

# SPRING 2018

## Department of English

### Course Descriptions



#### English 90S.01 Special Topics in Literature: The (In)Glorious Bastards of Fiction, from Shakespeare to *Game of Thrones*

Robert Tate

Let me give you some advice, bastard. Never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not. Wear it like armor, and it can never be used to hurt you.

- Tyrion Lannister to John Snow – *Game of Thrones* – Season 1, Episode 1

In the history of fiction, the figure of the bastard is typically cast as the villain. But even when the character proves to be an evil bastard indeed, s/he resists any simple picture of villainy. Their ‘evil’ is the kind that troubles us, provoking us to ponder what evil is, where it originates. Their status as outcasts urges us to confront what in our culture and in ourselves casts others out. And at their most seductive and sympathetic, we glimpse in their stories ‘the rise of the antihero.’

We will read a host of narratives—pre- to post-modern, on the page, stage, and screen—with particular regard to those who are (or claim to be) disregarded. We will track how bastards, in word and in deed, challenge their cultures’ visions of nature, legitimacy, and liberty. And inasmuch as they are children of inequitable societies, we will probe the limits of parental and filial accountability. The works we will study express divergent and, at times, disturbing responses to these concerns. Nevertheless, each stages an encounter with the difficult realities of other people, in other positions than one’s own. Each is in some way investigating the conditions for justice and for love, with the sense of this being a search for the possibility of community.

Course requirements: active participation in discussion, two 5-page essays. We will devote time in class to practicing multiple aspects of close reading, annotation, composition, and revision.

Possible works include Shakespeare, *King Lear*; Milton, *Paradise Lost* (selections); Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*; Shelley, *Frankenstein*; Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*; Weiner, *Mad Men*; Benioff & Weiss, *Game of Thrones*. **Note: I hope to collaborate with students during our first class on finalizing these selections, along with the reading/viewing schedule!**

## English 90S.02 Special Topics in Literature: Snakes and Players: From Don Juan to Don Draper

Rachel Gevlin

“Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,  
'Tis woman's whole existence.”

– Lord Byron, *Don Juan*

“What you call love was invented by guys like me to sell nylons.”

– Don Draper, *Man Men*

Although almost 200 years separate Lord Byron and the screenwriters of *Man Men*, our fascination with the figure of the womanizer has not dwindled with time. And yet, we continue to be equally enthralled with the Mr. Darcys of literature – men whose patience and fidelity mark them as epitomes of the “romantic hero.” Where do these categorizations come from, and how have they evolved, both over time and across genres? Why are figures like Mr. Darcy still appealing to readers and viewers today, and would Darcy have captivated audiences in the same way a century earlier?

In this course, we will examine the figure of the male protagonist in love (or trying to be) and the many forms this can take. Through an exploration of both male- and female-authored novels, short stories, poetry, drama, and television, we will consider the effect that different interpretations of masculinity have had on seduction and marriage plots. Taking into consideration the social and historical circumstances that surround constructions of romantic masculinity, we will also reflect on how these notions continue to impact our present-day understanding of what it means to “be a man” – and to be a man in love. Primary texts may include: John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, selections from Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and short stories by Ernest Hemingway, John Cheever, Alice Munro, and Junot Diaz. In order to see how cinema reinterprets the male figures in these works for contemporary audiences, we will watch film adaptations of some of these texts, as well as episodes of *Mad Men*, *Broad City*, and *The L Word*.

Assignments will include regular responses to the reading that will both help foster class discussion and build towards the students' two essays (5-7 pages each, with drafts) over the course of the semester. No exams.

## English 90S.03 Special Topics in Literature: Spy Fiction Brendan Higgins

Perhaps no figure embodies the twentieth century more than the spy. Spies are at once crucial geopolitical actors and objects of fantasy and fear. The US, for one, has seen waves of paranoia about the dangerous and disloyal living among us: Japanese Americans during World War II, communists during the Cold War, and Muslims today, to name just a few examples with serious consequences. This course will investigate the perennial fascination with espionage through the lens of spy fiction. What are the features and tropes of the genre? How do fictional spies shape the way we think about politics in the present and recent past? What can the figure of the spy teach us about nationalism, citizenship, and ideology?

We will ask these and other questions through close consideration of novels, film, and television. Beginning with one of the first ‘literary’ examples of the genre, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, we will then move into the Cold War context, analyzing works from both the West (e.g. John Le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*) and the Eastern Bloc (e.g. Soviet television series *Seventeen Moments of Spring*). We will end the semester with contemporary cultural objects, such as Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel *The Sympathizer* and episodes from television shows like *The Americans* and *Deutschland '83*. Students will write occasional short, informal response papers, one 5-7 page essay, and an 8-10 page final research paper. No exams.

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## English 90S.04 Special Topics in Literature: American Bestsellers Myles Oldershaw

Thousands of novels are published in the U.S. each year - what are some that have most fascinated twentieth-century readers? And what might these books' popularity reveal about the society that found them so engrossing? These are the questions that underpin this class, which will study a series of bestsellers from across the last century. The books we read will vary widely in topic, setting, and genre: from the science fiction of Kurt Vonnegut to the social realism of Edith Wharton; from the wild west of John Steinbeck to the deep south of Maya Angelou; from the office drudgery of Sloan Wilson to the post-apocalyptic horror of Margaret Atwood.

We shall read these works closely, paying attention to the plot, structure, and social context of each. We shall also consider the popular reception of each: what is it that made these books so successful? What thematic or formal qualities attracted readers in such high numbers? Our goal is to think deeply not only about the ways in which these particular works address and illuminate their culture, but also about bestsellers and literary taste more generally – the common characteristics of popular works, the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ writing, and the rival views about literature’s function. By the end of the class, students will have become adept at analyzing these subjects, and well-acquainted with the celebrated authors whose books populate the syllabus.

Students will be evaluated in various ways. There will be a number of short writing assignments and two papers. Particular attention will be paid to writing, with the opportunity for collaborative editing and revision – the aim is to ensure that students improve their ability to both analyze texts and formulate ideas about them, and their ability to express these ideas in writing.

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**English 90S.05 Special Topics in Literature: Mystery and Detective Fiction: Sex and Secrets in Mystery Fiction from *Sherlock Holmes* to *Harry Potter***  
**Gregory Brennen**

This course traces the intersecting themes of sexuality and secrecy in mystery fiction from its nineteenth-century formations through its contemporary reincarnations. Why are secrets at the heart of so many novels and other cultural forms? Does literature make detectives of its readers? How do different cultures and literary genres define what must be kept secret? How have the discourses of secrecy surrounding sexuality changed—is sex still, as it arguably was for the Victorians, the consummate secret? In exploring such questions, we’ll aim to crack the case of why mystery fiction has been and remains so compelling to readers and viewers.

As we conduct our investigation, we’ll read, discuss, write about, and think with a few popular, formally innovative, and self-consciously sensational mystery novels. We’ll begin with a Victorian proto-detective novel and end with *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. In between, we’ll explore texts ranging from the classic detective stories of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie to twenty-first century crime fiction. We’ll also consider shorter examples from a range of genres and media, which may include

episodes of *Sherlock*, the podcasts *Serial* or *S-Town*, and brief excerpts from Michel Foucault and Sigmund Freud. Grades will be based on seminar participation, two short essays, and a final essay or creative project. No exams. First-years and non-majors welcome.

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**English 110S.01 Introduction to Creative Writing: Cooking up Poems, Stories, and Short Plays**  
**Melissa Malouf**

Inspired by my current students’ avid interest in snacks, in this course you will read and write in a variety of genres about food. I’ll invite you to imagine, for example, a contemplative poem about the sign at the cupcake shop downtown (which we’ll visit): “Frosting Fixes Everything.” Or a story about pancake soufflé (which we’ll make together). Or a short play set in the kitchen. Not to mention food for thought. Expect to participate in bringing snacks to class—one small package of your favorite pretzel, or a leafy piece of celery will do just fine—about which we’ll do writing exercises as you practice the basics of creative writing.

I’ll also be asking you to write brief entries in journal form about the readings, noting what you take away from them *as a writer*. For the most part, the reading assignments will be available to you online.

Your grades will be based on your preparation and participation, as well as the quality and effort you put in to your written work.

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**English 110S.02 Introduction to Creative Writing**  
**Joseph Donahue**

The goal of the course is to introduce students to the history and practice of literary art in the twentieth century. Reading assignments will offer for inspection the models that have informed twentieth and twenty-first century writing practices, many of these models are, paradoxically, quite ancient: spells, chants, curses, prophecies, letters, hallucinatory visions, dialogues, rants, riddles, character studies, allegories, instructions, satires, graffiti, lists, reveries, dream transcriptions, and prayers. Lectures will provide background about what we are reading, and about the traditions that inform the literature of this century. The course proceeds from the premise that a sharp sense of literary history is critical to the development of any serious writer. Lectures will provide background about what we are

reading, but the greater part of the class will be a workshop format: the writings of class members distributed to the class, read to the class, and analyzed by the class. Students are expected to compose a portfolio of works and to keep a notebook, both of which are to be submitted at the end of the term. Students will be expected to read closely, to acquire an overall grasp of key conventions of modern writing, and participate in discussions. Further, students will be expected to investigate the texts towards which their writing leads them. Our main focus will be on the traditions and practice of writing, and on developing both a critical and a generous approach to each others' work.

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### **English 110S.03 Introduction to Creative Writing** **Brenna Casey**

This course is designed to give students an opportunity to practice and explore three genres of creative writing: fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Part of the class will be devoted to peer critique of student work ("workshopping"), and part to discussions of craft and close reading of published essays, stories, and poems. There will be weekly writing assignments—both creative and critical—and students will also submit a final portfolio of finished work.

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### **English 184S.01 Readings in Genre: Gothic Fiction and Film** **Leonard Tennenhouse**

This class will ask why a literate public who prided itself on its modernity developed such an enduring appetite for gothic fictions and films. How did advances in modern science, the expansion of empires, and the growth of an information society feed this appetite? What aspects of daily life tend to take on gothic qualities and under what conditions? We will address these questions by examining how selected works of fiction and film challenge and perhaps anticipate changes in established notions of the self, family, nation, and world. Readings may include Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, short stories by Poe, Hawthorne, and Wilde, Stoker's *Dracula*, James's *Turn of the Screw*, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Whitehead's *Zone One* and such films as *Nosferatu*, *The Birds*, *Heathers*, and *Serial Mom*.

### **English 184S.02 Readings in Genre: Utopias and Dystopias in American Literature**

**Mike 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 manifestoes, autobiographies, theatrical dramas, and television shows. Texts include Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives*, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, 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, two oral presentations, a final research essay, and class participation.

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### **English 186.01 Readings in Genre: Southern Grotesque** **Taylor Black**

"Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one." —Flannery O'Connor

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

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

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

We will consider depictions of the South in fiction (novels, plays and short stories), music (country, blues, bluegrass, gospel), film and television. This evolving character analysis of the region will tend toward the fantastic, terrible and estranged. With this in mind, your assignments will help you develop strategies for understanding and writing about forms of representation that are, in and of themselves, uncanny and highly stylized.

Students enrolled in this course will be expected to participate in class discussion and to complete three short (5-7 page) essays. Potential authors: Truman Capote, William Faulkner, Cormac McCarthy, Flannery O'Connor, Edgar Allan Poe, Tennessee Williams. Potential films: *Deliverance* (1979), *Wise Blood* (1979), *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1997), *George Washington* (2000), *Winter's Bone* (2010).

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### **English 204.01 English Historical Linguistics** **Julie Andresen Tetel**

This course covers the entire history of the English language from its origins as an Indo-European language (5000 B.C.E.) to the present. In the first half of the course, we focus on the causes and principles of language change, investigating phonetic, syntactic, and semantic change from Indo-European to Old English (450-1100 A.D.) and on to Middle English (1100-1500 A.D.). In the second half of the course, we shift emphases to understand the phenomenon of language variation as we chronicle the

spread of English(es) around the globe that began with the Renaissance. The second half of the course is, thus, concerned to understand the social and political conditions in which the varieties of English in the world today have developed. Exams: Midterm; Final. English 204 is not open to students who have taken English 208.

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### **English 220S.01 Introduction to the Writing of Poetry** **Nathaniel 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 Introduction to the Writing of Fiction** **Michelle Dove**

Fiction is a powerful lens to view the world—and ourselves—through different perspectives. If we approach the short story as an iceberg—where the invisible is just as important as what's plainly there—we begin to see how the craft of a story takes on its own meaning and significance. When do we write a word or infer it? When do we show a scene or give our readers just enough to imagine it? The choices we make as writers do more than propel a narrative forward. In this class we will read and write short stories and workshop our original work as a class. Along the way we will discuss how modern fiction writers engage the writing process and read essays and interviews to expand our understanding of fiction and how it interacts with “truth.” Grades will be based on class participation, discussion, weekly writing prompts, workshop submissions, and a revised final portfolio.

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### **English 222S.01 Introduction 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 interweaving stories and ideas that have shaped our lives, we will read selected examples of self-writing that will help us develop techniques for creating our own. No previous creative writing experience is required for this course.

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### **English 271.01 Classics of American Lit: 1915-1960: American Radiance** **Thomas Ferraro**

"American literature is distinguished by the number of dangerous and disturbing books in its canon--and American scholarship by its ability to conceal this fact." —Leslie Fiedler (Missoula, October 13, 1959)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, reputedly the most Puritan-besotted writer of America's Puritan-obsessed canon, makes an appearance--at least his words do--in, of all things, a terrific episode of our belated mafia melodrama, The Sopranos. The Hawthorne we encounter in The Sopranos would seem to be that specialist in the consummately Calvinist terrors of masquerade and self-division: "No man can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude without finally getting bewildered as to which may be true." But the episode in question--when chief mobster Tony takes his daughter on a New England college tour--features a would-be adulterous priest, a communally sanctioned revenge plot, female complicity in male-on-male violence, and the metaphysics of Evil's daughterly issue. Now where have we seen those narrative conceits before? I have in mind of course Hawthorne's very own The Scarlet Letter, a novel or, to be more precise, a Romantic novella, featuring a diva-class sexual adventuress whose notorious act of transgressive love is at once reproductive and redemptive, a false buddy team of village divine and his pagan avenger locked in a tangle of stalking, persecution, and self-flagellation, and the projected specter of a Protestant Godhead so intent on punishment that the only ideas of "confession" He will abide are communal humiliation and face-to-face abjection. Now what's up with that? The stunning truth is that Hawthorne borrowed from the treasure-trove of Southern Italian storytelling--cuckoldry, the predator parson, vendetta, bedeviled children at risk, and the omerta--to produce not only a Protestant moralistic turn on the classic Northern European adultery novel but also--if in coy indirection or even (to come full circle) panicked self-denial--the greatest sexual revenge narrative of 19th century America.

Clearly, what I am describing here is not your mother's The Scarlet Letter--it is not even my mother's Scarlet Letter--yet this Pagan Catholic reading of the novel breathes new life into the first and still most canonical of all American tales: resurrects it as it were, responsive to emergent 21st century wisdoms--having to do with race and sexuality, sanctity and violence, the interplay of imperial Calvinist heritage and syncretic religious dissent--yes, but also shedding light to an astonishing degree on the evidentiary detail and emotional pulse of Hawthorne's conflicted story. I have a couple of dozen such readings up my sleeve from which to choose no more than nine, interweaving warhorses of the postwar white boys' canon (Billy Budd, The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises), the most revered of the multicultural neo-canon (Chopin's The Awakening, Cather's Professor's House, Larsen's Passing, Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, West's Day of the Locust), and outliers of an insidiously magical sort (Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware, Claude McKay's Banjo, Ron Hansen's Mariette in Ecstasy), with a few films (The Wizard of Oz, Some Like it Hot, Blue Velvet) referenced for queerer measure.

ALL are invited, by the way, whether these novels have gotten to you--or not!

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### **English 288.01 America Dreams / American Movies** **Marianna Torgovnick**

A survey course in selected American films that create as well as reflect American national identity. Through lectures, weekly screenings and students; oral reports, we will study a dozen of the best-loved movies in our popular culture, from THE GOLD RUSH, KING KONG, and IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT to SINGIN' IN THE RAIN, THE GODFATHER and WALL-E. We will examine how these movies, their directors, and their stars, came to define American mythologies in the twentieth century and how they have collected over time iconic resonance. Attention as well to genre, form, technique, and Hollywood's history.

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**English 290-7.01 Special Topics in Language & Literature: American Literature Since 1960**  
**Victor Strandberg**

A study of selected American fiction and (to a lesser extent) poetry from 1960 to the present. Within the time limits imposed by the semester, we shall include a wide range of ethnic, racial, geographic, and gender diversity in the syllabus, while at the same time choosing—so far as the instructor can determine—only first-rate literature. Reading assignments include assorted poems (TBA) and the following novels: John Updike, *The Centaur*; William Styron, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*; Toni Morrison, *Sula*; Joan Didion, *A Book of Common Prayer*; Cynthia Ozick, *The Shawl*; Joyce Carol Oates, *You Must Remember This*; and Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*. Several books by Duke colleagues in Creative Writing will be added. Examinations: Three hour-long exams and a terminal (open book pass/fail) quiz. There will be no three-hour final exam. Term papers: One term paper of 6-8 pages, on any topic relating to one or more of the writers in this course.

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**English 290S-1.01 Special Topics in Medieval / Early Modern Lit: Game(s) of Thrones: Medieval Literature and Popular Culture**  
**Jessica Hines**

Winter is coming—and with it, the ideal time to consider popular culture's obsession with the medieval world. From George R.R. Martin's titillating *Game of Thrones* to the mythical world of C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, popular culture imagines and re-imagines the medieval. Why? What imaginative possibilities does the medieval world hold for contemporary authors and their readers?

In order to better understand why fantasies of the Middle Ages have increased in popularity, we'll read medieval texts alongside contemporary poetry, novels, and critical theory. One of the goals for this course will be to consider what popular re-imaginings and perceptions of the Middle Ages suggest about the political and ethical commitments of our own time period. As such, we'll consider HBO's adaptation of *Game of Thrones* in relation to Sir Thomas Malory's epic tale of King Arthur, *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Alongside the novels of C.S. Lewis, we'll read the philosophy of Edward Said as well as the medieval Arthurian legend *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Possible additional texts might include: Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, the crusade romance *Richard Coeur de Lion*, J.

R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and excerpts from the philosophical works of Eve Sedgwick, Frantz Fanon, and Michel Foucault. No exams. No prerequisites.

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**English 290S-2.01 Special Topics in 18th and 19th Century Lit: American Crime: Theater, Fiction, Film, 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 throughout the long nineteenth century. In this course, we examine many of the period's plays, novels, and silent films that reflected a culture of seemingly never-ending vice. Our discussions center on how these different media affected specific groups of consumers. Playwrights, fiction writers, and filmmakers all utilized formal tools exclusive to their respective medium when depicting violent and nearly pornographic scenes of crime. The course moves across Northeastern urban capitals of sin to brutalizing Southern plantations and through the often lawless Western frontier. By tracing how artists exploited and sensationalized crime, we engage national debates regarding social class advancement, immigration, Native American removal, slavery, and sex trafficking.

The syllabus covers plays including W.H. Smith's *The Drunkard*, Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, and Clyde Fitch's *The City*; novels such as Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods* and Frank Norris's *McTeague*; short stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Louisa May Alcott, and films including *The Great Train Robbery* and *Inside the White Slave Traffic*. Supplemental readings feature exposé journalistic sketches, police gazette reports, and theater reviews as well as secondary source readings from social and political history and performance studies. In reading 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 a series of short essays, two oral presentations, a final research essay, and class participation.

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**English 290-04.01: Special Topics in Creative Writing: Flash Nonfiction**  
**Cathy Shuman**

Experimenting with creative nonfiction style, tone, and structure, in this class we will explore the challenges and opportunities involved in making brevity the soul of wit. Over the course of the semester each student will gather material for, draft, workshop, revise, and polish a series of six flash nonfiction pieces of 600-800 words each, using a variety of assigned approaches. Along the way, in-class writing exercises and published examples of flash nonfiction will provide inspiration and ideas. No previous creative writing experience is required for this course.

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**English 321S.01 Intermediate Workshop in the Writing of Fiction**  
**Joseph Porter**

There is no course prerequisite. Students will complete a minimum of thirty pages of short or long fiction, and have this work discussed intensively in class. We will explore traditional and experimental techniques and procedures, as well as how to see work into print. Fiction writers at all levels of expertise are welcome, to learn from each other.

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**English 333.01 Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales**  
**Jessica Hines**

The medieval poet Geoffrey Chaucer occupies a unique place in the history of English literature. It was only a few short decades after his death that other poets began to refer to him as the “Father of English Poetry,” attributing to Chaucer the seminal work of creating and shaping the English literary tradition. But what does it mean to call Chaucer the “Father of English Poetry”? And what was so groundbreaking about his work?

In order to understand the nature of Chaucer’s poetic innovations, this course will engage in an in-depth study of his poetry with a particular emphasis on his early works, including *The Book of the Duchess* and *Anelida and Arcite*, and his incomplete masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*. We’ll read his tale of knightly combat and tragic love, *The Knight’s Tale*, studying it as one of the earliest “tragedies” written in English. We’ll analyze the alchemical *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale* as an early meditation on scientific pursuit and invention. And we’ll enjoy the satire of *The Pardoner’s Tale*, which asks its readers to reflect on what makes a story—and its teller—

“good.” As a way of understanding what might (or might not) be groundbreaking about Chaucer’s work, our readings will be supplemented by brief considerations of his sources and contemporaries including texts by Boethius, Christine de Pizan, and Dante Aligheri.

This course serves as an introduction to Chaucer and to medieval literature; students need not have prior experience with the Medieval or with Middle English—the particular form of English in which Chaucer wrote. We’ll spend the first few class sessions finding our footing in the Middle Ages. Coursework will include 1 short essay (2 pgs.), 1 mid-length essay (5-7 pg.), and 1 research project. No exams.

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**English 337.01 Shakespeare after 1600**  
**Joseph Porter**

The class will read, write about, and discuss ten plays from the second decade of Shakespeare’s career. We will begin at the end of Elizabeth’s reign with the world’s most famous literary character and his play, *Hamlet*, after which we will treat ourselves to *Twelfth Night*, the culmination of the “great comedies,” and possibly “the most beautiful work of art ever created,” in the words of one Shakespearean. Then, as we enter the more doubtful and cynical first decade of the reign of James I, we will read the “problem comedy” *Measure for Measure*, and then Shakespeare’s least classifiable play *Troilus and Cressida*. Then we will read the three greatest Jacobean tragedies: *Othello* (which Professor Porter is currently completing the mother of all editions of, and which seems likely to prove the essential Shakespeare tragedy of our new century), *King Lear* (still considered Shakespeare’s supreme work), and finally *Macbeth*, Shakespeare’s deepest plunge into the depths of evil. Finally we read Shakespeare’s final genre, romance, with the experimental *Cymbeline*, the glorious *Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*, Shakespeare’s troubled and troubling valedictory. Examinations: A final, a 3-4 pp. paper, and a 10-12 pp. paper. Grade to be based on class participation, written work, and final.

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**English 344.01 18th Century British Novel**  
**Charlotte Sussman**

Eighteenth-century Britain is often associated with “the rise of the novel”: a time and place where the novel became a prominent, if not the dominant, literary genre. We will study the process by which the novel moved from

being an experimental, and sometimes scandalous, form of writing, to being a respectable genre—albeit one that still made room for experiment. Other issues we will consider include: the novel's role in shaping ideas of personhood, including sexuality and class status; the role of women writers in the history of the novel; the nature of literary realism; and the novel's representation of emotions—what the eighteenth century call "sensibility."

Possible texts include: Aphra Behn's narrative of slave rebellion in Surinam, *Oroonoko*—considered by many critics to be the first novel; Defoe's *Moll Flanders*; Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*, a best-seller in its own day, though little read now; Richardson's *Pamela*—thought by many to define the genre; Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*; Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*—the first "gothic" novel; Sterne's wildly experimental novel, *Tristram Shandy*; and Frances Burney's *Evelina*. We end the course with Jane Austen's early nineteenth-century novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, a text that reflects back on both eighteenth-century reading habits and gender roles.

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### **English 390-5.01 Special Topics in Genre: Political Drama** **Corina Stan**

"*Stuff happens* . . . And it's untidy, and freedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things." This was a statement made by Donald Rumsfeld after the pillaging of Baghdad in April 2003, and the play that quotes it imagines the political decision-making process that led to the invasion of Iraq. Like other contemporary plays we will read in this class, David Hare's *Stuff Happens* capitalizes on the enduring affinity between theater and politics, bringing on stage international leaders, journalists, ordinary citizens and refugees who compel audiences to think critically about the events, crises, and ideological conflicts that have shaped our world: the war in Afghanistan, the Iraqi conflict, the Syrian refugee crisis, Israeli-Palestinian tensions, dictatorships, and terrorist attacks. These plays—variously reviewed as "quick-witted" and gripping, humorous and shocking, "sparkling and combustible," many of them Pulitzer Prize winners—bring to life and put human faces on the most devastating conflicts of recent decades, in an awe-inspiring orchestration of voices that unsettle the reader and spectator into an unshakable discomfort: What is freedom, and what is its relationship to responsibility? How can we think about the refugee crisis in terms both humane and realistic? Why do people resort to terrorism, and

what is the ethics of giving a voice to those who commit such crimes? How can we put in perspective the contemporary world, and what wisdom do we gain from contemplating the broader stage of human civilizations, or longer histories of migration?

*Antigone*, the famous play by Sophocles, and its re-enactment by two cellmates in a South African prison in Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973), will immerse us in questions of citizenship, family obligations, discrimination, and the demands of the law in circumstances inimical to individual freedom; George Wolfe's *The Colored Museum* (1988), a highly humorous satire about Afro-American history, invites us to buckle up our shackles on the Celebrity Slaveship, and refrain from drumming and singing. Also exploring relative privilege and sentimentalism, Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* (2001) is a soulful engagement with the war in Afghanistan. Diplomacy, political machinations, and asymmetries of power are at the center of Hare's *Stuff Happens*, and of J. T. Rogers' most recent play *Oslo* (2017), humorously dramatizing behind-the-scenes negotiations between Israel and Palestine. Robin Soans, *Talking to Terrorists* (2006) is based on interviews with people from around the world who have engaged in terrorism, while Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer-winning play *Disgraced* (2013) explores race and religion in America, freedom of speech and political correctness, racial prejudice surrounding Muslims, questions about Islam and Judaism, the state of humanity today. Finally, we'll discuss Kay Adshead's *The Bogus Woman* (2001), based on hundreds of stories of refugees seeking asylum in the UK, and Amir Nizar Zuabi's *Oh My Sweet Land* (2014), which puts a human face on the Syrian refugee crisis.

This seminar is thematically connected to the Representing Migration Lab hosted by the English Department. It will also feature the screening of Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 dystopian thriller *Children of Men*, set in 2027, an age of human infertility and uncontrollable immigration. *Requirements*: two close readings (webposts), oral presentation, a short performance or film review, one short paper (5 pages), and a final paper (10-12 pages), that we'll workshop in class prior to final submission.

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### **English 390-6.01 Special Topics in Film: Hollywood Renegades: American New Wave Cinema, 1967-1982** **Michael Moses**

"New Hollywood" (or the American New Wave) helped to revolutionize world cinema between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s. During a

tumultuous period marked by the Vietnam War, anti-war and student protests, the Civil Rights movement, urban violence, the rise of Black Power, the Woman's Liberation movement, the sexual revolution, the Watergate scandal and the emergence of a generational counter-culture that celebrated personal freedom, sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, a small but influential group of artists in Hollywood made movies that transformed American cinema and American society. The accelerating collapse of the old studio system that had dominated Hollywood since the early 1930s provided an opportunity for independent-minded film-makers such as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Stanley Kubrick, Woody Allen, Dennis Hopper, Arthur Penn, Bob Rafelson, Sam Peckinpah, William Friedkin, Robert Altman, Roman Polanski, Peter Bogdanovich, Terence Malik, Ridley Scott, George Lucas, and Stephen Spielberg to change the way American movies were made. In the process, these "renegade" filmmakers (some American, some European expatriates) of the New Hollywood simultaneously reflected and contributed to a profound reshaping of American cultural identity that we are still coming to terms with today. In the course of the semester, we will consider a renewed fascination with American outlaws and criminals in *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Easy Rider*, *The Wild Bunch*, *The Godfather*, and *Badlands*. We will explore the legacy of Vietnam and Watergate in *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *The Conversation*. We will examine the rise of the neo-noir film and explore the corruptions and the temptations of city life in *Mean Streets*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Chinatown*, *The French Connection*, and *Taxi Driver*. We'll consider the cinematic nostalgia for (and satire of) lost ways of American life in *The Last Picture Show*, *Nashville*, and *Stardust Memories*. We will ponder the fate and the future of American love, desire, and romance in *The Graduate*, *Five Easy Pieces*, *Manhattan*, and *Days of Heaven*. We will travel to distant galaxies and alternative (dystopian) realities in science fiction epics such as *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Alien*, and *Blade Runner*. And finally, we'll look at the emergence of such escapist blockbusters as *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the success of which marked the end of an era of "independent" and counter-cultural Hollywood cinema.

**READING ASSIGNMENTS:** Students will be required to watch one or two feature-length films per week. All films will be available in DVD, BRD, or in streaming format via a digital portal at Lilly Library. In addition, students will be assigned one to two short essays of film criticism each week that will focus on the history of film genres, the formal grammar and technical innovations of cinematic art, and the political, cultural, and historical contexts of the films under discussion.

**EXAMINATIONS:** None

**TERM PAPERS:** Students will be required to write four (4) five-page essays (2,500–3,000 words each) in addition to weekly one-page (300 word) response papers.

**GRADE TO BE BASED ON:** Four essays, weekly one-page response papers, class attendance, and regular participation in class discussion.

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**English 390S-1.01 Single American Author: Bob Dylan  
Taylor Black**

Bob Dylan is certainly a divisive figure. That said, one cannot deny his impact and influence on the ways we understand American culture. His 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature requires us all to reconsider the ways in which we have traditionally approached the worlds of music and literature. On top of this, in order to understand the impact his work will have on future generations, we must immediately get down into Dylan's groove. I welcome Dylan devotees as well as those with little to no knowledge of his catalog.

We will analyze Dylan as both a contemporary, living figure and a more opaque, shadowy persona that moves backwards and forwards through time and space. Our work will chart Dylan's course through time—song by song, album by album and decade by decade—while also filling in the space surrounding his music with historical materials that add life and meaning to his creations.

This class requires a willingness to accept improvisation as an intellectual skill and openness to new forms of response. On top of the music itself, which we will experience in-class and you will be expected to take in on your own time, we will consider primary materials by Dylan, films, interviews secondary criticism and primary historical documents. Practically speaking, however, students should expect to do a lot of *listening*: to the music itself, but also to the, sometimes counterintuitive, messages that non-musical materials have to offer.

Throughout the semester, we will endeavor to cultivate our habits as critical listeners and musical thinkers. To accomplish this task, regular participation and conversation in class will matter a great deal. Additionally, students will be expected to complete a handful of short (1-2

page) and two longer (6-8 page) essays that will make up a final portfolio due at the end of the semester. I will be open to various approaches to these writing assignments, accepting both traditional academic prose and more creative interpretations of the form.

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**English 390S-7.01 Special Topics in Language and Literature: Masterpieces of World Literature**  
**Victor Strandberg**

This course intends to facilitate a better understanding of major literary monuments across a wide range of periods and cultures, including several with a religious orientation. We will begin with the four great Greek dramatists (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes) and segments of the Bible as well as Hindu sacred writ (*The Bhagavad-Gita*) and perhaps a Hindu play of the fifth century (*Shakuntala*). The latter half of the course will (as time permits) cross European boundaries with Dante's *Inferno*, Chaucer's *Tales*, Montaigne's *Essays*, and Shakespeare's *Othello*. In passing, we shall observe instances of the influence of earlier writings on later artists and thinkers – for example, the impact of the *Bhagavad-Gita* on American Transcendentalists (Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman), and of the Bible in later millennia.

Examinations: Two or three hour exams (no three-hour final exam). Two term papers of 6-8 pages on topics relating to the course syllabus.

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**English 390S-7.02 Special Topics in Language and Literature: Virginia Woolf & Zadie Smith**  
**Aarthi Vadde**

This seminar will bring two hugely influential and innovative writers – Virginia Woolf and Zadie Smith – into sustained conversation. In 1924, Virginia Woolf famously wrote, “On or about December 1910, human character changed.” Looking back over 14 years, Woolf witnessed great social shifts defined by historical, intellectual, and political events. She witnessed World War I and the decline of the British Empire; responded to new theories of the human mind and memory; and considered how gender and class shaped the role of women in society. Her greatest novels embraced these large themes by developing new forms of literary language. We call those forms “modernism” today. Zadie Smith is a contemporary inheritor of literary modernism and regarded as one of the

finest writers and critics working today. Her themes, like Woolf's, straddle the relationship between literature, history, and politics. Her novels consider the role of identity (gender, race, class) in shaping social hierarchies; explore the relationship between public and private forms of memory; and display a commitment to formal innovation in keeping with the modernist injunction to stretch the novel beyond its previous limits. This course moves beyond paradigms of chronology in which Woolf influences Smith and Smith responds to Woolf. Rather, we will use the comparative context to think creatively about the relationship between experimental writing and experimental thinking. **Texts to be drawn from the following list:** Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Three Guineas*, *The Waves*; Smith's *White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, *NW*, *Swing Time*. Short stories and essays by Woolf and Smith may also make an appearance. **Requirements:** Midterm paper (5-6pgs); Final Paper (10-12pgs); Occasional (3 or 4) Short Assignments (1-2pg); Active Participation in a seminar setting.

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**English 390S-7.03 Special Topics in Language and Literature: Lit & The Pursuit of Happiness**  
**Leonard Tennenhouse**

Together, we will try to figure out how the religious promise of heaven as the fulfillment of life and self, plenitude and perfect love, continues to operate in modern secular society: How did the pursuit of happiness become the driving force of a world organized by capitalism, one in which human life must seek and find self-transcendence in the world? This is powerful stuff!

To help us identify this elusive and deeply contradictory secular myth, we will consult a few of the major intellectual arguments that proposed and/or challenged it, including those by Locke, Mill, Marx, Weber, Marcuse, and Coetzee. But to understand where these arguments break down or fail to deliver on their promises, we will rely on such works of fiction as Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, short stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Oscar Wilde, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the film version of *The Wizard of Oz*, Phillip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*, Colm Tobin's *Brooklyn*, and Colson Whitehouse's *Underground Railroad*.

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## **English 390S-7.04 Special Topics in Language and Literature: Doctors' Stories**

**Charlotte Sussman**

This class will explore both the stories doctors tell about themselves, and the stories that have been told about them. We will begin by considering what “becoming a doctor” has meant to people of different genders, ethnicities and social classes. We will go on to investigate some of the roles doctors play in modern society, and the ethical dilemmas that accompany those roles. Issues to be discussed include: doctors at the intersection of science and social management; the ethics of empathy between doctors and patients; and doctors as border crossers.

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## **English 420S.01 Advanced Workshop in the 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 490.01 Special Topics in Language and Literature: Nobel Literature**

**Michael Moses & Corina Stan**

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

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

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

**EXAMINATIONS:** None

**TERM PAPERS:** Four essays of five pages (1500-2000 words) each.

**GRADE TO BE BASED ON:** Essays, one-page weekly response papers (300 words each), in-class participation. Attendance is mandatory.

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

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## **English 490S-10.01 Special Topics in Criticism/Theory/Methodology: Trivial Pursuits**

**Aarthi Vadde**

Ever been told that majoring in English won't get you a job? That certain subjects are "serious" while others are "fun?" This class will help you answer the naysayers by introducing you to theories of reading and knowledge production that take both amateur pleasures and professional aspirations seriously. The works featured in this class will explore how trivial pursuits become entangled in serious projects of educating oneself, learning how to live with others, and making sense of dominant cultural values. Topics will include: the relationship between amateurism and professionalism in theories of literary criticism and works of fiction; disciplinary debates about reading "critically," "uncritically," and "postcritically;" the embodiment of knowledge and expertise in ways that are profoundly raced, gendered, and sexed; the role of hobbies like gardening or blogging in cultural criticism; the uses of literature and the humanities in a world that prioritizes information and instrumental knowledge. We will read a mixture of fiction, creative non-fiction, and literary/cultural criticism (in traditionally academic as well as experimental styles). Texts to be drawn mostly from: Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*; Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*; Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*; Jamaica Kincaid, *My Garden (Book)*; Junot Diaz, *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*; Kate Zambreno, *Heroines*; Nick Sousanis, *Unflattened*; Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust*. Shorter Essays: Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," T.S. Eliot, "The Perfect Critic," Michael Warner, "Uncritical Reading;" Amy Hollywood, "Reading as Self-Annihilation," Rita Felski, "Enchantment," others.

Requirements: Midterm paper (5-6pgs); Final Paper (10-12pgs) or Opportunity for Collaborative Final Project; Active Participation and Occasional Short Writing Assignments.

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## **English 490S-10.01 Sexuality & the Novel: "What's Love Got to Do with It?"**

**Nancy Armstrong**

This course will consider how sexual relationships form different communities and sustain them over time. To do so, we'll look at how these relationships change the shape of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century narratives—from Jane Austen's *Emma*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Freud's *Dora*, Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, William Faulkner's

*Absalom, Absalom*, to Todd Hayne's film *Far from Heaven*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, and Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*. Looking at these narratives as the means of reproducing, updating, and challenging the way of life organized around a sexualized nucleus, we want to ask some pretty basic questions as to who we think we are and the way to live good and happy lives: How does the novel enable members of an increasingly wide and diversified readership to imagine themselves as either men or women whose happiness rests on belonging to a household? Which sexual identities are stigmatized as a result of not so belonging? How do novels change the basis for and limits of heterosexuality to accommodate or resist economic change? What changes does our definition of love, along with our expectations for future happiness, undergo as a result? In the contemporary world, where less than 40% of the population of the US and UK live in a single-family household, does the novel offer an alternative model of sexual intimacy and social reproduction? I plan to fortify discussion with occasional lectures on relevant material from political, anthropological, and scientific theory (e.g., John Locke, Claude Lévi Strauss, Charles Darwin, William James, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Wendy Brown, Melinda Cooper, Lee Edelman, and others).

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## **English 490S-2.01 Special Topics in African American Lit: Sonic Fugitivities: The Soundscapes of African-American Literature**

**Jarvis McInnis**

This course explores the rich interplay between sound and literature in nineteenth and twentieth-century African-American letters. Historically denied the right to literacy and education, African-Americans utilized sound, primarily in the form of music and orature, as a mode of protest and an expression of freedom, subjectivity, and citizenship. As such, we will examine how African-American writers have drawn on this rich sonic tradition to make political claims about race, gender, class, region, nation, and cultural identity. While many of the readings feature music, we will also attend to other modes of sonic expression—such as laughter, oratory, screams, yells, shouts, grunts, and noise—to think more expansively about the multiplicity of sounds that emanate from black literature and their various cultural connotations. We will read seminal works by Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Nella Larsen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Gayl Jones, James Baldwin, and Kiese Laymon, among others. Readings will often be accompanied by sound recordings,

ranging from early minstrel and vaudeville ditties to speeches, work songs, blues, jazz, gospel, spoken word poetry, and hip hop. Practices of critical listening and audition will figure centrally in our discussions. Some of the concerns we will take up include: How does sound function as a hermeneutic for analyzing African-American literature? How have black writers adapted literary form to mirror musical forms and vice-versa? How does the African American literary tradition rupture the putative binary between orality and literacy? What is the relationship between sound, the body, and subjectivity? How has sound recording technology impacted the way that we hear racial identity?

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**ENGLISH 590S-4.01 Special Topics in Criticism/Theory/Methodology: IN FIEDLER'S SHADOW; or, DANCING IN THE DARK (WITH THE PAPISTS)**  
**Thomas Ferraro**

American literature is distinguished by the number of dangerous and disturbing books in its canon—and American scholarship by its ability to conceal this fact. – Leslie Fiedler (1959)

Time does tell: in 1982, Fiedler's Love & Death in the American Novel (1960) was struck off my graduate exam lists (“that book is not relevant anymore”) but now, three-and-a-half decades later, when we are post-everything and queered to the hilt, Love & Death looks, once again, like the best synthetic account we have not only of the modern American novel but of the mythopoetics of the American imagination writ large. Provoking capacious re-engagement, commanding vigorous dissent: How did that happen?

At century's end, after high poststructuralism took the U.S. academy by storm came the applied movements that we now know as material feminism, critical race theory, and gay-to-queer-to-trans-studies, all of which were variants on Foucauldian-suspicion-cum-liberatory-ambition. Each movement issued a jeremiad against the critical past and a manifesto for the critical future, brandishing revolutionary claims of born-again newness, American style. Yet each deconstructed the canon along lines of gender/sex and race/ethnicity that were, in fact, more Fiedler-esque than the critics themselves were wont to admit. (The work of deconstruction was carried out in the shadows too of writer-critics such as D.H. Lawrence, William Carlos Williams, and Ralph Ellison/Albert Murray). Each movement reconstructed it by attending to a formidable coterie of long-neglected novels, including some of the moderns that even Fiedler (whose 18<sup>th</sup> and

19<sup>th</sup> century purview was capacious), tellingly, had missed: James's In the Cage (1890), Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896), Chopin's The Awakening (1899), Wharton's House of Mirth (1905), Johnson's Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1911), Cather's A Lost Lady (1920) and The Professor's House (1924), Larsen's Passing (1927), McKay's Banjo (1929), Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God (1939), DiDonato's Christ in Concrete (1939), and others, including some neglected still. And yet all of these reclaimed novels turn out to be remarkably hospitable to Fiedler-esque analysis (including a couple that practically do Fiedler's work for him), whatever your endgame—and this is especially the case once Fiedler's surprising ace-in-the-hole, long suppressed but no longer to be denied, is recognized: for the third term in Fiedler's analytic trinity was religion, above all, his uncanny apprehension of the fault lines between our Calvinist heritage and the impress of Marian Catholicism.

This is when and where we enter: that is, with the ubiquitous long-buried legacies of the Anglo-Puritan/Mediterranean Catholic faultline, the procreative counter-force of the Calvinist temptation to Marian Catholicism (and vice versa), and the uncanny realizations of Protestant-Catholic syncretism, especially on the paganish end of the Catholic imaginary. I want in particular to consider revising and redeploying Fiedler's thesis that the Protestant vs. Catholic war dividing Europe for centuries morphed in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. to an internecine Protestant battle between the moralistic sentimentality of de-sexualized middle-class romance and the putative innocence of male-male camaraderie in domestic flight. Indeed, it is my personal suspicion that the Protestant victory stateside was less thorough and more pyrrhic than Fiedler could warrant, particularly after the massive arrival of Southern and Eastern Europeans (not to mention the Southwest and the Far Northeast); that Mary the Refulgent was in profound ways there even from the very beginning, especially where we should most expect her; and that what she has given to the American Mythos is a combination of dark sexual knowing and un-looked-for grace: transgression as redemption, incarnate.

In this seminar, we will begin with a close encounter with Fiedler, asking how he was able to do what he did. (Short answer: he was a working-class Jewish boy from Newark, N.J. teaching in Missoula, Montana, of all places, who had trained as a medievalist—a medievalist!—and found himself reading Twain and Cooper to his kids.) We will then interrogate and rework Fiedler's legacy, taking advantage of 1) the literary theory/cultural studies that were meant and have been understood to displace him, 2) the alternative (“guerilla”) forms of critical inquiry and cultural critique that

once preceded or continue to proceed in Fiedler's light, and, most importantly, 3) a half-dozen of the formidable novels that "talk back," novels that Fiedler, in fact, missed but that are ripe, even over-ripe for Fiedler-esque revision. We will ask: what speaks to us now, what not, and why or why not? When are we enabled, when implicated? How do the neglected criticism and, especially, the reclaimed texts reorient our understanding of the American literary tradition? And, again most importantly, where would each of us like to go from here, as scholars and writers and teachers—which is a question not just of method and archive, but of (at least for me) devotional aspect, mediative address, and artful conjuring.

Let me say finally that this course is conceived at the interest relay between an undergraduate capstone and a graduate gateway, thus the 500-level designation. On your part, I am expecting an appetite for novels and pleasure in the big picture: that is, a zest for the procreative reciprocity between analytical detail ("close reading," however contextualized) and synthetic breadth (be it, "theory," "cultural studies," or "literary history"). I promise to assume nothing of your own preparation and background, however, beyond a willingness to participate in the sustained practice (which means "to rehearse" but also "to put into effect") of the interdisciplinary humanities. Indeed, the course is designed to take advantage of both newcomers to and old hands with these particular materials (the revised canon of the modern American novel, early writer-critics such as Lawrence, Williams, and Denis deRougement but also late century writer-critics like Toni Morrison, Gerald Early, Mary Gordon, Camille Paglia, René Girard, and Richard Rodriguez as well as the most relevant academic criticism of Nina Baym, Christopher Looby, Eve Sedgwick, Tracy Fessenden, Amy Hungerford, Elsa New, Lawrence Buell, and "the new religious history" of Orsi, Fisher, and McDannell). The idea is to put wonder and expertise in conversation with one another to the point where they trade places, and to that end, at once selfish and risky, I mean as well to test my writing (a trigger warning for real!) on you.

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**English 890S.01 Special Topics Seminar: Black Mobilities: Cartographies of Black Transnationalism and Diaspora**  
**Jarvis McInnis**

This course examines cartographies of black transnational and diasporic mobility within African Diaspora literary and cultural studies. Loosely organized around five overlapping cartographies—the Black Atlantic, the

Great Migration, Circum-Caribbean & Hemispheric Migrations, European Sojourns, and African "Returns"—this course explores literature, criticism, and theories of black people on the move, from the coercive and fugitive movements of slavery, colonialism, and their afterlives to labor migration and practices of black cosmopolitanism. We will trace these routes of black mobility across a range of literary genres, including slave narratives, fiction, travel writing, and memoir, and alongside theories of diaspora, transnationalism, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Readings may include works by Martin Delany, Zora Neale Hurston, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, Maryse Condé, Erna Brodber, Saidiya Hartman, and Chimamanda Adichie. We may also engage with theoretical and critical work by Paul Gilroy, Brent Edwards, Michelle Ann Stephens, Tsitsi Jaji, Ifeoma Nwankwo, Edouard Glissant, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Joseph Roach, Robin D. G. Kelley, among others. Students may conduct archival research in the Marcus Garvey papers in the Rubenstein Library and attend the "Black Atlantic" performance series hosted by Duke Performances in March 2018.

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**English 890S.02 Special Topics Seminar: African American Experimental**  
**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 890S.03 Special Topics Seminar: Shakespeare, Tragedy, Ethics**  
**Sarah Beckwith**

"Love", says Iris Murdoch," is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality."

Murdoch's wonderful claim conjoins art and morals through her parsing of love.

This class is at once an exploration of the ethical implications of a vision of language explored in Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell, Raimond Gaita, Peter Winch, Iris Murdoch, and Cora Diamond; and an exploration of Shakespeare's plays, chiefly tragedies, distinguished by the awesome fate of our acts of speech.

What Shakespeare shares with all these thinkers is a profound attack on the moralization of morality. Tragic freedom in Shakespeare obviates moralism, though it makes our every word, our every stand and judgment, of unavoidable ethical consequence. What brings these thinkers together with Shakespeare is the idea that there is no separate domain of ethics, that much contemporary moral philosophy is profoundly reductionist in its restriction of ethics to the domain of rules, and obligations. What "vision of language" makes the ethical implications of language newly available? How are Shakespeare's extraordinary linguistic range, precision and poetry able to word the world for us in new ways? How does Shakespeare explore the binding power of words, and the ways in which we must mean what we say, our responsibility in meaning our words?

We will read a number of Shakespeare's plays alongside some of these thinkers. Beginning with Wittgenstein's exploration of pain and private language, we will examine the third section of *The Claim of Reason*, in its entirety, we'll work with Peter Winch's parsing of "The Good Samaritan", and examine Cora Diamond's exploration of concepts, their loss, and "the difficulty of reality" among other topics.

Students interested in Shakespeare, ethics, theatre and performance, tragedy, as well as questions of voice and acknowledgement in criticism, will find this class of interest.

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### **English 890S.04 Special Topics Seminar: Apocalypse in Contemporary Lit & Film**

**Marianna Torgovnick**

The seminar explores how and why the 21<sup>st</sup> century imagines apocalypse to reflect on large and sweeping themes such as gene-modification and species-crossing, viruses and contagion, the endangered electric grid and internet, the continued use of fossil fuel and climate change, and the fate of America's coastal cities.

Texts to include films such as *An Inconvenient Sequel* and the latest Planet of the Apes series, sci-fi like Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* series, drama like Annie Washburn's *Mr. Burns, a Post-electric Play*, representative episodes of *Game of Thrones* and zombie tv, and the theme of urban destruction in a variety of narratives. The course will also draw on the instructor's expertise in theories of beginnings and endings, including primitivism.

Two oral reports, one leading of class discussion, a typed reading / viewing journal on required and optional readings OR a short (15 page) paper you may ask to workshop in class.