framework of solidarity. This was never easy. We will turn to a question first formulated by Countee Cullen, a leading poet of the Harlem Renaissance: “What is Africa to me?” For African Americans, the continent beckoned as a site of origin, as we will see in Maya Angelou’s memoir of her years in Ghana, *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes*, and Saidya Hartmann’s moving account of her study trip there, *Lose Your Mother*. African writers also reflected on what pan-African, nationalist, and later, Afropolitan ideas meant for what “Africa” meant. We will welcome author Novuyo Tshuma as we read her multi-generational political novel, *House of Stone*. In closing we will return to the immediate prompts for this topic: anti-black violence and COVID’s disproportionate impact on black and brown communities.

This class focuses on literature but also includes film, non-fiction, and scholarly articles. No experience in literary study is expected, and grades are based on class discussion, short reflection papers, and an extended essay or creative project. There are no exams in this class.

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## **ENGLISH 290-7.01**

### **SPEC TOPICS IN LANG & LIT: NOBEL LITERATURE**

**Thomas Pfau & Corina Stan**

No honor given to an author is more celebrated than the Nobel Prize in Literature, which has been awarded annually by the Swedish Academy since 1901. The list of recipients of the prize includes many of the most famous writers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Winners include William Butler Yeats, Thomas Mann, Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O’Neill, Gabriela Mistral, Herman Hesse, André Gide, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Pär Lagerkvist, Ernest Hemingway, Albert Camus, John Steinbeck, Jean-Paul Sartre, Nelly Sachs, Yasunari Kawabata, Samuel Beckett, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Pablo Neruda, Isaac Bashevas Singer, Czesław Miłosz, Elias Canetti, Gabriel García Márquez, Wole Soyinka, Naguib Mahfouz, Octavio Paz, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, Toni Morrison, Seamus Heaney, Günter Grass, Gao Xingjian, V. S. Naipaul, J. M. Coetzee, Harold Pinter, Orhan Pamuk, Doris Lessing, Herta Müller, Mario Vargas Llosa, Mo Yan, Alice Munro, Svetlana Alexievich, Bob Dylan, Olga Togarczuk, Louise Glück, Abdulrazk Gurnah, Annie Ernaux. In this class, we’ll have a chance to read (and sometimes to watch or listen to) a selection of novels, short stories, dramas, poetry, essays, creative non-fiction, and songs written by artists from Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East who have won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Over the semester, we’ll follow the

historical arc of modern world history, politics, and culture as represented in many of the most influential, popular, and celebrated works of world literature. We'll reflect on the impact of two World Wars, the rise of fascism and communism, the Holocaust, the collapse of European and Asian colonial empires, the Cold War, the struggles for independence on the part of new nations in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the American political and economic imperium, the emergence of the European Union and a new (highly controversial and contested) global culture. To be sure, we'll also consider the many and various revolutions in literary art that have characterized the modern age, from naturalism and realism to modernism, surrealism, expressionism, magical realism, and post-modernism.

**READING ASSIGNMENTS:** All readings will be in English or English translation (students who can will be encouraged to read works in the original languages). Readings are likely to include some selection of the following: poetry by Yeats, Mistral, Eliot, Sachs, Neruda, Walcott, Miłosz, and Heaney; short fiction by Mann, Gide, Hesse, Faulkner, Lagerkvist, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Kawabata, Solzhenitsyn, García Marquez, Mahfouz, Gordimer, Morrison, Grass, Coetzee, Müller, Vargas Llosa, Mo, and Munro; drama by Pirandello, O'Neill, Sartre, Camus, Beckett, Soyinka, Gao, and Pinter; essays, memoirs, and creative non-fiction by Singer, Canetti, Paz, Pamuk, Lessing, and Alexievich; songs by Dylan.

**EXAMINATIONS:** None

**TERM PAPERS:** Two short essays and one final research paper.

**GRADE TO BE BASED ON:** Essays and in-class participation. Attendance is mandatory.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/COMMENTS:** This course will mix lectures with in-class discussion.

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**ENGLISH 290S.01 SPEC TOPICS IN LANG & LIT**  
**GREAT POEMS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**  
**Victor Strandberg**

Beginning with some medieval ballads, this course will sample the shorter works (no epics!) of such classic writers as John Donne, Alexander Pope, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Tennyson, the Brownings, A. E. Housman, William Butler Yeats, Dylan Thomas, and Philip Larkin. From the American side of the ledger, we will, as time permits, draw upon such writers as Anne Bradstreet, Phillis Wheatley, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, Edna St Vincent Millay, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sylvia Plath, and Allen Ginsberg. The course also figures to rescue some non-classic but very fine poems from undeserved oblivion.

Three hour exams (no 3-hour final exam) and a couple of papers.

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**ENGLISH 290S-1.01 SP TOPICS IN MEDIEVAL/EARLY MODERN LIT**  
**LET'S WRITE A SHAKESPEARE PLAY**  
**Julianne Werlin**

In this class, students will collaboratively write a "Shakespearean" play. Over the course of the semester, we will use the creation of a play to get as close as possible to Shakespeare's drama. Our aim will be to become first-class forgers, which will require us to become first-class scholars. Major areas of emphasis will include language and linguistic history, narrative and sources, theatrical companies, actors, and the possibilities of staging, and the arc of Shakespeare's career. In order to prepare, we will read plays by Shakespeare and examine his sources. We will also read a significant amount of scholarship both together and independently. This is a research-intensive class for students who are excited about delving as deeply as possible into Shakespeare's world and words.

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## **ENGLISH 290S-2.01 SP TOPICS IN 18th & 19th CENTURY**

### **AMERICAN HAUNTINGS: From Poe to Pop Culture**

**Mike D'Alessandro**

Although America has often projected the image of a shimmering New World, there always has been a shadow realm beneath the surface. This course concentrates on various tales of the supernatural (including the occult, mesmerism, mad science, ESP, body invasion, witchcraft) as well as the darkly psychological (suppressed memories, traumatic dreamscapes) that run throughout American literary and cinematic history. While these narratives reveal the spectral truths beyond everyday perception, they also unveil humans' hidden natures, our persistent attraction to the mysterious and forbidden. With a concentration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but stretching into the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, this course furthermore examines the historical conditions that produced these tales. With supplementary readings about early American witchcraft, spiritualism, and psychology, the course grounds primary texts in a record of unsettling real-life occurrences. Similarly, we explore how the American landscape offers distinctly fertile ground for such stories. Its history steeped in blood and sin, the United States remains forever haunted by the ghosts of its past and the uncertainties of its future.

The syllabus features stories by Edgar Allan Poe ("The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ligeia"), Nathaniel Hawthorne ("Young Goodman Brown," "The Birthmark"), Henry James (*The Turn of the Screw*), and Louisa May Alcott (*Behind a Mask*). It also includes several films (*Sleepy Hollow*, *The Shining*, and *Get Out*) and television shows (*Twin Peaks*). Evaluation is based on weekly response posts, two mid-length formal essays, and an oral presentation. Also, as this class is a discussion seminar, most of our time—and a sizeable percentage of the evaluation—will focus on class participation. No prerequisites necessary. Counts for Area II requirement or elective.

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## **ENGLISH 290S-2.02 SP TOPICS IN 18th & 19th CENTURY**

### **AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE: Origins to Experimentation**

**Sharon Kunde**

African American literature is rooted in protest. The field's foundational works respond to the institutions of African slavery and anti-black racism. Yet, even while emerging from a protest against slavery's fundamental violence, African American literature celebrates the freedom and hope that come with resistance to oppression. This course will introduce students to canonical African American literary works of the nineteenth century and the best of contemporary fiction and poetry that builds on these stories of protest and resistance.

Far from being conventional, nineteenth-century African American autobiographies, novels, and poetry pushed the boundaries of literary expression. Invoking ideas from the Age of Revolution, this literature challenged the United States to live up to its ideals of equality and freedom for all. It expanded the sense of what kinds of language counted as valuable by mixing dialect with the elevated diction of Romanticism and sentimentalism. Twentieth-century works of African American literature often directly revisit the themes and stories of these earlier texts about captivity and rebellion. Calling on contemporary literary developments like science fiction, magical realism, and cross-genre writing, this literature considers the long afterlives of racial slavery while cultivating practices of self-discovery and collective joy.

Texts will be drawn from the following:

**19<sup>th</sup> century:** Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, and the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar. **20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century:** Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, Terrance Hayes' *American Sonnets for my Past and Future Assassin*.

Where appropriate, the course will include film or television versions of these works.

Grades for the class will be based on participation in discussion, a reading log, two short analytic papers, and a final project that can take the form of a longer critical analysis or a research paper into an aspect of the course's topics.

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## **ENGLISH 290S-4.01 SP TOPICS IN CREATIVE WRITING WORD & IMAGE**

**Toby Martinez de las Rivas**

Poetry need not be just about language. In this course, students will investigate the long tradition of poems combined with images across a variety of media, what each component brings to the other, and how combining text and image can broaden our own practice as poets. Students will explore key movements and individuals from the middle-ages onwards, including works by The Limbourg brothers, The Little Gidding Community, William Blake, Guillaume Apollinaire, Dom Sylvester Houedard, Mary Ellen Solt and Mary Ruefle, and end in the 21st century with poems that combine text, film and other digital media to produce a range of innovative, immersive or unsettling effects. Students will have the opportunity to experiment with the techniques investigated in the classroom as well as the technologies available to them to bring their own work into conversation with images and other media. Taught by Distinguished Blackburn Artist Toby Martinez de las Rivas.

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## **ENGLISH 320S.01 INTERMEDIATE WORKSHOP WTG OF POETRY Joseph Donahue**

The goal of the course is to deepen students' engagement with the history and practice of poetic art in the twentieth and twenty first century. Reading assignments will be drawn from the canon of

post WWII avant-garde poetry and literary art. Lectures will provide an historical and cultural context for the works we are reading, and about the controversies and challenges that inform the poetics of the late nineteen forties to the present. The course proceeds from the premise that a deeply internalized command of literary history is critical to the development of any serious writer. Students will be expected to read closely, to acquire an overall grasp of modernism and its development into what is now called the postmodern, and above all to participate in discussions. Further, students will be expected to investigate on their own initiative the texts towards which their own writing leads them. In class and out of class we will explore the possibilities for contemporary poetic practice suggested by earlier works. We will look at a wide range of poems with attention to both how they are made and to the personal urgency that makes the poem more than an exercise, that creates surprise or sorrow or exhilaration in the reader. Our main focus will be on writing poems, or creating letter-based artworks, and on developing both a critical and a generous approach to each other's work.

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**ENGLISH 321S.01 INTERMEDIATE WORKSHOP WTG OF FICTION**  
**Mesha Maren-Hogan**

In this course we will build on the concepts outlined in "ENGL 221S – Introduction to the Writing of Fiction." Now that you are familiar with the basic skills of fiction writing it is time to refine those techniques and dig more deeply into your own sources of inspiration. What are the abiding images that come up in your work over and over again? What craft techniques do you feel most strongly about? Where are your weaknesses? This is a generative course. We will draft lots of material and workshop, redraft and redefine the pieces you feel most passionate about. We will read both craft essays and literary examples each week as well as reading the work we create in class. Students will have the opportunity to workshop two full length pieces as well as many shorter weekly free writes. All types of fiction are welcomed in this class including but not limited to speculative, scifi, and fantasy.

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**ENGLISH 331.01**  
**LATE MEDIEVAL LIT/CULTURE**  
**Derek Witten**

In this class we will feel our way into late medieval life and worldview (1300-1500) through engagement with a wide selection of the period's most enduring writings. Texts may include the following: Dante's early love poetry in *La Vita Nova* ("the new life") as well as excerpts from the *Divine Comedy*; a selection of Arthurian legend, including *Gawain and the Green Knight* and Malory's "The Quest for the Holy Grail"; several of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; and finally, two of the period's mystical masterpieces, the *Cloud of Unknowing* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*. Our primary aim is not critical distance but imaginative inhabitation: we will recruit all of our faculties toward what Hans Georg Gadamer dubbed a "fusion of horizons"—a merging of medieval and modern perspectives for the creation of a new frame of knowledge. To help us gain access to these writings—which may at first seem foreign—we will employ those modern authors best at illuminating what is crucial for today in medieval literature: Charles Williams, Caroline Walker Bynum, and Henri de Lubac will appear at key junctures. Even as we engage these influential



interpreters we will seek, as a class, our own experience of this potent literary period—an experience which is, in Gadamer's phrase, "written anew by every new present."

All texts save one will be read in modern English (unless a student wishes for a greater challenge, which will certainly be permitted). Together, we will work our way through one Canterbury Tale in the original Middle English. No previous experience is needed for this task, and you will be provided with all the help you need! Major assignments: two major papers of 2,000 words each.

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**ENGLISH 360S.01**  
**ENVIRONMENT IN LIT, LAW & SCI**  
**Priscilla Wald**

Climate change, resource exhaustion, an increase in natural disasters, from tornados, hurricanes, floods to droughts, heat domes, earthquakes, and, of course, pandemics: 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.

Racism, unprecedented poverty, inadequate health care, and urban blight in the midst of rising affluence: these, too, are problems with "the environment." The world population has exceeded eight billion; we are putting increasing pressure on the planet, with dangerous consequences, as the covid pandemic has made so starkly clear. Social hierarchies and inequities, as we have seen over time, take their toll on every aspect of the planet; the natural and social worlds are fully integrated entities.

So, what is this "environment," and why does this question matter, now more than ever? How might a better understanding of how that term is circulating and being used help us move beyond our impasses and think productively about how to live more justly, compassionately, and responsibly in our world? What can we learn from the stories we tell about the environment in fiction, film, and the mainstream media/journalism as well as in scientific, legal, and political documents? How might we change that story, and with what consequences?

This class will address these questions by considering the global and the local, with special attention to the very ground on which Duke is standing: the Southern Piedmont, the city of Durham, the Duke campus, and the Duke Campus Farm. Beginning with early human settlement, when the earth began to get a human-natural history of its own, we will consider three historical moments — settlement; plantation culture and enslavement, and the ongoing struggles for Civil Rights from the late 1960s into the Environmental Justice and Environmental Health movements in the present—to show how science, law, and cultural forms (literary, cinematic, and scientific works, legal cases, policy documents, and news media) contribute to the changing idea of "the environment." The class will include visits to Duke Forest and the Duke Campus Farm and a walking tour of downtown Durham.

We will trace the idea of the environment not only across time, but also across geographical space, as we consider how ideas take root locally, and also circulate through social, cultural, economic, legal, political, agricultural, academic, and other networks, reshaping the ever-changing relationship between the local and the global.

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**ENGLISH 386.01**  
**SCIENCE FICTION FILM**  
**Priscilla Wald**

The computer running your spaceship has turned homicidal; you have crash landed on a planet run by talking apes. Your little sister can read your mind; your future is revealed in the DNA sample taken moments after your birth. From space travel to time travel, from mind control to genetic manipulation, from aliens to sentient robots, no genre has more fully captured—and influenced—the relationship between important scientific discoveries and profound geopolitical and social transformations than science fiction. It registers the anxieties and hopes, the terror and the anticipation that comes with scientific innovation and social change. This class will consider science fiction film from its rise in the 1950s through the present. From its earliest years, science fiction film offered an important mode of engaging profound social changes and of imagining ethical responses to them. In its depiction of the future or of other worlds entirely, it offered a template for rehearsing a variety of outcomes for contemporary dilemmas, from the cultural negotiations of the multi-galactic crew of the starship Enterprise in *Star Trek* to the consequences of genetic determinism in the sterile world of *Gattaca*. And it staged explorations of human potential and limitations in the Atomic Age through such scenarios as the discovery of alternate universes and mental dimensions, the implications of human evolution and the creation of artificial intelligence, encounters with alien beings and worlds, and the ultimate unthinkable that was never really far from the human imagination: the consequences of full-scale nuclear war. Since its proliferation in the post-war period, this cinematic genre, with its fantastical settings, imaginative plotlines, and inventive special effects, has dramatically registered collective responses to the radical scientific innovations and geopolitical transformations that have characterized the second half of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first and has forged new mythologies for the contemporary world.

This class will be organized around the relationship between scientific innovation and social and geopolitical transformation: how, for example, the threats of nuclear war and the exhaustion of environmental resources, discoveries in virology and genetics, and the innovations in cybernetics and artificial intelligence all intersect with decolonization and global development, race relations, and new social and geopolitical configurations. We will explore how science fiction film registers and responds to the contours and uncertainties of a changing world: to the challenges to the concept of human being and to the survival of the species. We will consider both how the films stage the dilemmas emerging from scientific and social change and how they posit responses to them. We will explore the cinematic innovations, the social criticism, and the mythological imaginings of science fiction film.

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**ENGLISH 390-6.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN FILM**  
**MADONNA TROUBLE**  
**Thomas Ferraro**

If you have never binged on Madonna videos, especially those of the 1980s in the chronological order released as “The Immaculate Video Collection,” you have a treat in store: they play together as a coming-of-age and coming-into-power novel in the great American Romantic tradition but with a

special twist—that of a Pagan-Catholic Girl Living in our Anti-Materialist Protestant World! A blast, then, *from a generation past or more*, make-overs and face-overs in the interim notwithstanding.

How so? My plan is to consider Madonna's storied radiance—including her troubling of Theory's paranoid constructions and its left-right political mappings—in the context of the major art-trajectories upon which she consciously draws. The “break out” song-and-dance routines of American musical comedy turn out to be as wittily gender-bent (*Monaco, The Wizard of Oz, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*) as elsewhere they are campily exploitative (*Gilda, Bye-Bye Birdie, Flower Drum Song*) or darkly sophisticated (*Monaco, Oklahoma, Rocky Horror*). Madonna's winking redeployments hail the consuming male gaze, yes—as demystified by John Berger and Laura Mulvey, Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler. But they also comment upon and almost invariably redirect its sexism and hetero-presumption (women have always been her majority consumers), generating “sexual personae” of pop-mythic stature that bring Camille Paglia's gay optics into enfolded performance—if not always, alas, complete clarity or total persuasion.

That the Divine Ms. Ciccone (whose own mother named her “Madonna”!) grew up in suburban Detroit meant immersion as a youngster in the black popularizations of Motown and through them the Italianate renderings of the Jewish-composed classic American songbook realized on the '50's Vegas stage: constellation of old-timey influences that Madonna absorbed well before her sojourns in the black-latino discos of the Meat Packing District and that would come to distinguish her aspirations and operations, for better and for worse, from her otherwise convergent genius peers (lordly Prince, edgy Grace, self-immolating St. Michael). Next up, Lady Gaga?

We are not over yet: in a couple of surprisingly good actress-stints in fun films, Madonna brought first downtown gear of the naughty-nun variety (*Desperately Seeking Susan*) and then retro-Hollywood glam (*Dick Tracy*) into the mainstream—instantaneous fashion-force that troubled even the torch-bearers of power feminism, who had otherwise hailed her as their crown-goddess. In the meantime, the era's most auteur directors responded both to her celebrations of cross-gender no-holds-barred femininity (at the height of the AIDS epidemic) and to her insistence on cross-racial identifications (in the immediate wake of the Howard Beach/Bensonhurst brutalities), with the theoreticians excitedly following suit, whether yeah or nay. For instance, David Lynch's Sedgwickian *Blue Velvet* (1986) outed a much more disturbing form of suburban female investment in the male homosexual underground than Madonna's Vogue-ing; Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989) ignited an explosion in Italian-black Bensonhurst despite and partly because of its Madonna-esque carnival; and Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), with its *cine*-sophistication, staged a doubled-over yet wickedly resurrectionist white-black male-bonding that outgunned even Madonna's bi-race Rom-com celebrity antics (Dennis Rodman! then Tupac), in utterly Fiedler-esque fashion. How can getting this smart be this entertaining?

Paradoxically, when it comes to Madonna's iconic art, the more we understand its detailed revisionism, the more expansive its relevance and indeed, the more compelling its ontologies. That goes, also paradoxically, for her strongest rivals, too.

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**ENGLISH 395.01**  
**LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY**  
**Dominika Baran**

This course examines language as a social practice, focusing on different aspects of its role in social life. Topics addressed in the course include: language and social identity, such as ethnicity, social class, age, and gender; variation in language, including dialects, accents, and registers; multilingualism and language contact; new languages such as pidgins and creoles; language, culture, and intercultural communication; language and ideology; language in education and in the media. Through the discussion of these topics and homework including reading and small research projects, students are introduced to key concepts, theories, and methods in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology.

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**ENGLISH 420S.01**  
**ADVANCED WORKSHOP IN WRITING OF POETRY**  
**Nathaniel Mackey**

Advanced Writing Workshops build on the work done at the intermediate level, and are intended for the most well-prepared and gifted creative writing students. Pre-requisite: English 320S or consent of the instructor if prior work merits admission to the class (as judged by the instructor).

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**ENGLISH 421S.01**  
**ADVANCED WORKSHOP IN WRITING OF FICTION**  
**JP Gritton**

Building on concepts outlined in “ENGL 221S – Introduction to the Writing of Fiction” and “ENGL 321S – Intermediate Fiction Workshop,” students will focus on producing excellent fiction for their next audience: short stories/novellas/novel excerpts that glitter enough to catch the eye of an agent, a publisher, or an MFA committee. As we write and workshop, we’ll pursue a parallel study of the Science Fiction genre. How have writers like Margaret Atwood (*Blind Assassin*), Octavia Butler (the *Patternist* trilogy), and Ted Chiang (*Stories of Your Life and Others*) employed the conventions and tropes of Sci Fi to surprise and delight their readers? As we study and learn from the work of these authors, and as we hone our own writing, we seek to answer bigger questions: can the conventions of the Sci Fi genre (the conventions, for that matter, of any genre) serve not only as helpful reference points, but also as points of creative departure, for writers struggling with form and structure?

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**ENGLISH 490S.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LANG/LIT**  
**CONTEMPORARY BLACK SOUTH**  
**Jarvis McInnis**

“The South Got Something to Say”:

The Contemporary Black South in Literature & Popular Culture

This course explores contemporary representations of the Black US South in African American literature and culture. While more than 90% of African Americans lived in the US South in the early 20th century, by the 1970s, more than 50% had fled the region, pushed by the persistent threat of anti-black violence and oppression and pulled by the promise of better socioeconomic opportunities in the US North, West, and Midwest. Following the legislative gains of the Civil Rights Movement and “northern” urban decline, however, the 1990s witnessed a reverse migration, such that more than 50% of black Americans now reside in the South again. This demographic shift has produced a cultural shift—a black southern renaissance, if you will, whereby contemporary artists and scholars are reimagining the region as a viable present and future for black Americans, even as they continue to grapple with its tortured past. Journeying through rural Mississippi and the Carolinas to urban centers such as Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans, and Houston, we will interrogate the geographic and cultural diversity of the contemporary Black South. We will read a range of fiction (by Gayl Jones, Jesmyn Ward, Randall Kenan, Kiese Laymon, etc.) and scholarship (by Imani Perry, E. Patrick Johnson, L.H. Stallings, etc.) that *grapples with the intricacies and contradictions of contemporary black southern identity, not only in relation to whiteness, but the region’s fast-growing Latino population as well*. We may also examine depictions of the region in media and pop culture, e.g., TV shows *Atlanta* and *Queen Sugar*; Hip Hop artists OutKast and Big Freedia; and experimental films such as Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*.

This course is a hybrid between an upper-level undergraduate seminar and a graduate seminar. The **graduate discussion section** (which will meet for one additional hour, once a week) will include a range of critical and theoretical works that cut across literary, cultural, media and performance studies, African American Studies, New Southern Studies, gender and sexuality studies, geography, anthropology, and sociology.

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**ENGLISH 546S.01**  
**VICTORIAN LITERATURE**  
**Kathy Psomiades**

This is a course about genre and psychology in Victorian literature and in Victorian Studies. Its aims are literary, historical, and theoretical. We’ll be reading a range of Victorian novels that reflect the emergence of popular new genres in the last half of the nineteenth-century: detective fiction, sensation fiction, Victorian gothic, imperial romance. We’ll also read Victorian extra-literary writing about what the Victorians called “Science of Mind,” and scholarship in Victorian studies that focusses on the genres of gothic and sensation fiction.

What books to order: Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins, *Armadale*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, H. Rider Haggard, *She*, Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. These are Victorian novels, so it means that

most of them are long and it will be much easier for you to navigate them in print. You might want to get started on the reading over the summer—*Bleak House*, *Armadale*, and *Tess* in particular take some time to read. (The other novels are beachier, though!)

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. This course carries R and W designations, which means that you need to be prepared for a heavy reading load, and a lot of writing.

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**ENGLISH 590S-3.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LANG/LIT**  
**CONTEMPORARY BLACK SOUTH**  
**Jarvis McInnis**

“The South Got Something to Say”:

The Contemporary Black South in Literature & Popular Culture

This course explores contemporary representations of the Black US South in African American literature and culture. While more than 90% of African Americans lived in the US South in the early 20th century, by the 1970s, more than 50% had fled the region, pushed by the persistent threat of anti-black violence and oppression and pulled by the promise of better socioeconomic opportunities in the US North, West, and Midwest. Following the legislative gains of the Civil Rights Movement and “northern” urban decline, however, the 1990s witnessed a reverse migration, such that more than 50% of black Americans now reside in the South again. This demographic shift has produced a cultural shift—a black southern renaissance, if you will, whereby contemporary artists and scholars are reimagining the region as a viable present and future for black Americans, even as they continue to grapple with its tortured past. Journeying through rural Mississippi and the Carolinas to urban centers such as Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans, and Houston, we will interrogate the geographic and cultural diversity of the contemporary Black South. We will read a range of fiction (by Gayl Jones, Jesmyn Ward, Randall Kenan, Kiese Laymon, etc.) and scholarship (by Imani Perry, E. Patrick Johnson, L.H. Stallings, etc.) that *grapples with the intricacies and contradictions of contemporary black southern identity, not only in relation to whiteness, but the region’s fast-growing Latino population as well*. We may also examine depictions of the region in media and pop culture, e.g., TV shows *Atlanta* and *Queen Sugar*; Hip Hop artists OutKast and Big Freedia; and experimental films such as Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*.

This course is a hybrid between an upper-level undergraduate seminar and a graduate seminar. The **graduate discussion section** (which will meet for one additional hour, once a week) will

include a range of critical and theoretical works that cut across literary, cultural, media and performance studies, African American Studies, New Southern Studies, gender and sexuality studies, geography, anthropology, and sociology.

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**ENGLISH 890S.01 SP TOPICS SEMINAR**  
**VERSIONS OF CHARITY & ITS IMPEDIMENTS**  
**David Aers**

**Versions of Charity and its Impediments:**  
**Thomas Aquinas, William Langland, and Corpus Christi in the Later Middle Ages**

In this course we will explore the theological virtue of *Charity*. We will study three medieval versions of charity and its impediments across widely different genres. As the title indicates, I want us to consider both the forms this virtue takes and the specific impediments each writer considers. This means we will be thinking about charity as a form of life in specific communities (church, polity, society) with their own impediments to the virtue, their own habitual sins. For both Aquinas and Langland, *Charity* shapes our understanding of sin's effects on the individual person and the community. For both Aquinas and Langland, the Incarnation is the eminent and decisive expression of God's Love. And so it is for the feast of Corpus Christi and its plays performed in medieval York.

We set out with the innovative, dazzling account of Charity offered by Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* II-II.23–46. You should have read this BEFORE the first class. We will begin our exploration of Aquinas's teaching by considering his "modi loquendi," the way he leads us to understanding through a dialectical account of arguments against the positions he favors. His modes of writing are inseparable from what he teaches, just as they are for poets like Langland and the Corpus Christi plays. We will also need to think about what virtues, habits and vices are in Aquinas's *Summa* and the place of the teaching on Charity within the whole work, especially in relation to Faith and Hope. We will certainly conclude our study of Aquinas by some consideration of Part III, the Life of Christ and the Sacraments. You will want to read Aquinas in one of the parallel-text (Latin/English) editions.

From Aquinas we will jump over a hundred years to Langland's great poem, *Piers Plowman*, in which the exploration of Charity (Deus Caritas, as Holy Church proclaims in Passus I) and the impediments to Charity are central. This is a demanding allegorical, dialectic, and visionary poem which I hope to introduce carefully to those unfamiliar with it, as well as introducing some of the differences between the contexts of Aquinas and Langland, writing in late 14th century England during the Great Schism. If you have not studied Middle English, read the poem in an excellent modern translation by George Economou, William Langland's *Piers Plowman: The C Version* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, paperback). We will be studying the final version of the poem, known as the "C Version," and this is edited in a superbly but simply annotated version by Derek Pearsall: *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-Text* (2nd edition, Liverpool University Press/Exeter University Press, 2008, paperback). Even if you are reading the poem in Economou's translation, you will find it well worth reading this alongside Pearsall's edition because of its thorough "Introduction" and annotations. Langland's *Piers Plowman* explores a very wide range of issues, showing the scope of charity in medieval Christianity: from "Deus Caritas" to vexed questions concerning almsgiving, mendicancy, and the treatment of the working poor. Above all, the

poem is an extraordinary search for Charity: a contemplative, satirical, allegorical, and visionary search deploying Scripture and shaped by the liturgy from Passus XVIII.

We conclude the course with an exploration of Corpus Christi. Aquinas wrote the liturgy for this feast, and around it the later Middle Ages developed a great festival which included performance of the cycle of plays organized and performed by the laity, particularly urban guilds (hence “mystery” plays). We will read the York version of these in a selection edited by Richard Beadle and Pamela King, *York Mystery Plays: A Selection with Modernized Spelling* (Oxford World Classics, paperback).

The best introductions to Aquinas for this course are probably the following: Mark Jordan, *Teaching Bodies: Moral Formation in the Summa of Thomas Aquinas* (Fordham University Press, 2016)—a superb example of how to read Aquinas's Summa, and much else; Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford University Press, 1993). He also has published an excellent guide to the Summa Theologiae: *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (Oxford University Press, 2014). I urge all participants in this seminar to have read, before the first meeting, Eamon Duffy's great book on “traditional religion” and its smashing in the English Reformation, *The Stripping of the Altars*—use either the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition with a new preface (Yale University Press, 2005, paperback) or the celebratory 3<sup>rd</sup> edition recently published by Yale. For Langland, the best introduction to *Piers Plowman* remains an essay by Elizabeth Salter, “*Piers Plowman: An Introduction*,” chapter 5 in the collection of her essays entitled *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art, and Patronage of Medieval England* (ed. Pearsall and Zeeman, 1988); together with Nicolette Zeeman, *The Arts of Disruption: Allegory in Piers Plowman* (Oxford University Press, 2020). On Corpus Christi, alongside Duffy read Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) and especially the extremely fine book by Sarah Beckwith: *Signifying God: Social Relations and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago University Press, 2001).

**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, except for approved assistive technologies. 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 890S.02 SP TOPICS SEMINAR

### THEORY OF THE NOVEL

**Nancy Armstrong**

This course is intended for graduate students who plan to research in some area of novel or narrative studies. (Advanced undergraduates writing honors theses on the novel may enroll with permission from instructors.)

This course examines a set of concepts that should provide access to 1) the modes of thinking that characterize novels across the modern period and several different national traditions, 2) the



various ways that critical theory has defined those concepts, and 3) reading the novel as a concept-driven argument with other disciplinary discourses, including critical theory. Indeed, we have organized the course itself as such an argument.

This course begins by considering why a long and robust tradition of critical theory focused on the novel and its attempt to think about the modern world in dialectical terms has encountered some kind of cultural-historical limit where it can no longer do so. Yet novels continue to be written, taught in classrooms, and circulated for the pleasure and edification of literate populations. The uneven development of theory and fiction in this respect invites us to go back to the “fathers” of novel theory—Georg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin—and see whether they might have built in a shelf life for subsequent theories based on those conceptual foundations.

The second half of the course will turn the tables on theory. Reading certain critical concepts through the lens of the novel, we want to consider whether novels have taken up the task of critical theory and how they ask us to modify our critical thinking accordingly.

**Requirements include:**

- class participation,
- the facilitation of a seminar,
- and a written assignment of 12-15 pages.

In preparation for the course, we ask students to read 4 core texts that we will use throughout the semester:

- Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*,
- Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*,
- Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*,
- Orhan Pamuk’s *The Museum of Innocence*.

The required critical readings are listed on the syllabus and, for the most part, available on line.

For the writing assignment, we have in mind a *Vademecum* of Critical Concepts to which each student will contribute a significant piece.

- This assignment takes it as given that the novel “thinks” with certain concepts — some of which do double duty as components of critical theory — and invites us to do the same.
  - After spring break, the class will decide which concepts merit inclusion in this handbook, and each member will select one as the basis of his or her contribution to this project.
  - This assignment will require students to provide a state-of-the-art definition of the concept as it operates in critical theory and then select two or three novels that assess the relative advantages and limitations of that concept. How, if at all, do these novels require us to correct or supplement critical theory’s formulation of that concept?
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**ENGLISH 890S.04 SP TOPICS SEMINAR  
HISTORY OF LITERARY CRITICISM  
Corina Stan**

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. 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, feminism, postcolonial criticism, critical race studies, and possibly a few others, depending on the direction(s) in which our conversations go. We will also consider how these movements relate to both the changing structure of the university and to non-university publics across this period. This course does not aim to provide a snapshot of the field at the current moment; rather, it provides a history of the developments that have led to the current state of the field.

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**ENGLISH 890T.01  
JOB MARKET WORKSHOP  
Michael D'Alessandro**

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**ENGLISH 890T.02  
DISSERTATION WORKSHOP  
Charlotte Sussman**