

Duke English Department Graduate Course Descriptions
FALL 2023

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.

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.

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 2nd edition with a new preface (Yale University Press, 2005, paperback) or the celebratory 3rd 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.

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?

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.

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

ENGLISH 890T.02
DISSERTATION
WORKSHOP
Charlotte Sussman

Crosslisted Courses taught by English faculty originating in other departments

ENGLISH 550S-01 Seminar
BLACK CULTURE & PERFORMANCE
Douglas Jones

What is black embodiment? Black feeling? Black performance? This course explores these questions, among others, by taking up three major cultural movements: New Negro/Harlem Renaissance; Black Arts Movement; and contemporary "post-blackness." We will study black drama, performance art, visual art, and film. Major writers and artists might include Marita Bonner, Zora Neale Hurston, Adrienne Kennedy, Alice Childress, Ntozake Shange, Amiri Baraka, Aleshea Harris, Brendan Jacobs-Jenkins, Barry Jenkins, and Jackie Sibblies Drury. We will also read theories of identity formation, racialized experience, and black life, among other prevailing concerns in Black (Performance) Studies.

ENGLISH 822S-01 Seminar
WRITING IS THINKING
TORIL MOI

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. We will cover questions of style, voice, and audience, and learn to read academic prose as writers. We will also focus on how to move from note-taking to writing, and develop an understanding of different academic genres. The course will be writing intensive. Consent of instructor is required.

How to apply: Send an email to Professor Moi at 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? Explain who you are, what department and year you are in, and please tell me what academic writing project you wish to work on. If you are in the course taking years, that is just fine. In that case, you can pick as your project a paper for a course you intend to take in the fall semester. The course is suitable for graduate students at all levels.

ENGLISH 890S-03 SP TOPICS SEMINAR
PSYCHOANALYTIC SUBJECT
Ranjana Khanna

Subject” is a grammatical term (the part of the sentence on which the rest is predicated); a legal, religious, monarchical or political one in which one is under control of another’s rules or laws, a spiritual leader or pastor, a monarch or head of state, or a feudal organization. The “Subject,” then, is shaped by a series of identifications that effectively render the grammatical subject into an object. We will examine the changing concept of “the Subject” in a variety of psychoanalytic thinkers. The Subject becomes the tool through which to understand multiple concepts in psychoanalysis, like “the subject supposed to know,” (transference); the split subject (the subject of enunciation in relation to the subject of a statement); the reparative; identification; the unconscious; and symptom. We will study psychoanalytic theory and materials that shape that body of thought in literature, linguistics, and philosophy. We will consider why the Subject, which seems like a term tied to the intimate lifeforce of humans, becomes useful in analyzing literature, configurations of power, and even the non-human. We will also consider materials that offer challenges to concepts of the Subject on the grounds of different constructions and cultures of being; structures of the family; subjecthood and regimes of power; relationality; and linguistic difference in the constitution of the grammatical subject.

Non-English courses that may be of interest to English Grad Students

FR 530s/LIT541s/ROMST531s/MEDREN642s

Premodern Times: A User's Manual

Helen Solterer

Why are premodern fictions in French taken up by writers again, transformed to speak to people during various periods, re-located to other cultures? This seminar introduces you to a wide range of works in several vernaculars such as Provençal. We'll explore their inventive forms and original ideas, investigating the process of their time-release. You'll work with fictions as raw matter for experimentation rather than as national or cultural inheritance. Each week we'll investigate a different fiction in the context of a particular type of criticism: languages, deep history, gender & sexuality, political thought, visual

culture. Each week the map will be larger, reaching Muslim domains, the Americas; the time frame extending to modern times; the author profile shifting to 'the foreigner,' the diplomat. Fictions include Christine de Pizan's dream visions, and Edith Thomas, Alain Chartier's debates between social classes, troubadour song and Aragon, Villon's ballads, Édouard Glissant, and Langston Hughes. Among the critics: Boucheron, Kilito, Heller-Roazen, Vergès, Smail, Berque, Wood. Sessions in Rubenstein, Nasher and other collections. Throughout the seminar, members will research their own models of premodern fictions, their historical situations and uses – aesthetic, political, scientific – even passionately personal. By semester's end, you'll have made your own manual of fictions that will change your view on the premodern world, and the idea of the classic.

Seminar conducted in English. Works in translation; readings and preceptorial meetings in French for graduate students.