

Duke English Department  
Course Descriptions

SPRING 2025

**ENGLISH 89S.01 FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR IN ENGLISH**  
**Laws of Love and Obedience: Parents, Children, Rebels**  
**Corina Stan**

*How should a person be? Why, how, and for whom should we live? What do we owe our parents, and should such a sense of debt influence whether to become a parent oneself? How does one make the decision to have children, and are there situations when such an idea might not be morally defensible? In this seminar, we will read and discuss novels, memoirs, poems and art that “come out of one’s own burning” – as Friedrich Nietzsche might say – that is, from one’s own life experiences and the precious little wisdom they yield. These are books about parents, children, and the bonds that connect them; about the difficulties of responsible love and the intimate tug-of-war between what we owe ourselves and what we might owe others; about the fraught choice of staying true to oneself, about the awkwardness of certain familial conversations, about fears and doubts acknowledged candidly or passed over in silence. Why is becoming a parent so intimately tied to vulnerability and the awareness of finitude? Can time, or perhaps art, redeem loss?*

The texts on the reading list include meditations on motherhood, family, adoption, the entanglements of home, race, gender, and class; navigating social environments in the transition between childhood, adolescence and adulthood; love in its simple and complicated forms: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*; Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*; James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*; Maya Angelou, *Letter to My Daughter* and *My Mother and Me* (excerpts); Sheila Heti, *Motherhood*; Lorrie Moore, *A Gate at the Stairs*; Patrick Flanery, *The Ginger Child*; Elena Ferrante, *The Lying Life of Adults*; Kiese Laymon, *Heavy: An American Memoir*; Rachel Cusk, *A Life’s Work*; Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty*; Celeste Ng, *Little Fires Everywhere*; Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*; Bernardine Evaristo, *Girl Woman Other*; Alison Bechdel, *Are You My Mother?*; poems by Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and art by Nikki de Saint Phalle; movies *Paris Is Burning*, and Pedro Almodovar, *All about My Mother*.

Assignments: "Examined life" lexicon based on weekly responses; imaginary dialog; a short review; final paper.

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**ENGLISH 90S.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**  
**The Post-Apocalyptic Pacific**  
**Yeonwoo Koo**

Godzilla emerges from the radioactive currents of the Pacific Ocean. “Mecha” evangelion robots and cyborgs fight against kaiju-monsters and ghostly hackers. A giant everything bagel creates a blackhole that threatens to demolish the multiverse. This course ties together these monstrous, cataclysmic disasters set in the Pacific region to understand the geographical, oceanic, and cultural ties of that space. Is it possible to shift away from a Western-centered imagination of the post-apocalypse? How do we talk about global catastrophes in the Pacific? And what exactly constitutes the Pacific area? Is it based on national borders? The Pacific Ocean itself? With existing terms like the “Asia Pacific” and the “Pacific Rim” originating from colonial histories, is it possible to imagine a transpacific solidarity, especially after world-scale destruction?

To answer these questions, we will take global Asian and American literature in the broadest sense of forms and genre, from fictional narratives (monster invasions, female clone mutations,

environmental disasters) to real events (the Vietnam War, the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the COVID pandemic). Materials will include acclaimed Hollywood films like Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim*, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, and Daniel Kwan's and Daniel Scheinert's *Everything Everywhere All at Once*; Japanese sci-fi anime (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Ghost in the Shell*); a Korean film by Oscar-winner Bong Joon-ho (*The Host*); essays from Asian American and transpacific scholarship, as well as short and long fiction by Ken Liu, Larissa Lai, Chang-rae Lee, and Ruth Ozeki.

Assignments will include weekly reading responses (250 words), one short close-reading essay (2-3 pages), and a creative assignment (2-3 pages). These exercises will prepare students for the final project (6-8 pages). Each step of writing will be workshopped in class, peer reviewed, and undergo several drafts. No exams, no prerequisites necessary.

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### **ENGLISH 90S.02 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**

#### **The Literature, Film and Music of Masculinity**

**Ellie Vilakazi**

In this course, we will explore the construction of contemporary masculinity. While this course is organized around a cis-masculine gender, intersections of race, sexuality, class, and differing cultural contexts will be essential in our exploration of masculinity. We will explore a variety of texts and mediums across time and space to explore the following conventional aspects of cis men's lives: the quest for money, being in love, fatherhood, emasculation, and the construction of cis men through a woman's eyes. Each week, students will be asked to post a close reading reflection of 250-500 words. Students will then be asked to submit a 5 page midterm paper which will then be workshopped. The workshop will set students up well to polish and extend their 5 pages into a final paper of 8-10 pages.

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### **ENGLISH 90S.03 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**

#### **Monsters: Then and Now**

**Katherine Carithers**

Vampires. Werewolves. Witches. Why do centuries-old creatures continue to haunt us? In this class, we'll investigate why and when authors invent monsters and why these creatures captivate us today.

We'll look to some of literature's most infamous monsters like Medusa, Frankenstein's creature, and Carmilla, the lesbian vampire who inspired Dracula. To examine what happens when these creatures travel to new centuries, continents, and contexts, we'll look at more recent examples of "monsters" in television and film like Tim Burton's *Wednesday* and Yorgos Lanthimos's *Poor Things*.

Over the semester, we'll explore how societal changes like technological inventions, scientific advances, and new sexual norms shape what's deemed monstrous, abnormal, or strange. We'll also investigate how shifting ideas about race, gender, and sexuality influence science fiction and horror genres. To do so, we'll turn to literature, poetry, film, and television as well as excerpts from prominent medical, scientific, and political writings.

Primary texts will include novels like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. We'll also read shorter works by horror writers like Edgar Allan Poe as well as excerpts from early psychologists and sexologists like Havelock Ellis and Richard von-Krafft Ebing.

No exams, no prereqs. Students will develop their analysis in readings, class discussion, collaborative workshops, and peer review sessions. Assignments include short blog posts, two argument-based essays (4 pages), and a final project that students will work on during the second half of the semester.

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## **ENGLISH 101S.01 THE ART OF READING**

### **Arts of Attention**

**Sarah Beckwith**

Throughout the class we will be paying close attention to what writers do in various genres, media, and idioms of human voicing. We will be *noticing* how poets, novelists, and dramatists of various historical periods *notice* the world, and also *noticing* ourselves *noticing*. How do we learn to read – skillfully and with acumen-- poetry, plays, and prose, and what are we doing when we read? How do we do things with words? How might these arts of attention provoke us or inspire us to our own expression, to try to become people on whom nothing is lost, as Henry James marvelously put it?

In Literature classes we have the privileged luxury of working in the same medium as the writers we study: words. In this course we'll aid our study of literature by writing quite a bit ourselves. I ask students to build their own primers or handbooks to develop a critical vocabulary. We will work with forms of parody and imitation too in order to work close up with form. We will also be keeping notebooks of our reading and writing, a record, refinement, practice, and development of the art of attention. We will think about and also use the form of the essay, our medium for testing things out against ourselves (from *essay*, Fr. ).

We will look at a range of poetic forms, (ode, sonnet, free verse, elegy, dramatic monologue, lyric, epic) and think of poetry as witness (Czeslaw Milosz), and redress (Seamus Heaney), lament, celebration, and prayer in many idioms of human voicing. We will also read a range of fascinating novels in which each succeeding writer rewrites his or her forebears: Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*,(1847), Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which rewrites Bronte's novel from the point of view of Antionette Cosby, the Dominican heiress of Bronte's tale. As our third novel we will read Caryl Phillips, *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2019), Phillips' take on Jean Rhys and the forms of estrangement and belonging at the heart of empire.

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## ENGLISH 101S.02 THE ART OF READING

### War & Worship, Wine & (Wo)men

Thomas Ferraro

#### WAR & WORSHIP, WINE & (WO)MEN

A Seminar for Sophomores and Other Newcomers to English

Our age has lost much of its ear for poetry, as it has its eye for color and line, and its taste for war and worship, wine and women.

Henry Adams (1904)

Why read when there is so much else to do? What is there in a novel, a poem, an essay to hold our imagination captive? to make us smarter, wiser, more artful and more courageous? to bring us closer to each other, to the world at large, to the wonder and the terror and the majesty? How are we to know "it" when we see it; get there when we're not; speak of it when we are? And how are we to take the next step--to the point where bearing witness becomes a form of making present? embodying, a form of propagating? critical analysis, a form of collective self-interrogation?

These questions are the biggies--the overarching, meta-issues of deeply engaged, bloody demanding, fiercely intelligent, achingly beautiful reading.

Nice to contemplate, for sure. But, speaking practically, how to begin?

I will gather for us some of the best stuff I know, American Romantic texts especially, treating matters of nearly universal interest: those matters of "war and worship, wine and (wo)men and work," to expand pointedly on Henry Adams's 1904 alliterative litany. The kind of texts worth reading again and again. We will take character to heart, query idea and plot, describe the sound and sight and feel of the language. We'll ask each text to tutor us on how it wishes, in particular, to be read. And we'll work methodically on our game: 1) reading aloud, to catch the tone and the drama of the words on the page, even in expository prose, experiencing form as content; 2) cross-interrogating between part and whole, whole and part (a given phrase vs. its sentence or paragraph, a given passage vs. the text, the text-at-hand vs. the texts-so-far); and 3) cultivating self-reflexivity, in which what is going on in a text is seen to be at stake in how, separately and together, we discuss it. The ultimate goal is to be able to inhabit a text in its own terms, so intimately that it lives in us; to analyze it so cogently that it, in effect, analyzes us.

An introduction, in sum, to the pleasuring intensities of sustained reading during the age of cyber-immediacy and virtual contact: the visceral texture it offers, the analytic trenchancy (including capacity for contradiction) it demands, the repartee it solicits, the essaying that honors it, and the kinship of word and thought it ultimately inspires.

TEXTS TO BE DRAWN FROM: Poetry by Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, and Langston Hughes; fiction by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Willa Cather, Jeanette Winterson, and Mohsin Hamid; and art-essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Carlos Williams, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Richard Rodriguez.

And, finally, for the record: Around our seminar table, expressive quiet will supplement analytical acumen; writing assignments will be short and guided yet informal and exploratory; and grading (which it is time to re-invent or abandon altogether) will be effort-friendly, alert to varying strengths, and happily inflated.

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**ENGLISH 101S.03 THE ART OF READING**  
**Literature and Freedom**  
**Rob Mitchell**

In this course, we consider the ways in which literature—primarily novels—helps us to understand the nature of freedom in our lives. We will consider what freedom (and its contrary, bondage) mean in a variety of texts, focusing especially on those that emphasize some sort of inescapable constraint, such as divine fate, original sin, or heredity, though we will also consider social forms of bondage. We will begin with Sophocles’s classic drama *Oedipus the King*, and then consider a number of novels, including Jane Austen’s *Emma*, Émile Zola’s *Germinal*, Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. Alongside these literary texts, we will read short selections from literary critics and philosophers, including Aristotle, G. W. F. Hegel, and Georg Lukács, who have reflected on the nature of freedom and, equally important, on the ways in which perspectives on freedom and constraint bear on literary genre and form. Our primary goal is to consider how literature, in both its content and form, is able to reflect on the question of what “freedom” is and how freedom can (and cannot) be instantiated in a human life. To this end, we will take up a number of key literary terms, such as character, chorus, genre, plot, realism, naturalism, tragedy, etc.

Student work for the course consists of homework assignments for, attendance at, and participation in, each class meeting; an essay element exercise; two 5-8 page (double-spaced) literary critical papers; and two stylistic imitation assignments.

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**ENGLISH 110S.01**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Akhil Sharma**

This course will focus on the three primary strands of creative writing: poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction. The goal is to develop a sensitivity to the expectations and constraints of each of these. We will both read and write examples of these genres. While students will gain exposure with each area, the goal of the class is to develop sensitivity to language and to get a sense of their own aesthetic preferences.

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**ENGLISH 110S.02**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Faulkner Fox**

This course gives students an opportunity to explore and practice four genres of creative writing: creative nonfiction, fiction, drama, and poetry. Part of each class will be devoted to discussion of student work; part to talking about writing craft and the writing life; and part to close reading of published essays, stories, plays, and poems. There will be weekly writing assignments, and students will submit a final portfolio.

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**ENGLISH 110S.03**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Will Brewbaker**

“Poetry makes nothing happen,” wrote W.H. Auden in 1940. Just a few lines later, though, he revises this dour pronouncement: poetry is “a way of happening, a mouth.” In Auden’s telling, poems don’t make *other things* happen; they *are* what happens. In the words of the critic Jonathan Culler: “Nothing need happen in the poem because the poem is to be itself the happening.”

In this class, we will consider what it means for a poem to *happen* as we learn to write our own poems. Despite the fact that writing poetry will be our primary generic focus, our central question—of *how* a poem happens—will lead, by necessity, out of poetry and into other creative genres. From the prose poem to the lyric essay to “flash” fiction, we will read and write at the borders of genre.

This class will proceed through several modes: the group workshop, the mini-workshop, individual meetings, prompted writing, and in-class writing. It will culminate in a creative portfolio that represents each student’s writing process.

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**ENGLISH 110S.04**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Mesha Maren**

This is an introductory-level multi-genre creative writing course. No previous experience is required. Together we will explore personal essays, poetry, screen and playwriting, and fiction with an eye toward building a toolbox of craft skills. Come to class with a curiosity and love of language and leave with a refined sense of your own voice on the page.

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**ENGLISH 208S.01 CRITICISM AND THE ARTS**  
**Philosophy of Modern Song**  
**Taylor Black**

**The Philosophy of Modern Song** is a course for people who listen to music seriously and are interested in expanding their powers of critical reception. It offers a survey of canonical and recent texts of pop criticism and popular music studies alongside the vast and exciting archive of American popular music of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, from Tin Pan Alley to Hip Hop and everywhere in between. At the same time, this will be a critical/creative writing workshop that will encourage students to cultivate a musical style of expression all their own.

Keeping in mind that writing about music is always a matter of exploring the limits of descriptive language, students will have an opportunity to experiment with their styles of writing in short pieces (2-3 pages) that will be workshopped on an alternating basis throughout the semester. At the end of the term, students will submit a final portfolio of these with an introductory essay reflecting on how they relate to critical texts we will have surveyed.

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## ENGLISH 208S.02 CRITICISM AND THE ARTS

### Novels in Translation

Eun-hae Kim

#### Lost in Translation? Contemporary and Popular Novels in Translation

Without translation, English speakers would be deprived of the pleasures of reading classics like *The Odyssey* and watching international shows like *Squid Game*. Unlike other artistic modes like painting and music, literature depends on translation to circulate across the world. Yet, translation is usually sidelined as the invisible counterpart to literature. In this course, we will bring translation back to the center of debates on contemporary literature as we explore the key ethical, social, and political questions animating the practice of translation. What does it mean for a novel to get “lost in translation”? Or does a novel gain something in translation? Can translation be conceived as a creative and interpretive act? How does translation complicate the national categorizations of literature? Why do certain books get translated at the cost of others?

To answer these questions, we will read an array of recent novels written by authors from around the world. We will engage with rises in global bestsellers such as Elena Ferrante’s *My Brilliant Friend* (2011, Italian); claims that the English translation enhances Liu Cixin’s *Three-Body Problem* (2008, Chinese); charges of mistranslation surrounding Han Kang’s International Booker Prize winner, *The Vegetarian* (2007, Korean); deployments of strategic exoticism in Orhan Pamuk’s *My Name is Red* (2001, Turkish); and experiments of a multilingual and vernacular novel in Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007, English-Spanish). Secondary material will include TV series adaptations (Netflix’s *Three-Body Problem* and HBO’s *My Brilliant Friend*), translators’ commentaries, and philosophical essays. This course integrates literary and translation studies with the goal of not only enabling us to become attentive readers but also informed and empowered agents who can influence global cultural production.

\* No prerequisites and no exams. Advanced foreign language skills/fluency are NOT required. This is not a course where you will learn the mechanics of translation, but a literature seminar centered on reading novels in translation. Assignments will consist of short reading reflections (400 words) and three essays with creative writing options (3-4 pages, 6-8 pages, and 10-12 pages).

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## ENGLISH 218S.01

### Plays that Change the World

Faulkner Fox

The goal of this creative writing course is for aspiring playwrights to think deeply about what—exactly—they are trying to do, and avoid, in their writing. What causes a play to be heavy-handed and propagandistic, as opposed to impassioned? How can students who believe deeply in a particular issue write artful drama about that issue? In what ways is theater similar—and dissimilar—to social protest in the streets? Students will be encouraged to experiment, question, and revise, at every turn.

This course will closely examine a diversity of plays that have had a marked impact on their cultures—an impact beyond an excellent and meaningful theater-going experience. Over the course of the semester, students will read—and watch—excellent political plays as well as write their own. They will write and develop their own full-length (60-90 page) script in addition to doing weekly



creative responses to produced plays and other writing. Class discussion will be divided between focus on student work-in-progress, produced plays, and playwriting craft.

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### **ENGLISH 220S.01**

#### **Intro to the Writing of Poetry**

**Frances Leviston**

'Poetry sharpens our engagement with language, makes us rethink, rewire our relationship with words' (Ishion Hutchinson). This course will invite you to explore and rewire your own relationship with words as a poet, approaching language not as a tool to be used, but as a living intelligence to be collaborated with. With playfulness and pleasure, we will explore the possibilities of language: its sounds and rhythms, its tones of voice, its metaphors and images, and its intimate relation to the body. You will read a diverse range of work by poets including Ocean Vuong, Dunya Mikhail, Natalie Diaz and Kei Miller, and undertake writing prompts and challenges as you work towards your own portfolio of original poems — with plenty of workshop support and feedback along the way.

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### **ENGLISH 220S.02**

#### **Intro to the Writing of Poetry**

**Nate Mackey**

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

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### **ENGLISH 221S.01**

#### **INTRO TO THE WRITING OF FICTION**

**Akhil Sharma**

This course will focus on the primary elements of fiction writing: plot, character, and world building. We will both read and write short stories. All examples of short stories (science fiction, fantasy, romance) are equally welcome and will be tested under the same demands. The goal of the class is to develop sensitivity to language and to get a sense of aesthetic preferences.

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### **ENGLISH 221S.02**

#### **INTRO TO THE WRITING OF FICTION**

**JP Gritton**

In addition to composing their own pieces of short fiction, students in this class will read work by masters of the short form. These stories are lenses through which we'll explore the building blocks of narrative— character, point of view, setting, plot, voice, and so on—sometimes complementing essays on the craft. In addition to our weekly meetings, conducted in person (/via zoom when circumstances intervene), we'll maintain a robust online presence on the class's Canvas site. In addition to regular attendance, students may be asked to: post discussion questions on readings, as well as to in/formally "workshop" classmates' fiction in class and on the discussion board. In

addition to weekly writing exercises, students will submit a fully revised short story at semester's end, along with a final portfolio "letter" that articulates their revision process.

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

### **Writing the Self**

**Cathy Shuman**

How do you craft a self through writing? The semester will be spent exploring approaches to autobiographical writing, as students write preliminary drafts/exercises that will lead through workshops and revision to the production of three 6-8 page autobiographical essays. As we consider topics such as childhood and memory, the people, places, and things that make up our present selves, and the stories that have shaped our lives, we will read selected examples of published memoir and personal essay that will help us develop techniques for creating our own. No previous creative writing coursework is required for this course.

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## **ENGLISH 266S.01 American Crime: Fiction and Film**

**Michael D'Alessandro**

Public drunkenness, prostitution, arson, kidnapping, assault and battery, homicide: these are just a handful of the crimes that became increasingly prevalent in the United States during the long nineteenth century. In this course, we examine the period's novels, fictionalized confessions, and represented films that reveal a culture of seemingly never-ending vice. We trace how authors and filmmakers utilized formal experimentation to depict violent, voyeuristic scenes of crime. The course moves across Northeastern urban capitals of sin to dehumanizing Southern plantations and through the seemingly lawless Western frontier. By tracing how artists exploited and sensationalized crime, we will engage national debates regarding social class advancement, immigration, chattel slavery, and sex trafficking.

The syllabus covers short fiction by Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Chesnutt, Stephen Crane, and Annie Proulx, and modern films such as *12 Years a Slave*, *Gangs of New York*, and *True Grit*. Supplemental readings feature exposé journalistic sketches and police gazette reports, as well as secondary source readings from social and political history and film studies. In examining all our primary texts against these materials, we attempt to separate the era's real-life crimes from those existing only within the literary imagination.

No tech (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) allowed in class.

As this class is a small discussion seminar, most of our time—and at least 25% of the final grade—will focus on class participation. The other 75% will consist of weekly response posts, two medium-length papers (6-8 pages), and a short presentation.

Counts for Area II (for majors and minors), as well as ALP, W, and CCI.

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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**

### **Wakanda Forever**

#### **Tsitsi Jaji**

In 2018 *Black Panther* (dir. Ryan Coogler) broke box-office records, and it remains the highest grossing film by an African American director. It boasted a diverse cast of U.S., Caribbean, and African actors. And the music, costuming, and architecture reflected deep research into continental African cultures. The film enjoyed an extraordinary reception among global Black fans who attended the film dressed in African fabrics and adopted the crossed arms of the *Wakanda Forever* salute as a joyful greeting. The sequel, released after the death of star Chadwick Bosman, required cast and audience to navigate the difficult terrain of grief while following a narrative arc anchored in the Marvel Comics Universe's complex network of characters.

This class goes mining for vibrant insights into diasporic culture, taking the Wakanda films as a portal into new questions each week. We begin with three films directed by Coogler, *Fruitvale Station* (2014), *Black Panther* (2018) and *Wakanda Forever* (2022), taking these seriously as cinematic (not just narrative) texts. From there, we proceed to literature that grapples with how to imagine justice, ethics, governance, gender, and climate crisis. We'll cover a lot of ground -- African oral poetry, an 18<sup>th</sup> century nun's biography, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ghanaian philosophical novel, and two centuries of Black sci-fi, (from Du Bois to Nnedi Okorafor), and transformative music from *Songs of Flight* (a Duke Arts event we will attend together) to Janelle Monae. What are the distinctive capacities of each of the various genres we consider? Guest artists and lecturers, and visits to the Nasher and Rubenstein Special Collections will enrich our studies. There will be extensive weekly writing in this class, and the final project will be developed in individual consultations throughout the semester. Examples of previous projects include an article-length research paper, a podcast with annotated bibliography, or a set of paintings with artist statement.

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## **ENGLISH 290S.01 SPEC TOP IN LANG & LIT**

### **Facts: Literary, Scientific, and Political**

**Rob Mitchell**

Once upon a time, it seemed that though the *interpretation* of facts might depend upon the interpreter, “the facts” themselves were something on which everyone could agree. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt, for example, suggested that though historians might debate forever the fundamental causes of World War I, “they will not say Belgium invaded Germany,” but will have to begin their interpretations with the fact that Germany invaded Belgium. In recent years, though, the facts themselves seem fluid and unstable—a problem compounded by new technologies such as AI, which can make up compelling “evidence” (for example, deep fake photographs or videos) for pretty much anything one wishes to present as a fact. Election outcomes, the origins of pandemics, the causes of autism, the reality of global warming: on these important issues and many others, different groups hold to different facts.

This course aims to help us think through the consequences of this transformation of the idea of facts, and to consider how the idea of “fiction” relates to facts. We’ll consider different historical and theoretical accounts of facts that bring up questions such as the following: What are facts? How are facts distinguished from falsehoods? In which contexts do facts play a key role (for example, law courts and the modern sciences), and how are facts determined in each area? We’ll also consider several philosophical accounts that connect facts and “worlds,” focusing especially, but not exclusively, on Hannah Arendt’s work. We’ll consider how explicitly fictional literary texts and films, as well as the category of “auto-fiction,” help us to think about facts and their functions in social life. And we will take up a number of concepts that contest or complicate the notion of facts, such as “post-truth,” “bullshit,” and AI “hallucinations” and “confabulations.” Literary texts and films that we will consider include Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King*, Émile Zola’s *Germinal*, Justine Triet’s film *Anatomy of a Fall*, Alice Diop’s film *Saint Omer*, several film documentaries, and parts of Karl Ove Knausgaard’s *My Struggle*. We will also consider texts by Aristotle, Hannah Arendt, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, Paul Edwards, Michel Foucault, Catherine Gallagher, Bruno Latour, Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, Mary Poovey, Georg Lukacs, and Simon Shapin and Steven Schaffer.

Student work for the course consists of homework assignments for, attendance at, and participation in each class meeting; two short reflection papers; and two 5-8 page (double-spaced) papers (one due at the midpoint of the semester, and the other at the end of the semester).

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## **ENGLISH 290S.02 SPEC TOPICS IN LANG & LIT**

### **Great Poems of English Lang**

**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****Shakespeare and Film****Derek Witten**

Encounter Shakespeare's classics through the eyes of our most perceptive modern filmmakers. For each play, we begin with a thorough read and discussion of the original, feeling the urgency of Shakespeare's moral pleas and appreciating the genius of his language. We then turn to film, engaging one or two of each play's most visionary re-imaginings. Our timeline will reach from silent film to the recently concluded HBO series, *Succession* (strongly inspired by *King Lear*), and our geographic range will stretch from England to India, Japan, France, and the U.S.A. While we will gain familiarity with the classics of Shakespeare adaptation, our primary emphasis will fall on films that more freely re-conceive the spirit (and often language) of Shakespeare's original. The goal of this course is to provide you with a thorough understanding of 6–7 of Shakespeare's plays and what possibilities for artistic and ethical exploration those plays open for modern cultures.

Pairings will include the following: *Hamlet* alongside Michael Almereyda's techy and paranoid turn-of-the-century drama, *Hamlet-2000*; *Macbeth* alongside Vishal Bhardwaj's acclaimed *Maqbool*, a translation of tragedy into the Mumbai underworld; *The Tempest* alongside two loosely inspired sci-fi greats: Fred Wilcox's cult classic, *The Forbidden Planet* and Andrew Garfield's probing *Ex Machina*; *King Lear* alongside Akira Kurosawa's epic of feudal Japan, *Ran*; and *The Winter's Tale* alongside Éric Rohmer's poetic meditation on love and second chances, *A Tale of Winter*.

Evaluation will be based on several short responses, one creative project, and one major paper (8–10 pages). No exams. No prerequisites.

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**ENGLISH 290S-3.01 SPEC TOPICS IN ENG LIT MOD & CONTEMP****Contemporary Southern Lit****Jarvis McInnis**

In their acceptance speech for Best New Rap Group at the 1995 Source Awards, André 3000 of the hip hop duo OutKast, proudly declared to a crowd of primarily East and West Coast rappers: "The South got something to say!" This pivotal moment in hip hop history turned out to be quite prescient, as the last 30 years have witnessed a Black southern renaissance, if you will, in literature, music, and pop culture. This course will explore how a range of contemporary Black artists—including writers Jesmyn Ward and Kiese Laymon, pop stars Beyoncé, Big Freedia, and Lil Nas X, and TV shows *Atlanta* and *Queen Sugar*—are reimagining the US South as the site of a viable present and future for Black people, even as they continue to grapple with its tortured past of racial injustice and anti-black violence. We will examine the intricacies and contradictions of contemporary Black southern identity, not only in relation to whiteness, but to the region's fast-growing Latino/a/x population as well. Discussions will explore the intersections of race, region, class, gender and sexuality, performance, and environmentalism. Assignments (e.g., weekly discussion posts and 2-3 papers approximately 4-6 pages each) will aim to teach students how to write critically at the intersections of literature, music, and pop culture.

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

### **Fan NON-Fiction**

**Cathy Shuman**

A love letter to a novel character? A memoir in the style of a country song? An essay in the structure of a baseball game? Writing about your own writing? Students will experiment with creative nonfiction subject matter and form as they write about – and with – their favorite (or not-so-favorite) literature, visual art, music, film, tv, video games, sports, fashion, food – “art” interpreted in its broadest sense. Over the course of the semester, students will work on a series of creative exercises leading through workshops and revision to the production of around 20-25 pages of polished work. Along the way, we will read and discuss selected examples of published nonfiction to help us develop techniques for creating our own. No previous creative writing coursework is required for this course.

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## **ENGLISH 290S-4.51 SP TOPICS IN CREATIVE WRITING**

### **Poetry and Photography**

**Frances Leviston**

This creative interdisciplinary course will invite you to explore how the development of photography since the 1830s has influenced the writing of poems. Studying a range of poetic, photographic and theoretical texts, you will find new perspectives on poetry and its relationship to visual language, and develop your ability to think and write critically across artistic disciplines. You will also experiment extensively with taking photographs and writing poems of your own! The course is assessed by an essay and a creative portfolio of poems and photographs. No special equipment or technical knowledge is required for this course: we will establish the basic principles of taking photographs in the first seminars, and students can take suitable pictures using a smartphone.

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## **ENGLISH 290S-4.52 SP TOPICS IN CREATIVE WRITING**

### **Autofiction & First-Person Narratives**

**Mesha Maren**

"All art is autobiographical; the pearl is the oyster's autobiography." - Federico Fellini.

This course is your chance to dig deeply into the craft of the first-person narrative through the lens of “autofiction.” We will hone our voice-driven fiction skills while asking questions such as, ‘What is autofiction?’ Does it, as Serge Doubrovsky claimed in 1977, require absolute fealty to the “truth”? What is “truth”? How can we trust memory? What is the difference between autofiction and the personal essay? We will read a wide range of books that fall loosely under the term ‘autofiction’ (Marguerite Duras, Tao Lin, Julian Herbert, Scott McClanahan, W.G. Sebald, etc.) and attempt our own narratives, aiming for what cartoonist David Sipress calls “direct spontaneous activity of the brain reflected in the art.”

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## ENGLISH 319S.01 NARRATIVE AND MORAL CRISIS

Thomas Pfau

*Who* we are has always been closely entwined with the stories we tell and in which we see ourselves implicated, not necessarily as the protagonist but because we grasp a given story as a parable that sheds light on our very existence. Furthermore, it would seem that some type of conflict, or moral dilemma, forms the backbone of most, if not all narrative. Lastly, the very fact that we habitually tell stories suggests that what we mean by “moral crisis” is an integral feature of our



existence rather than an occasional “state of exception.” Through narrative, then, we come to understand that the moral dimension of our lives is both elusive and inescapable. Throughout the semester, we will focus on four concepts that are typically in play wherever a moral crisis is explored in narrative form: 1) **Justice**; 2) **Suffering**; 3) **Sin**; and 4) **Self-Recognition** (coupled with **Forgiveness**).

During the first half of the term, we will explore four texts that stage these moral concepts in particularly vivid ways: first, there is Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* which explores the emergence of a procedural model of justice from the debris of kin-based violence and revenge. Next comes *The Book of Job* with its puzzling juxtaposition between extreme and (seemingly) gratuitous suffering and the monotheist idea of divine benevolence and a well-ordered cosmos, so central to Old Testament narrative. We then move on to some shorter selections from Augustine’s *Confessions*, which take up notions of human sinfulness (and the enigma of free will presupposed by it). From here we move on to consider the complex links between love and forgiveness in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. – The second half of the term will be dedicated to shorter novellas and stories in which all four concepts are continually in play and explored with extraordinary psychological insight: George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* (1861); Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kreuzer Sonata* (1889); Robert Musil’s *Confusions of Young Törleß* (1906); Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947); and J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980).



**Requirements:** 3 medium-length papers (approx. 2,500 words each) – Active in-class participation – Consistent attendance and preparedness throughout the term. – Satisfies course codes EI, ALP, CZ and fulfills the CTM requirement for English majors.

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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**

**Writing the Novel**

**Amin Ahmad**

"The scariest moment is always just before you start." – Stephen King on writing a novel.

Have you thought about writing a novel, but been scared of doing it? Are you interested in learning long-form storytelling, but not sure where to start?

Writing a novel seems like a daunting task, but it is a craft that can be learned. In this class, we will learn how novelistic techniques differ from short stories. We will discuss the importance of beginnings and endings—and how to keep the reader engaged for 300-400 pages. We will learn all this by reading novel excerpts, but also by reading entire novellas (short novels), learning from them the intricate structures of storytelling. We will also discuss the impact of movies on long-form storytelling and incorporate screenwriting techniques into our work. Students will leave the class with at least 3 chapters of a novel and a full plot outline.

Class will include visits by bestselling published writers who will discuss their writing process and their publishing journeys. We will read work by authors including: Haruki Murakami, Ian McEwan, Dennis Johnson, Mohsin Hamid, Annie Proulx and Truman Capote.

This is an intensive class. Come prepared to read a lot, write a lot and expand your storytelling skills!

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## ENGLISH 338S.01

Milton

David Aers

Why would anyone want to spend a whole semester studying John Milton's writings and their seventeenth-century contexts? The answer is the extraordinary scope and utterly brilliant quality of the writing in often very demanding but exquisite poetry as well as in passionate prose. This scope includes explorations in ethics, politics and theology on topics that should still be of central concern to us. In my view the poetry often opens us to strange spheres of existence, making often provocative claims on us and perhaps making the world seem very different. At some points we will have to reflect on how, just like ourselves, Milton's views were informed by deformations in his own social and cultural world.

John Milton left Cambridge as an orthodox member of the Church of England. He died (in 1674) as one who had rejected this church, defended the execution of its governor (Charles I) and generated a theological system which included a dense cluster of positions which were startlingly "heretical" in terms not only of the magisterial Reformation but also of Catholic traditions. His unfinished treatise on *Christian Doctrine* begins with a statement which sets up the inquiry pursued in this seminar: "If I were to say that I had focused my studies principally upon Christian doctrine because nothing else can so effectually wipe away those two repulsive afflictions, tyranny and superstition, from human life and the human mind, I should show that I had been concerned not for religion but for life's well being." As both this statement and the title of this class suggest, poetry, politics and theology are inextricably bound together in Milton's work. We aim to read much of the poetry and areas of the prose that will provide a rich sense of his theological and political reflections and enable us to have well-informed discussions about the complex relations between the great poems and his evolving theology. For Milton's approaches to theology, ecclesiology and politics belong to a revolutionary moment in which unprecedented thoughts and practices emerged in the domains of religion and politics, domains inextricably bound together in the seventeenth century. The revolutionary regime Milton had served from 1649 disintegrated and the revolution to which he had been committed was defeated with the restoration of monarchy and state church in 1660. How did Milton and his writing respond to the defeat of the revolution and the restoration of Crown, Church of England, episcopacy and the attempt to suppress nonconforming groups? There has been a strong tendency in recent Milton scholarship to revise the Whig version of Milton into one that fits the narratives of secular postmodernity and some people taking this class may find it offers opportunities to interrogate some of these grand stories.

It will be helpful to read before the class begins the biography of Milton by Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought*. Anybody reading Milton's work would also benefit from some knowledge of the seventeenth century revolution in which Milton became immersed, and for this a lively introduction is Michael Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (2008); perhaps the best resource is a book by Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution, 1625-1660* (2002), especially parts 3 through 6. Some of the issues we will address are explored in Ann Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution* (2012). Because we will be reading substantial, complex works, the more Milton you read *before* class the better. The **set text** (required) is *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich and Stephen Fallon (The Modern Library). Before the first class, make sure that you have AT LEAST read (1) *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*; (2) *A Masque presented at Ludlow*, also known as, *Comus*; and (3) *Ad Patrem* (the set text includes an English translation).

### Note on grades, class format, and expectations

This is a seminar and attendance/participation is mandatory. Unwarranted absences will result in

failing the course. The grade comes from two essays (8-10 pages), which must be submitted by the given deadline to count. There will be no exams.

Please also note well: laptops and other electronic devices are not to be used in class. A seminar is a dialogic form of learning, very different to a lecture class. In my experience, laptops act as an impediment to the kinds of attention and communication I consider essential to a flourishing seminar. Also, since we will have more than enough to chew on already, please refrain from eating during class. Uses of all forms of AI should be acknowledged in footnotes to essays.

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**ENGLISH 371S.01** Studies in Classic American Literature, WWI-WWII

## **Gatsby's Great Rivals**

**Thomas Ferraro**

Those American high-school A.P. classics of the 1920s and '30s, **revisited**: Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, at the least. Whether you are reading these novels for the very first or the upteenth time, you will discover how entertaining (because smart) and dangerous (because smart) they truly are, even when dead white guys are involved (don't worry, the novels are *never* just about the anglos!).

By re-visiting these novels, I mean listening better, witnessing the dramas to the point of inhabiting them, and pondering the whole more capaciously. But that's not as hard as it sounds: for this "call" Back-to-the-Classics is issued by the inventive gender play, race-and-class savviness, and cross-media-dexterity of our 2025 moment. Indeed, the underlying proposition of *Gatsby's Great Rivals* is that it has taken us this long—nearly a century—for even the *college* classroom to catch up to the storied wisdoms of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Hurston. Indeed, even *their* seemingly exhausted elders (Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville's *Billy Budd*, or Chopin's *The Awakening* and James's *In the Cage*) should prove revelatory, as would such stepchildren as Claude McKay and Nathanael West.

What am I talking about?

One teaser, for those of you enticed by the course title. Did you know that F. Scott Fitzgerald had planned to use his short story, "Absolution," as the first chapter of *The Great Gatsby*? I am betting not and, further, that you can't possibly guess what the story is about. [Google only if you really like spoilers!] In class we will surely find "Absolution" to be a strange puzzle, at best a curiosity and at worst a distraction. But if we take enough time, we will feel it press upon the mind-expanding, heart-bustin' revelations of the novel itself—which concern love and money, yes, but only in relation both to felt sanctity and spilt blood, whose demands we need to factor together. (What revelations? I have in mind not only the main plot but also its contexts: the laundering of the Carraway family crimes, the hidden intimacy between Jewish gangsterism and WASP finance, that bad driving and those drunken-sex regrets and the wisps of pop lyrics that punctuate the novel.) I swear, you will never use the term "American Dream" again without reaching for a precise definition!

For the record: Around our seminar table, expressive quiet will supplement analytical acumen; writing assignments will be short and guided yet informal and exploratory; and grading (which it is time to re-invent or abandon altogether) will be effort-friendly, alert to varying strengths, and happily inflated.

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**ENGLISH 373S.02** Amer Lit, Cold War & After  
**Cults and American Culture**  
**Taylor Black**

**Cults and American Culture** is an American Studies course focused on the prevalence of personality cults in U.S. popular culture, beginning in the second half of the twentieth century and continuing into the present. It is presented in three parts, offering deep dives into the Manson Family, Peoples Temple/Jonestown, and more contemporary, post-Jonestown, cult movements such as Q-Anon and MAGA. We will analyze primary sources (novels, films, music, recordings of religious meetings, and other ephemera) and secondary materials that theorize and contextualize the American predisposition to extremism, cults, cult leaders, and other forms of charismatic influence.

Moving from Manson to Jim Jones and his Peoples Temple followers and then into the current MAGA/Q-Anon movements, we will mark the movement of cultic activity from the margins to the center of American life and culture. Our collective task will be to analyze and trace American narratives about personality cults. We will, in other words, take stock of the *stories* that are told about cults and cult leaders, stopping to consider not only what these stories have to say about their subjects but also what they imply about their tellers.

In addition to keeping up with our weekly assignments and participating in class discussions, students will be expected to write short response essays and submit a final project of a critical or creative nature that tries to understand why people—and Americans in particular—are so drawn to cults.

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**ENGLISH 390S-1.01** Single American Author  
**Walt Whitman**  
**Joseph Donahue**

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

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**ENGLISH 390S-1.02** Single American Author  
**Zora Neale Hurston: Race, Gender, Region, Diaspora**  
Jarvis McInnis

In this course, we will examine the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston. Though best known as a novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, she was also a trained anthropologist, who wrote and experimented across numerous literary genres and cultural media, including: novels, short stories, plays, anthropological and political essays, autobiography, sound recordings and documentary film. In addition to Harlem, Hurston traveled extensively throughout the US South and the Caribbean collecting and theorizing black vernacular culture, including folklore, music, dance, and religion. Bringing together literary, music, gender and sexuality, and performance studies, we will explore the vast range of Hurston's impressive oeuvre. Some questions we might take up include: What is the relationship between literature and anthropology in Hurston's oeuvre? How does her work converge with and depart from that of her male contemporaries (e.g., Richard Wright, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, etc.) who also wrote about black southern culture? How does she capture the unique experiences of black women in the early 20th century, and what is her significance for contemporary black feminism? Can we trace linkages between her literary, sonic and visual projects? If so, how might her work function as a model for practicing and understanding interdisciplinarity, in general, and the project of Black Studies, in particular? Assignments may include: 2-3 critical essays; weekly blogs; and a group presentation.

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**ENGLISH 390S-7.01** SP TOPICS IN LANG & LIT  
**W. G. Sebald and Bernardine Evaristo: Lives in the Long Duration**  
Corina Stan

Is there a more gratifying intellectual pleasure than immersing oneself in the entire body of work of a brilliantly imaginative, knowledgeable, and wise author? Perhaps pairing two such authors, reading them side by side, and engaging in conversation with them—in writing, figuring out what we think about their worlds, in a friendly community of research and writerly exchange and collaboration. In this seminar designed for advanced students passionate about literature, research, and writing, we are going to read most of the novels, as well as poetry and some nonfiction, by two exquisite writers who engage with themes of cultural and personal memory, history, and human life in the long duration: W. G. Sebald (1944-2001) and Bernardine Evaristo (b. 1959). While familiarizing ourselves with their (very different) sensibilities and archives, we'll piece together not only their respective literary careers, but also their conjoined, thus expanded, vision of European history, as shaped by colonialism, wars, Nazism and the Holocaust, migration, decolonization and various reckonings with the past. Sebald and Evaristo share a keen interest in visual art and have been the subjects of documentaries.

Rather than split the syllabus into two separate units, one dedicated to each author, we'll move back and forth between their creative worlds. We'll read and analyze Sebald's novels *Vertigo* (1990), *The Emigrants* (1992), *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), and *Austerlitz* (2001), selections from *After Nature* (1988) and *On the Natural History of Destruction* (1999), poems from *For Years Now* (2001), *Unrecounted* (2003) and *Across the Land and the Water* (2008). While immersed in his perambulatory texts, we'll reflect on his insights into visual art and his use of photography. Whereas Sebald's explorations are mostly continental European, Evaristo's work reflects her extended family's rich heritage (English, Irish, and German on her mother's side, Brazilian and Nigerian on her father's) as well as her interest in the African diaspora and the presence of Black people in Europe since Roman times. In addition to her novels, some of them in verse, *The*

*Emperor's Babe* (2001), *Soul Tourists* (2005), *Blonde Roots* (2008), *Lara* (1997, exp. 2009), and *Girl, Woman, Other* (2014), we'll engage with her 2021 memoir *Manifesto: On Never Giving Up*, her essay *Look Again: Feminism* (2021, on the representation of women of color in British art), and a selection of writings on the theater.

I envisage the seminar as a research group for advanced students and graduate students, in which ideally all participants will keenly engage with both authors while working on a paper or publication project on Sebald or Evaristo, either individual or co-authored, that they might submit to a conference or a journal.

Assignments: weekly reading (roughly a novel/week or equivalent) and short reflection, an oral presentation, paper/article proposal, essay (20 pages or so, depending on journal guidelines).

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## **ENGLISH 390S-7.02 SP TOPICS IN LANG & LIT**

### **Language, Gender, and Sexuality**

**Dominika Baran**

Language reflects, enacts, reproduces, and challenges sociocultural identities and ideas surrounding gender and sexuality. This course explores these relationships from the perspective of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, including seminal theories and studies and most recent work at the forefront of the field, emphasizing work by scholars representing racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, and different national and linguistic backgrounds. We will tackle such questions as: How does the way we talk about gender and sexuality contribute to social ideas and stereotypes? Does enforcing language change, e.g. pronoun use, help to implement social change? How have ideas about gender and sexuality changed over time, and how is this reflected in language? How can we respond to binary approaches to language and gender that focus on differences between men and women? How are gender and sexuality experienced and expressed differently across cultural and linguistic contexts? What are the discursive implications of intersections among gender and sexuality on one hand, and race, ethnicity, social class, and age on the other? How are the meanings of the very concepts of "gender" and "sexuality" being contested and challenged today? Students will be evaluated on class projects, presentations, and papers. Class material will include academic texts, and examples from media and everyday life. Students will have the opportunity to suggest topics to explore and to lead class discussion.

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## **ENGLISH 4201S.01 ADVANCED WORKSHOP IN WRITING OF FICTION**

### **Prose Narratives of Fiction and Fact**

**JP Gritton**

As its title implies, writers of both *fiction and nonfiction* are welcome to enroll in this upper-level workshop. Building on concepts outlined in introductory and intermediate non/fiction workshops, students will focus on producing excellent prose for their next audience: short stories, personal essays, and book chapters 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 writing that straddles the line between fiction and nonfiction. How have writers like Bernardo Carvalho (*Nine Nights*) utilized fact to enrich fiction? How have writers like Javier Marias (*All Saints* and *Dark Back of Time*) embroidered their lives with fiction? How have writers like Marguerite Duras (*Practicalities*) blended fiction and fact into a tapestry of existence? As we study and learn from the work of these authors, and as we hone our own writing, we seek to complicate an easy understanding of what

separates the two genres. This is a face-to-face class: in addition to our weekly meetings, we'll maintain a robust online presence on the class's Canvas site. For those unable to attend in-person meetings, alternative/asynchronous assignments and readings may be made available, among them: posting discussion questions on readings, as well as informally "workshopping" classmates' fiction on the discussion board.

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**ENGLISH 590S-3.01 Special Topics Seminar III**  
**Writing for the Public**  
**Marianna Torgovnick**

Writing for the Public aims to merge the academic skills you have already learned at Duke or elsewhere with an experimental or creative spirit. We will begin with a series of exercises to help discover your voice as a writer: something unique and unmistakable that can elevate a standard academic style or allow for separate projects as a writer.

As suits the interests and ambitions of the group, we will then turn to a number of basic things to know about writing for the public, putting together lists of available venues for publication and how to navigate them. We will probe the different protocols and requirements for online and in-print publication and their very different timelines.

As the semester develops, if it suits the group, we'll talk about the functions of agents and editors and how to contact and communicate with each, as well as practice writing actual pitches that can and have produced concrete results. Most of all, we will help you evolve the writing project or projects that meet your needs *right now*, at whatever level (Duke coursework, Honors Thesis, MA essays, doctoral or post-doctoral work). Your instructor has substantial experience with productive writing groups, and we will workshop our work in that spirit.

Previous iterations of this class produced accepted conference paper proposals and papers for delivery; memoirs and a photo memoir accompanied by substantial text; collections of poems; proposals for dissertations on their way to becoming book proposals. I cannot promise those results but can certainly try.

Are you ready?

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**ENGLISH 590S-4.01 SPECIAL TOP CRITICISM/THEORY/METHODOLOGY**  
**The Novel after the Internet**  
**Aarthi Vadde**

Scholars of the novel have long understood it as a baggy monster – capable of absorbing high and low genres into its evolving shape. The genre developed and reached the height of its influence during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries as cheap print and growing literacy rates (mass reading) increased access to books. But where does the novel stand now in a contemporary media ecology driven by the mass forms of writing and image-making associated with digital culture? Can the twenty-first century novel formally contain the roiling seas and endless rabbit holes of the Internet or is that not its representational role in our post-Web 2.0 world? This course will center on a subset of contemporary fiction that is self-reflexive about the novel in its relationship to the internet or, to be fancy, the sociotechnical conditions under which today's novels are produced, circulated, and

received. Such fiction asks what the novel is *for* and whether it is still capable of illuminating zones of experience that other genres cannot.

“The Novel after the Internet” can mean many things, but some questions that we will discuss in class include: how is the form of the novel changing in light of the proliferation of Big Data, machine learning, and computational thinking? How has the rise of social media and user-generated content changed the novel’s efforts to capture everyday life? What does having an “authentic voice” mean after living under constant practices of self-display and against the horizon of a “post-truth” society? How can subgenres of the novel (e.g. autofiction, *Bildungsroman*, dystopia, etc.) mediate ethical and political questions raised by the global rise of “Big Tech” and generative AI? Possible novels: Rachel Cusk, *Outline* trilogy; Ayad Akhtar, *Homeland Elegies*, Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments*, Jennifer Egan, *The Candy House*; Sheila Heti, *Alphabetical Diaries*; Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*, Lauren Oyler, *Fake Accounts*; Vauhini Vara, *The Immortal King Rao*. Criticism and theory by the likes of Zahid Chaudhari, Kris Cohen, Kate Crawford, Harry Frankfurt, Rene Girard, N. Katherine Hayles, Mark McGurl, Megan O’Gieblyn, John Durham Peters, Rita Raley, Shoshana Zuboff, others. Paper options will include one long seminar paper (20-25 pages) or two shorter conference-style papers (10-12 pages).

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#### **ENGLISH 590S-5.01 SPECIAL TOP SEMINAR DIVERSITY**

##### **African Poetry**

##### **Tsitsi Jaji**

In 2001 Jahan Ramazani noted that “the achievements of postcolonial poets have been strangely neglected.” The course addresses this neglect, focusing on African poets from 20th and 21st centuries. We will primarily read Anglophone poets, but questions of language and translation will be essential as we consider what “counts” as African poetry in various institutional settings. We will begin with Isidore Okpewho’s influential study of oral poetry and myth, and then move chronologically through a set of weekly readings likely to include négritude, the Mbari workshop in Nigeria and poetry’s place in the African Writers Series famously published by Heineman press from 1962-2003, Southern African protest poetry, the impact of the African Poetry Book Fund’s initiatives, and the rise of spoken word, festivals, and digital platforms. Students will have an opportunity to participate in the research process for the first anthology of criticism on Africa poetry, which the instructor is co-editing, and all student labor or contributions will be acknowledged in the final publication. This is an introductory-level graduate class, open to advanced undergraduate majors by permission. No particular background knowledge is expected. Assignments will consist of weekly response papers, annotations of critical essays, an in-class presentation, and a final research paper (6000 words).

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#### **ENGLISH 590S-5.02 SPECIAL TOP SEMINAR DIVERSITY**

##### **Black Archival Imagination**

##### **Chris Ouma & Khwezi Mkhize**

What do we mean when we invoke the idea of a Black Archive? What are the conditions, genres and modes of expression through which Black life, imagination and desire become legible? These questions complicate how we understand the concept of the archive. This course will engage with a range of archival material that includes the Robert A Hill papers on Marcus Garvey and the UNIA at Duke, documentaries and creative filmic narratives from Arthur Jafa and John Akomfrah, a novel by

Yaa Gyasi, poetry by M NourbeSe Phillips, photography from Zanele Muholi, 'digilittle' magazines like Jalada and sonic curatorial platforms such as the Pan-African Space Station. A key objective of the course is to deploy these genres as methodological interventions in understanding what a Black archive could mean. Classroom engagement will entail close readings of primary and secondary texts, conversations with archivists and invited speakers, screenings, listenings and visitations of both paper and digital archives. Students will be expected to write short reflective essays inspired by or based on archival research and engagement with the theoretical debates about Black archives.

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## ENGLISH 890S.01 SPECIAL TOP SEMINAR

### Shakespeare, Tragedy, Philosophy

Sarah Beckwith

**A first aim** of this class will be to explore Shakespearean tragedy as a "lethal attempt to deny the existence of another as essential to one's own." So tragedy in Shakespeare's handling turns out to explore acknowledgment as the home of our knowledge of others and of ourselves. This class explores Shakespeare's tragedies as a set of meditations on the costs of denying that we share language. Why does this idea become compelling and attractive right then? How is such a denial so much as possible? We will focus on Shakespeare's late tragedies (*King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*), as well as *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. We will also ponder the tragic matrix of comedy in plays such as *Much Ado About Nothing*, as well as those plays that begin as tragedies but turn aside from that form: *The Winter's Tale*, and possibly *The Tempest* if we have time.

**A second aim** of the class, and closely connected with the first, is an exploration of ordinary language philosophy (Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell) in relation to theatre. I see a natural affinity between the practices of theater and the practices of ordinary language philosophy because each practice is committed to examining particular words used by particular speakers in particular situations. Each practice understands language as situation, which is different from "context" because sometimes we only understand the context when we understand what it is that is being said. Ordinary language philosophy makes the very radical claim that we will fail to understand what something means until we understand what it does, until we understand the force of the words used on any particular occasion as, say, entreaty, command, order, suggestion, permission, request, prayer. Each practice understands language as act, as event in the world, and so asks us to extend our conception of the work of language beyond the work of representation, the chief focus of historicism old and new.

We will read some central essays of J.L. Austin, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, and especially Part 4 of Stanley Cavell's work: *The Claim of Reason: Skepticism, Morality, Acknowledgment, Tragedy* where we will attempt an exploration of the intimacy of these four terms to each other. This will help us explore tragedy's work between "avoidance and acknowledgment."

This class should be of interest to anyone interested in exploring Shakespeare, tragedy as a genre, theatre, ordinary language philosophy and ethics, and performance studies. Generally speaking I will be assigning more reading than we can usually read in detail in class every week. Each week we will read some Shakespeare and some Cavell and these will be the focus of the class, but I will also assign some optional extra reading which will always complement the Shakespeare and Cavell texts. Please bring a copy of the [Philosophical Investigations](#) and [The Claim of Reason](#) to every class in addition to whatever other material is assigned for reading. I don't like electronic devices of any



kind in class, so please make other arrangements for the duration of this course for note-taking, reading etc.

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## ENGLISH 890S.02 SPECIAL TOP SEMINAR

### Poetry and/as Theology

Thomas Pfau

#### *“Poetry & Theology II – T. S. Eliot”*

This seminar will trace the evolution of T. S. Eliot from about 1910 to 1945 from a young symbolist poet into a public intellectual, from a reluctant modernist into a chief representative of Anglo-Catholic culture, and from a diagnostician of modernity’s “dissociated sensibility” into the quasi-mystical poet of *Four Quartets* (1943), arguably the most concentrated and profound theological poetic statement in Twentieth century anglophone literature. Our readings will cover most of major poetry (from “Prufrock” to *Four Quartets*), as well as a substantial selection of his extraordinarily wide-ranging prose writings (essays, lectures, reviews, short commentaries, etc.). These materials will be flanked by a number of critical essays and chapters shedding light on Eliot’s evolution and, in the later part of the course, by selections from Julian of Norwich, John of the Cross, and François Fénelon, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, and Bernard McGinn.

Though he has long been considered a key figure in Anglo-European Modernism, Eliot broke early on with the secular and immanent aesthetic programs of his modernist peers (Pound, Woolf, Lewis, Russell, et al.). Instead, starting with *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot’s poetry and prose develop a far more expansive, pan-European and increasingly religious perspective. Following his 1927 conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, Eliot becomes consumed with reimagining political and religious community and with discovering and retrieving potentialities within the English language suitable for that purpose. As he charts his asymptotic trajectory vis-à-vis the liberal-secular-naturalist creeds held by most of his contemporaries, Eliot’s poetry and prose is profoundly informed by a religious and theological (specifically mystical) outlook. Starting with “Ash Wednesday” (1930) and always guided by a scrupulous sense of Anglo-Catholic ritual and the multiple forms of religious speech (prayer, confession, penance, *lectio divina*, etc.), Eliot’s poetry charts the region between meditation and contemplation, between searching speech and mystic silence.



In developing this understanding of poetry’s ultimate purpose, Eliot rejects modern humanism’s proposed cure for deracinated and despairing, modern life, such as I. A. Richards and Irving Babbitt outline them during the 1920s. For Eliot, such a palliative, “religious rear-guard action,” cannot succeed because it merely tries “to preserve emotions without the beliefs with which their history has been involved” (“The Use of Poetry”). At the same time, he dismisses home-spun mythologies such as those of Blake or Yeats as “but a highly sophisticated lower mythology summoned, like a physician, to supply the fading pulse of poetry with some transient stimulant so that the dying patient may utter his last words” (*After Strange Gods*).

What most distinguishes Eliot's fusion of poetic and religious contemplation is his capacious and dynamic understanding tradition. It informs Eliot's astonishing range of reading and, in the poetry after 1930, a host of deeply considered and subtly embedded allusions to literary, religious (esp. mystical) writing, and Scripture. Of supreme importance among Eliot's literary precursors is



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Dante, whose insistent presence and crucially enabling role within Eliot's poetic oeuvre will be an enduring concern for us. Other voices and genres significantly bearing on Eliot's literary formation include medieval mystery plays, Julian of Norwich, the Anglican Divines of the seventeenth century, the metaphysical poets, particularly Donne and Herbert, and the French Symbolists.

Our exploration is greatly aided by three landmark publications: first, there is Christopher Ricks' definitive edition of Eliot's published and unpublished poetry; second, Ronald Schuchard and others have recently completed an 8-volume edition of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot* (available online at Duke Libraries through Project Muse); and, finally, there is the still ongoing but by now well-advanced publication of Eliot's complete letters. All of these projects allow us at last to take the full measure of Eliot's wide-ranging and robust engagement of historical scholarship and current debates in theology, philosophy, literature, and social thought.

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**ENGLISH 890S.03 SPECIAL TOP SEMINAR**  
**African American Experimental Writing**  
**Nathaniel Mackey**

A study of poetry and fiction by African American writers pursuing alternative approaches to form, content, style, coherence and meaning inside the literary work and outside it. The period covered is the 1960s to the present. The authors read for the course are Amiri Baraka, Jayne Cortez, Renee Gladman, Erica Hunt, Bob Kaufman, William Melvin Kelley, Clarence Major, Harryette Mullen, Claudia Rankine, Ishmael Reed, Ed Roberson and Fran Ross.

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**ENGLISH 890T.01**  
**Article Writing**  
**Kathy Psomiades**

This is a workshop for advanced graduate students in English who want to work on writing an article for publication. Ideally, you'd have something—a conference paper, a dissertation chapter, a paper from coursework—that you'd like to turn into an article. You and your dissertation committee should be in agreement that this workshop is a good use of your time at this point in your graduate career. We'll be working our way through Wendy Belcher's *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks (2nd edition)*. We'll also be making use of Eric Hayot's *Elements of Academic Style*. You'll be workshopping your article, as well as various exercises from Belcher and Hayot, and you'll be giving feedback to others about their articles as well. We will meet every week for the standard 2.5 hours. You'll need a permission number from me to sign up.