

Duke English Department Course Descriptions  
SPRING 2023

**ENGLISH 89S.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**  
**BLACK SPIRITUALITIES AND LIT**  
**Jarvis McInnis**

Black Spiritualities: Conjure in African American & Caribbean Literatures

Known variously as conjure and hoodoo in the United States, vodou in Haiti, obeah in Jamaica, and Santería in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, African-derived religious, spiritual, healing, and magic practices survived in the Americas despite slavery's inordinate brutalities and consistent efforts to eradicate them. Bringing together writers from the United States and the Caribbean, this course will explore how enslaved Africans and their descendants retained and remade their knowledge of the supernatural world as strategies of resistance and agency, healing and survival. Reading across a range of literary genres—including the southern gothic, magical realism, and historical fiction—as well as anthropology, we will mobilize conjure (and its Caribbean variants) to chart a hemispheric conception of African Diaspora literature. Readings include works by Charles Chesnutt, Zora Neale Hurston, Alejo Carpentier, Gloria Naylor, Maryse Condé, and Erna Brodber, among others. The course will also include representations of conjure in film and television such as Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* and Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. Some questions we may take up include: What is the sociopolitical function of conjure in African Diaspora literature and culture? How are these practices gendered in the tradition? How does conjure converge with and/or depart from Judeo-Christian religious practices and notions of Western rationality? What alternative epistemologies and ontologies emerge from the space and practice of conjure?

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**ENGLISH 90S.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN LITERATURE**  
**MYTHIC WOMEN**  
**Jane Harwell**

Myths from antiquity (ancient Greece and Rome) feature stories of many women: powerful women, wronged women, vengeful women. Characters such as Dido from the Virgil's *Aeneid* (a forsaken queen), Circe from Homer's *Odyssey* (who turns men into pigs), and Philomela from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (who escapes her kidnapper and transforms into a nightingale) remain huge figures in literature and the arts broadly. The class "Mythic Women" will pursue a few of these original myths as they change forms into poetry, prose, philosophy, and graphic novels throughout time and various literary traditions. Why do these women loom as largely as the myth itself? Further, how does the re-telling of such mythic women create new ways of interpreting the original, or even new ways of interpreting the more contemporary work?

This class will be divided into two sections. The first part of the semester begins by reading the source texts and tracing retellings. Such retellings occur in Shakespeare, the eighteenth-century poetry of Anne Finch and Phyllis Wheatley, contemporary novels such as *Circe* by Madeline Miller and *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, and even *Wonder Woman*, as examples. Students will then choose their own mythic woman and research a retelling.

Our class writing will similarly reflect retelling as we shape our own ideas with different audiences in mind, developing one idea across various mediums. Students will be expected to write a blog or a creative project (equal to 2-4 pages written assignment), a close-reading (5-7 pages), and a final research essay (8-10 pages). Just as we focus on retellings, our class writing practice will center on

the editing process. Students are encouraged to pursue one myth or idea and communicate it across different mediums, altering the writing style to reflect different audiences as well as sharpening their argument along the way.

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

### **HUMAN NATURE IN AMERICAN LIT**

**Ejuerleigh Jones**

Are you an addict? Aren't we all? In the last several years, terms like "screen addiction" have begun floating around as social media engagement has become obsessive and binge-watching a neverending list of shows on a neverending list of streaming services is now the norm. Netflix offers an entire page dedicated to "Bingeworthy TV Shows" (RIP Downton Abbey). On Reddit, users bond over classics and promising new additions on threads like "What is your most addicting show?" YouTube search "digital detox" for an eternal scroll through TedTalks and 30-day challenges. Essentially, our cultural understanding of addiction and what it means to be an addict is expanding as social scientists and neurologists argue digital technology as a powerful instrument of addiction. What are the consequences to ourselves and others? To what extent are we responsible?

In this course, addiction is just one of the themes we'll explore as we investigate the extremes of human nature in American literature of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Other themes include grief, compulsion, obsession, moral angst and moral apathy. Our guiding questions are: What does it mean to be human? Is there a universal understanding of human nature that transcends across time and place? We will read texts such as: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" which offers a controversial take on addiction, crime, and personal responsibility. Plagued by grief for most her life, Emily Dickinson's poems and letters reveal a relatable frustration with the figure of a benevolent God. In *12 Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup provokes angst through an unexpected moral challenge. The role of confession in "The Minister's Black Veil" (Nathaniel Hawthorne) illustrates the compulsion to reveal our inner ourselves to others. We will examine the tensions between social mobility and moral identity in novels like *The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald). Alongside novels, poems, and short stories, we'll read historical documents like letters and periodicals to get a sense of the real-life daily experiences of nineteenth and early-twentieth century Americans.

Assignments are designed for students to deeply engage the thinking process inherent in writing and to assist them in developing their own style and voice. These include:

1. Short, informal writing responses due weekly
2. 5-pg. midterm essay with an in-class peer review workshop
3. 7-pg. final essay with an in-class peer review workshop

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

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

**Thomas Ferraro**

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, Michael Herr, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Richard Rodriguez.

PREREQUISITES: an appetite for risk, a willingness to dig in, and that extra something.

INVITATION/WARNING: I know that English 101 fills a requirement, which produces an allergic reaction to all and sundry, even the majors! More damaging still, it is a clear that--thanks to high-school pedagogy, not to mention the current cultural climate--the pendulum has swung back to certain whispered assumptions about "English": above all, that it is a touchy-feely enterprise of dreamy subjectivity for those without the brains or the gumption to do the real stuff. But let me say, at the risk of sounding defensive: Dream on. As former President Brodhead reminds us, almost every single American winner of the Nobel Prize in the Sciences of the last 25 years began

intellectual life with an undergraduate Liberal Arts degree heavy on English. Now is the time to start wondering, what am I missing?

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## **ENGLISH 101S.02 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 – skilfully 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 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.

Our explorations and investigations of theatre will focus on Antigone in Greek and South African variants: Sophocles *Antigone*, and Athol Fugard, *The Island*.

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## **ENGLISH 101S.03 THE ART OF READING**

### **UTOPIAS & DYSTOPIAS IN AM LIT**

**Michael D'Alessandro**

From *The Hunger Games* to *The Handmaid's Tale* to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, American culture has become saturated with visions of speculative "other" societies. But why exactly have utopian and dystopian stories become so central to our national landscape? How can so-called utopias allow specific populations to thrive while so many others fail? Moving from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day, this course examines the genre through social, cultural, and political lenses. We investigate traditional examples of utopias and dystopias--from planned communes to

futuristic authoritarian regimes--at the same time that we test the boundaries of utopian and dystopian definitions.

Throughout, we ask critical questions of the utopian and dystopian genres, such as: how have speculative futures illuminated fears around changing economic structures, gender dynamics, and race relations? In what ways do utopias and dystopias offer insight into ideals of individualism and fears of conformity? What aspects of United States history have unfolded as real-life utopias and dystopias? Finally, how distinct are the concepts of utopia and dystopia?

Fiction and film lie at the center of our exploration, but we also engage theatrical dramas, television shows, and cultural criticism. Texts include Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives*, and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. Film screenings include David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report*, Bong Joon-Ho's *Snowpiercer*, and George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Evaluation consists of a series of short essays, one oral presentation, a final research essay, and class participation.

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

This course will introduce you to the three dominant genres of creative writing: poetry, non-fiction, and fiction. We will focus primarily on the sonnet, the profile, and the short story. There will be a writing assignment each week and sometimes every day. The course is intended to develop sensitivity to language and form. The hope also is that you will have fun.

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**ENGLISH 110S.03**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING: NARRATIVES**  
**JP GRITTON**

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

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**ENGLISH 110S.04**  
**INTRO CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Faulkner Fox**

This course gives students an opportunity to explore and practice four genres of creative writing<sup>¾</sup>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 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 208S.01 CRITICISM AND THE ARTS**  
**THE ART OF SUSPICION**  
**Thomas Ferraro**

We live in suspicious, even paranoid times, and as the old saying goes, “just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they aren’t out to get you.”

I happen to know where to go for help, given that Literary Theory and Criticism has been dominated by the interpretive strategy of paranoia—a.k.a, “the hermeneutics of suspicion”—since the late 1970’s. A fancy phrase, yes. But you may already be familiar with its tacit assumption, namely that all instances of established cultural expression—especially the canon of “great” literature—harbor invidious ideologies and con the reader into false ontologies. A literary work is, ipso facto, *guilty*, all the more so when its oppressive operations are surreptitious. The reader’s mandate is to burst the bubble of aesthetic enchantment and get at the secreted nasties: “thou *must* interrogate! expose! demystify! take umbrage! and subvert!”

In this version of “Criticism and the Arts,” we will double-down on the art of suspicion. We will ask, where does it come from? (Wikinote: Marx, Freud, Nietzsche.) Why has it been so charismatic? (Meta-wicked-smart, elitist-cliquish, and ultra-politically-righteous: what’s not to like?) And how should we move beyond it? (By turning suspicion against itself? By “just letting that s— go”? Or even, paradoxically, by leaning ever the more fully into it?)

In pursuit of these questions, we will learn the pleasures and limitations and paradoxes of *critique*, how to practice *critique* ourselves and how to critique the practice of *critique*, especially as it promotes and troubles those once-and-future hot-button topics of gender and sexual liminality, racial and class and colonialist retrenchments, consumerist virtuality and performative simulation. We will let works of critical theory teach us, but we will mostly learn by means of the texts that tutored *critique* in the first place—that is, from fiction itself, especially the great reflexive tales of American Romanticism: Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil,” Melville’s *Billy Budd*, Larsen’s *Passing*, James’s *In the Cage*, West’s *Day of the Locust*, and Hansen’s *Mariette in Ecstasy*. With Romantic reflexivity, texts such as these entrap readers in the “discourses” they are investigating—only to induce exhilarating analyses of overdetermined complicity, liberating recognitions of self-in-other (if not shattering recognitions of other-in-self), and ex-static intimations of the demonic-cum-divine. As we read and ponder, the critical hallmarks of *cynicism*, *denial*, and *despair* will conjure their veritable opposites: “*wonder, reverence, exaltation, hope, epiphany, and joy*,” in Rita Felski’s enumeration: those very states of admiration and affirmation that *critique* was designed to annihilate. Trust, anyone?

Phew! The good news is that, despite the complexity of this description, the seminar will be structured first to last as an *introductory* course, presuming no previous exposure to critical theory or even an interest in the English major. (Note to perospective return customers: I, for once, *will* go slow and *will* explain.) All you need in advance is a bit of self-knowledge—that you enjoy reading stories and thinking big thoughts in concrete manifestations, both fashionable and not.

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**ENGLISH 220S.01**  
**INTRO TO THE WRITING OF POETRY**  
**Mesha Maren-Hogan**

I invite you to come and play with words with me. In this class, we will explore poetry's sonic, rhythmic, and visual elements while reading deeply and broadly. The most important thing you can bring along with you is curiosity and, of course, a love of language.

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**ENGLISH 221S.01**  
**INTRO TO THE WRITING OF FICTION**  
**Mesha Maren-Hogan**

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

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

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

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

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**ENGLISH 221S.02**  
**INTRO TO THE WRITING OF FICTION**  
**Akhil Sharma**

Writing fiction requires grappling with certain fundamental technical questions: how to make characters sound different; how to move through physical space and also through time; what is the



underlying “present” that a past tense narrative is based on. This course will use many different writing exercises to help sensitize you to the underpinnings of fiction.

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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 7-9 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 235.01 SHAKESPEARE  
SHAKESPEARE: NOW & THEN**

**Sarah Beckwith**

Shakespeare’s astonishingly experimental romance *The Winter’s Tale* has sponsored a fascinating series of literary, philosophical and cinematic reflections. This seminar examines the afterlives of *The Winter’s Tale* as “the book of second chances”. We will examine together the winter’s tales of Jane Austen (*Persuasion*), George Eliot (*Daniel Deronda*), Eric Rohmer (*Contes d’Hiver*), Kate Atkinson’s *Life after Life*, Almodovar’s *Volver* and *Talk to Her*, as well as the stunning films of the Dardennes brothers (*The Child*, *The Son*). None of these works are adaptations of Shakespeare; rather they are meditations on the themes of reconciliation, romance, time, wonder, childhood and change, (re)-marriage, and the power and possibilities of art that his play sponsors or initiates. What narrative possibilities are engendered by *The Winter’s Tale*? How do such possibilities morph across the philosophical forms of novel and film? And what thoughts do such works sponsor for thinking about the relation between ethics and the arts? This seminar will grant us the opportunity for a long and loving look at Shakespeare’s greatest play, and an ever deepening encounter with it in the work of a fascinating range of novelists and film-makers.

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**ENGLISH 246.01  
JANE AUSTEN  
Charlotte Sussman**

This course will trace the development of Jane Austen’s writing and ideas through her major novels. Some of the issues we will examine include: the relationship between economic structures and personal happiness; the nature and value of “family life”; women’s “education” and the construction of femininity; and the innovative effects of Austen’s use of irony and free indirect discourse. We will also spend some time comparing Austen’s views and style to previous versions of the “the witty couple,” and thinking about her place in the history of women writers. Finally, we

will consider Austen's enduring fascination for our own culture. Course requirements will include short response papers, two short critical papers, and a longer final paper.

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**ENGLISH 282S.01 MODERNISM & THE ARTS**  
**EUROPEAN MODERNISM ACROSS THE ARTS**  
**Thomas Pfau**

**Overview:** This course will introduce you to modernist literature, music, painting, and some (early) cinematic works. We will concentrate on the emergence of modernism and on what's commonly referred to as "High Modernism," with the course covering works from approximately 1860 to 1930. Alongside major writers such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, T. Mann, Joyce, Kafka, Rilke, Musil, Eliot, and Woolf, we will also study a few representative figures of musical modernism (Wagner, Mahler, Schoenberg, Scriabin, Stravinsky), as well as major shifts in the visual arts, ranging from symbolism to and post-impressionism, cubism, abstract expressionism, and surrealism (Manet, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, Klimt, Schiele, Kandinsky, Grosz, Beckmann, Legèr, Chagall, and Dali).

**Structure:** Our explorations will be divided into three sections: 1) Towards Modernism: Symbolism & the Unraveling of Bourgeois Life, 1860-1905. – 2) Early Modernism: Dissociation & the Terrors of Adolescence, 1900-1922. – 3) Visualizing and Writing the Modern Metropolis, 1918-1933. The last section will also have us study some silent films from the 1920s.

**Requirements:** Consistent attendance; active participation in discussion; careful preparation of all assigned readings; and 3 writing assignments. In your written work, you'll be exploring a variety of genres, including a review essay (on a series of artworks or a musical composition), an attempt at intermedial analysis aimed at connecting a visual or musical artwork to a specific literary form and, finally, a critical essay on a single work of your choice.

**CCI, ALP, CZ**

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**ENGLISH 289.01**  
**AMERICA DREAMS AMERICAN MOVIES II**  
**Marianna Torgovnick**

This course studies contemporary American movies as they create and reflect America's self-image from the rise of independents through the innovations of the 21st century, including digital video, streaming, and the rise of high-quality TV productions. Approaches include U.S. cultural history, industry developments, and technical analysis. Directors such as Kubrick, Coppola, Spielberg, Tarantino, Lee, Moore, Cameron, Campion, Jenkins, Bigelow, Peele, Du Vernay, and others up to today. At least two weeks of the semester will be devoted to TV, such as Game of Thrones, The Americans, or Watchmen. Like the film and TV industries themselves, assignments encourage creativity and collaboration.

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**ENGLISH 290-7.01 SP TOPICS IN LANG & LIT**  
**MASTERPIECES OF WORLD LIT**  
**Victor Strandberg**

If you are quite certain that you plan to stay in this course, it would be an advantage for you to obtain the textbooks before the term begins. Accordingly, I am sharing with you my decisions concerning the curriculum. A more detailed syllabus will be provided when we meet at our first class.

The first thing to do is to get hold of a **Bible**. Any version will do, though I favor the King James version, originally published in 1611, because of its immense influence on writers in English during the last four centuries. (Examples: Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, and Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*—titles drawn from the KJ Bible.) Hint: this Bible is often available for free in any hotel room.

I am planning to begin the course with a series of assignments in whatever version of **the Bible** you bring to class, including *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *The Book of Job*, *The Gospel of Luke*, *The Book of Revelation*, and assorted brief selections along the way.

To save money, I am asking students to purchase the following books via Amazon.com (Amazon Books) or other such sites online. It is greatly desirable that we all have the same editions. The list:

1. **The Bhagavad-Gita** (Signet Classics edition, Introduction by Aldous Huxley)
2. **Dante: The Inferno** (Signet Classics edition, translated by John Ciardi)
3. **Shakespeare: Othello** (Signet Classics edition, edited by Alvin Kernan)
4. **Greek Drama: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes** (Bantam Classic, edited by Moses Hadas)
5. **Montaigne: Essays** (Penguin Classics, translated by J. M. Cohen)

In addition to Dante's *Inferno*, two stories by Chaucer will represent the Middle Ages: *The Prioress's Tale* and *The Pardoner's Tale*. To save money, I plan to download these tales from the Internet and distribute paper copies to each student.

If it all works out, we will study works from three ancient civilizations (Greek, Hebrew, Hindu), two medieval masters from Italy and England (Chaucer, Dante), and two giants of the French and English Renaissance (Montaigne and Shakespeare). I am planning to have three exams and one or two term papers. There will be no three-hour final exam.

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**ENGLISH 290S.01 SP TOPICS IN LANG & LIT**  
**BLACK SPECULATIVE FICTION**  
**Carolyn Benack**

Speculative fiction imagines the possibilities of the world—whether it is what the world could look like in the future, in an alternative past, or if populated by zombies. In doing so, it also provides a powerful description of the real world, capturing something about our lives that feels deeply true yet hard to articulate. Works of speculative fiction always show us two worlds: the one on screen or on the page, and the one we, the readers and viewers, live in.

That doubleness—the experience of living in two worlds—is also a familiar way writers describe Blackness in America. As W.E.B. DuBois famously wrote: “One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” Writers from Frantz Fanon to Toni Morrison have echoed this sense of “twoness,” indicating that DuBois’s description remains relevant to this day.

This course explores Black writers’ use of speculative fiction to depict the worlds that are and those that could be. We will survey literature and film that contain elements of, among others, science fiction, magical realism, and horror, from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. Our aim is to understand and articulate the insights Black speculative fiction writers offer into the strange workings of our existing world and the alternatives they allow us to imagine.

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**ENGLISH 290S.02 SP TOPICS IN LANG & LIT**  
**ECOPOETICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**  
**Sharon Kunde**

Ecopoetics: Versification in the Age of Climate Change

Writers have long turned to poetry as a uniquely expressive medium for exploring the complex relationship between the human and the nonhuman. But how do poets begin to write about nonhuman nature in the Anthropocene, an era defined by a rapid human-driven transformation of the planetary ecosystem? What tools can poetry offer for thinking through, addressing, and enduring the changes already well underway?

Poets and literary scholars have begun to use the term *ecopoetry* to describe a subgenre of contemporary nature writing engaged with the myriad issues to which climate change has given rise. Works in this genre often assume complex and ambitious stances: they eschew an anthropocentric (human-centered) perspective, for example, or they contend with the ugly material and economic conditions that make the leisured enjoyment of nature possible in the first place. In addition, they often embrace an activist agenda, aiming to unsettle, terrify, awaken, rile up, and inspire.

In this course, we will develop a working definition of ecopoetry, exploring the ways in which the subgenre seeks to transform its readers and the world. In addition, we will experiment with the forms of the genre, producing a class anthology of poems. Primarily exploring a range of late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries American ecopoetry, we will take some excursions into

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writing for context. The course will include writers such as Julianna Spahr, Natalie Diaz, Camille Dungy, Jake Skeets, Lucille Clifton, Ada Limon, Jorie Graham, Craig Santos Perez, Joy Harjo, Ross Gay, Terrance Hayes, Monique Alleweart, Joyelle McSweeney, Francisco X. Alarcon, John Shoptaw, and others. Writing for the class will include critical analyses as well as options for research and creative writing.

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**ENGLISH 290S-1.01 SP TOPICS MEDIEVAL/EARLY MODERN  
RENAISSANCE COMEDY  
Julianne Werlin**

This class will introduce some of the most entertaining and enduringly popular works of English and European literature: Renaissance comic plays, including works by Shakespeare, Jonson, Aphra Behn, Moliere, and others. We will consider how these playwrights skillfully use and reimagine distinct varieties of comedy, including wit and wordplay, character-based humor, black humor and irony, farce and physical comedy, and others. We will also examine how actors and directors perform and stage comedies to appeal to the audiences of their own era.

Codes: ALP

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**ENGLISH 290S-2.01 SP TOPICS 18TH & 19TH CENTURY LIT  
AMERICAN CRIME, 1800-1914  
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 silent films—as well as modern-day films and criticism—that reveal a culture of seemingly never-ending vice. We trace how authors and filmmakers utilized formal experimentation to depict violent, nearly pornographic scenes of crime. The course moves across Northeastern urban capitals of sin to dehumanizing Southern plantations and through the often lawless Western frontier. By tracing how artists exploited and sensationalized crime, we will engage national debates regarding social class advancement, immigration, slavery, and sex trafficking.

The syllabus covers short fiction by Edgar Allan Poe, Louisa May Alcott, and Stephen Crane, early silent films including *The Great Train Robbery* and *Inside the White Slave Traffic*, and modern films such as *12 Years a Slave*, *The Wild Bunch*, *Gangs of New York*, and *The Assassination of the Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. 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. Evaluation consists of online response posts, two mid-length formal essays, and an oral presentation. Also, as this class is a discussion seminar, most of our time (and a sizeable percentage of the evaluation) will focus on class participation. No prerequisites necessary.

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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 – “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 20-30 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-4.03 SP TOPICS IN CREATIVE WRITING**

### **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. Recent examples we will study include *Pass Over* by Antoinette Nwandu and *Pipeline* by Dominique Morisseau. We will also watch and study several classic political plays like Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*.

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 script with the help of classmates who will read roles as the script progresses. In addition, students will write weekly creative responses to produced plays. Class discussion will be divided between focus on student work-in-progress, produced plays, and playwriting craft. Students will also work in small groups, meet with alumni readers, consultants at the Writing Studio, and individually with me.

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## **ENGLISH 321S.01 INTERMEDIATE WORKSHOP WTG OF FICTION**

### **WRITING ALTERNATE REALITIES**

**Amin Ahmad**

Detectives, Robots and Talking Frogs: Writing Altered/Alternate Realities

As children, we live in worlds that combine reality and fantasy, but as we grow older, we lose that ability. Perhaps that is why we are drawn to fiction that creates new realities. In this class, we will

explore fiction that alters existing reality, or creates an alternate one: Hardboiled/ noir detective fiction, magical realism, dystopian fiction, fantasy and science fiction.

Reading like writers, we will analyze each genre to understand how it creates a new but authentic world, and how it draws upon existing archetypes and story structures.

We will then explore those understandings through in-class writing exercises. Students will ultimately write three full short stories in different genres, and workshop them in class.

This is an intensive class--come prepared to read a lot, write a lot, and to experiment with your writing.

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**ENGLISH 373.01 AMERICAN LIT, COLD WAR & AFTER  
PERSONALITY CULTS  
Taylor Black**

Drink the Kool-Aid: Modern American Cults of Personality

Following the violent insurrection attempted on the US Capitol in January 2021 by Donald Trump's devotees, it is hard not to think of the nation as under the spell of a kind of maniac cult leader. The nation is, in its current state, standing at kind of political crossroads, this time teetering between fascism and democracy. Those of sitting on the sidelines are, once again, drawn into the contemporary trainwreck play out on the national stage, thinking that we are not *they*, but in fact, *they* are expressing our disavowed desire to escape both chaos and constraint. Despite our perceived wisdom regarding figures such as Trump or Q being "unprecedented," the historical popularity of personality cults running through the nation's history and folklore shows that it has been preparing for this moment from the very beginning.

"Drink the Kool-Aid" attempts to contextualize the events of January 6<sup>th</sup> as the latest in a series of dramatic explosions of violent cultic activity. To sort this out, this course revolves around three such events in the ongoing drama of cultic belief in modern America: the Manson Family, Reverend Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple (Jonestown) and MAGA/Q-Anon. We will analyze texts that tell stories about cults; our interest will not only be in how the cult appears to the outsider looking in but how the outside world appears from the perspective of the cult believer themselves. We will find these in fiction, film, journalism and primary source material from inside these cults.

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**ENGLISH 390-5.01 SPECIAL TPCS IN GENRE  
SOUTHERN ACCENTS  
Taylor Black**

Southern Accents: Music, Sound, and Literature of the U.S. South  
Instructors: Taylor Black (English) and Sophia Enriquez (Music)

This course explores musical and literary traditions from across the American South. In doing so, we argue that "the South" is not a monolith and aim to show how southern musical and literary traditions of South are diverse and complex. This course is co-taught with professors from Music

and English and will be approached in an interdisciplinary way. We will consider how literature can be musical and how music can be literary.

Course materials will include readings, audio recordings, film, and podcasts and range from historical to contemporary examples. Our discussions will feature a variety of texts such as literature, music, dance, art, food preparation, rituals, religious practices, and varying views of gender and sexuality. Students will be asked to investigate, interpret, and assess these differences in a way that helps them make sense of shifting Southern cultural landscapes.

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**ENGLISH 390S-1.01 SINGLE AMERICAN AUTHOR**  
**ZORA NEALE HURSTON**  
**Jarvis McInnis**

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: RACE, GENDER, REGION, DIASPORA

This course examines the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston. Though best known as a novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston was also a formally trained anthropologist, who wrote and experimented across a range of literary genres and cultural media, including: novels, short stories, plays, anthropological essays, political essays, autobiography, sound recordings and documentary film footage. In addition to Harlem, she spent a considerable part of her career traveling throughout the US South and the Caribbean collecting and theorizing black vernacular culture, such as folklore, music, dance, and religious expression. Bringing together literature, music, gender and sexuality studies, and performance studies, this course will explore the vast range of Hurston's impressive oeuvre. Some questions we will 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, and Langston Hughes) who also wrote about black culture in the US South? How does she represent gender, and particularly black women's experiences, in her work, and what is its significance for contemporary black feminism? How do Hurston's depictions of "the folk" defy conventional understandings of black modernity? How does the emphasis on the US South and the Caribbean in her work offer an alternative geographic framework for exploring questions of diaspora? Can we trace linkages between her literary, sonic and visual projects, and if so, how might this function as a model for practicing and understanding interdisciplinarity and, more specifically, the project of Black Studies?

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**ENGLISH 390S-1.02 SINGLE AMERICAN AUTHOR**  
**EMILY DICKINSON**  
**Joseph Donahue**

This seminar on the life and times on one of the foremost lyric poets in world literature, Emily Dickinson. We read the entirety of her published work in the order of, to the degree scholars can determine, its composition, which is between roughly the late eighties to her death in 1886. For all the mastery of syllables, phrase, cadence, and visionary psychology, Dickinson's work cries out for a cultural context, which as a member of an elite and ambitious family was richly available to the poet. Dickinson, in short, as recent scholarship has amply demonstrated, was deeply attuned to the intellectual concerns of her day, especially in the realms of art, politics, and theology, and such



sciences as geology and botany. However much her lyrics give the fullest voice in the English language to states of ecstasy and despair, they also draw on the world around her, and our reading of her letters and poems sets her poems deeply in the culture from which they arose, a culture that given its deep roots in American Protestantism and in the Civil War, remains of vital interest to the contemporary moment, as two recent full length films exploring the life and legend of Emily Dickinson attest.

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**ENGLISH 397S-.01**  
**NARRATIVES OF MIGRATION**  
**Dominika Baran**

Migration is a journey, and a journey makes for a story. Whether it is a story of dreams and successes, of struggling with physical and emotional challenges, of traumatic pain suffered by refugees from war-torn regions, of mixed emotions that accompany discovery and loss, or of some combination of these, the story of migration is always captivating because it touches on things deeply important to all of us as humans: home, family, belonging, identity. In this course, we will explore narratives, or stories, of migration, as told by refugees and immigrants from across the world, through different media: written, spoken, photographed, constructed digitally on social media. Narratives as texts are of great interest to a number of disciplines, including literature, cultural studies, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and sociology, because studying them allows us to examine how people make sense of their lived experience. This course approaches narratives of migration primarily from the perspective of sociocultural linguistics and discourse analysis, but we will refer to other scholarly traditions as well, such as literary criticism and cultural studies, to explore the interdisciplinary nature of narrative research. Throughout the course, we will also think about different ways of defining a narrative, about what distinguishes it from other forms of discourse or other types of texts, and about new forms that narratives can take in the age of globalization and in the multimodal, translocal contexts of social media.

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**ENGLISH 420S.01**  
**ADVANCED WORKSHOP IN WRITING OF POETRY**  
**Joseph Donahue**

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

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

You won't find *Gone Girl* or *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the "Romance" section of a bookstore--in fact, you probably won't find either of these novels anywhere near it. And yet, each makes use of the conventions and tropes of a romance novel to tell a certain kind of story, slant: "If I was bound for

hell,” writes Jean Rhys in her feminist prequel to Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, “let it be hell. No more false heavens. No more damned magic. You hate me and I hate you. We’ll see who hates best.” In this advanced fiction seminar, we’ll supplement weekly writing activities and our writers workshop with a deep dive into a neglected sub-genre: *the anti-Romance*. How have writers like Oyinkan Braithwaite and James M. Cain employed the conventions and tropes of the Romance to surprise, delight, and horrify their readers? As we study and learn from the work of these authors, and as we hone our own writing, we seek to answer bigger questions: can the conventions of the Romance, or of any genre, serve not only as helpful reference points, but also as points of creative departure, for writers struggling with form and structure? Only students who have taken an Intermediate Fiction workshop are eligible to enroll, unless they can obtain a recommendation from faculty members familiar with their work.

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**ENGLISH 490S-10.01 SPECIAL TOPICS IN CRITICISM/THEORY/METHODOLOGY  
CONFESSIONALISM/AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
Savannah Marciezyk**

Confessionalism & the Philosophy of Autobiography

Who do you tell your secrets to—your friends, or your finsta followers? What value does truth have when it comes to expressing our personal experiences? In this course we’ll investigate these questions by examining literature from a philosophical perspective. The goal will be to learn how to read literature by exploring concepts in philosophy, and how problems in philosophy can be illuminated by literature. We’ll begin by considering works from philosophers like Noël Carroll and Marya Shectman about narrative, the stories we tell ourselves about our lives, and whether we can trust our own memories. Our literary works will serve as case studies, and will include poetry from the Confessional school, tell-all memoirs like Elizabeth Wurtzel’s *Prozac Nation*, controversial works like James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces*. We’ll also consider works of autofiction to understand how autobiography is present in literature today.

Assignments will include short analytical papers, original poems in the Confessional style, and a final project containing philosophical analysis of literature. Options for the project include an original memoir and reflection, or a critical essay on an autobiography or memoir.

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**ENGLISH 590S-2.01 SP TOPICS SEMINAR  
THE ENLIGHTENMENT  
Julianne Werlin**

A survey and assessment of major texts of the European Enlightenment in light of recent -- and not-so-recent -- interpretations and critiques of the era and its values. Primary texts will include writings by Bacon, Locke, Rousseau, Diderot, Voltaire, Wollstonecraft, Spinoza, Vico, Herder, Smith, and others, with a particular emphasis on works that span or synthesize fiction and philosophy or engage in storytelling or myth making. Approaches to this era, which we will also subject to

analysis, will include interpretations of the Enlightenment in relation to capitalism (Horkheimer and Adorno; Wood); colonialism and slavery (Mills, Scott), religion and secularization (Israel), and book history (Darnton, Bell), among others. Along the way, we will consider the vital question of whether there was one Enlightenment or many, and examine how ideas traveled to widely varying social and intellectual contexts, changing in the process.

Codes: ALP, CCI, R

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### **ENGLISH 590S-3.01 SP TOPICS SEMINAR III**

#### **WRITING FOR THE PUBLIC**

**Marianna Torgovnick**

In most Duke courses, you are taught and encouraged to write in standard academic styles with the usual forms of documentation and that's fine, and good. This course taps other potentials and possibilities in critical writing that seeks a larger audience to engage the mind in a style that delights and shimmers as it communicates knowledge. The model has a long history that includes figures like Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Margaret Mead, Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe, James Baldwin, Edward Said. Continuing up to today, one thinks of figures like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Louise De Salvo, Henry Louis ("Skip") Gates, Anthony Appiah, Jill Lepore, Wayne Koestenbaum, Te-Nahisi Coates, and Jesse McCarthy. We will read and study examples of essays by such writers, with an eye to content, methodology, and style. The course will include classes on these and similar writers but will feature group writing exercises and workshop sessions in which we write, workshop in writing groups, and share reactions.

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### **ENGLISH 590S-3.02 SP TOPICS SEMINAR III**

#### **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 increased access to books. But where does the novel stand now in a contemporary media ecology driven by 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 digital media. This fiction asks what the novel is *for* now and whether it is still capable of illuminating zones of experience that other genres are not. "The Novel after the Internet" can mean many things, but some questions it designates here: how is the novel form 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?

We will read works of so-called autofiction that thematize and defamiliarize the formal devices of the novel (such as character, plot, and narrative voice); novels that theorize and sometimes try to

reproduce the feelings and experience of being online as a new form of “everyday life”; computationally-driven projects that extend and appropriate the novel form. Possible novels: Rachel Cusk, *Outline* trilogy; Ayad Akhtar, *Homeland Elegies*, Patricia Lockwood, *No One is Talking About This*; Lauren Oyler, *Fake Accounts*, Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*, others. Criticism and theory by the likes of Mikhail Bakhtin, Zahid Chaudhari, Kris Cohen, N. Katherine Hayles, Lilli Irani, Mark McGurl, C. Thi Nguyen, John Durham Peters, others.

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**ENGLISH 890S.03 SP TOPICS SEMINAR**  
**POETRY AND/AS THEOLOGY II**  
**Thomas Pfau**

**Poetry & Theology, Part II**

In this second part of our seminar, we will explore the relationship between poetry and theology from 1922 to 2004. Readings in the second semester will explore works of lyric poetry and prose writings of T. S. Eliot and Czeslaw Milosz in relation to issues in theological aesthetics and philosophical theology either contemporary to the authors or part of their intellectual and spiritual inheritance and formation.

Following the cataclysm of World War I, a remarkable surge in post-liberal theology coincides with the period of high modernism, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Barth’s *Römerbrief* and Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (both published in 1922) constituting the ground zero for these developments. Eliot’s passage from *TWL* to *Four Quartets* coincides with his wide-ranging work as essayist, reviewer, and editor of *The Criterion* – with numerous essays focusing on the reorientation of post-WW I theology, ecclesiology, and the role of literature in relation to these shifts. During the two decades from 1922-1943, Eliot’s extensive work as reviewer and editor of *The Criterion* (1922-1939) finds him engaging the work of leading theologians and intellectuals (John Middleton Murray, Irving Babbitt, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson, C. S. Lewis, Karl Barth, Christopher Dawson, among many others).

Born a generation later, Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004) begins his career as a published poet (in 1931) with a series of short poems that not only exhibit a remarkably cogent moral imagination but also reflect on the perennial threat of Polish Catholicism being coopted by a rising tide of nationalism and anti-Semitism in Poland during the 1930s. Having already sparred with his hardline Thomist teachers in school, Milosz’s evolution as a poet is characterized by a gradual (though never uncritical) rapprochement with the Catholic intellectual tradition culminating in his translations of several books of the Old and New Testament. Concurrently, his poems and essays often focus on heterodox Catholic thinkers (Pascal, S. Weil) even as Catholicism continues to play a steadily growing role in Milosz’s attempts to balance his century’s catastrophic history against ineluctable and inescapable moments of beauty.

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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* (2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

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**ENGLISH 996.01**  
**TEACHING COLLEGE ENGLISH**

Provides graduate students in the English department with pedagogical training in the teaching of college-level composition and English department courses. Open only to English department graduate students in years 4 and above. Department consent required.