

Tentative Listing of 2021-22 English Courses Open to Graduate Students

[**S**mall= 0-2 sections; **M**edium=3-4 sections; **L**arge=5+ sections]

Fall 2021

English 10. Literature Today **M**

Kelly Rich & Teju Cole

All literature was contemporary at some point, but the literature that is contemporary now provides special opportunities for enjoying, questioning, and understanding the world. Literature Today focuses on works written since 2000—since most of you were born. It explores how writers from around the world speak to and from their personal and cultural situations, addressing current problems of economic inequality, technological change, structural prejudice, and divisive politics. We will encounter a range of genres, media, and histories to study contemporary literature as a living, evolving system. The course uniquely blends literary study and creative writing—students will analyze literature and make literature. The conviction that these practices are complementary will inform our approach to readings and course assignments.

English 20. Literary Forms **S**

Nicholas Watson

This foundational course for English concentrators examines literary form and genre. We explore some of the many kinds of literature as they have changed over time, along with the shapes and forms that writers create, critics describe, and readers learn to recognize. The body of the course looks to the great literary types, or modes, such as epic, tragedy, and lyric, as well as to the workings of literary style in moments of historical change, producing the transformation, recycling, and sometimes the mocking of past forms. While each version of English 20 includes a different array of genres and texts from multiple periods, those texts will always include five major works from across literary history: Beowulf (epic), King Lear (tragedy), Persuasion (comic novel), The Souls of Black Folk (essays; expository prose), and Elizabeth Bishop's poems (lyric). The course integrates creative writing with critical attention: assignments will take creative as well as expository and analytical forms.

English 97. Literary Methods **S**

Derek Miller

This course, taught in small groups and required for concentrators, introduces theories, interpretive frameworks, and central questions about literature and literary media. What do we do when we read? What is an author? What do we mean by "literature" itself? How might we compare and evaluate interpretations? How do the historical, social, cultural, and legal frameworks around a text shape its meanings and its effects? Combining major critical and theoretical writings with primary works, the course investigates how literary production and interpretation are informed by philosophical and aesthetic traditions, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, national and post-colonial identities, and the material forms in which literature circulates, from parchment books to the internet. Students will also practice fundamental literary research methods through close engagement with Harvard libraries.

English 97. Literary Methods **S**

Daniel Donoghue

This course, taught in small groups and required for concentrators, introduces theories, interpretive frameworks, and central questions about literature and literary media. What do we do when we read? What is an author?

What do we mean by “literature” itself? How might we compare and evaluate interpretations? How do the historical, social, cultural, and legal frameworks around a text shape its meanings and its effects? Combining major critical and theoretical writings with primary works, the course investigates how literary production and interpretation are informed by philosophical and aesthetic traditions, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, national and post-colonial identities, and the material forms in which literature circulates, from parchment books to the internet. Students will also practice fundamental literary research methods through close engagement with Harvard libraries.

English 102e. Introduction to Old English: Landscape, Seascape, and Early Ecologies S

Daniel Donoghue

How did people inhabit and view their physical environment in early medieval England? Was it life-sustaining or threatening? What was the balance between managing resources and exploiting them? How did poets and farmers, kings and saints invoke images of land and sea as meaningful symbols? The Old English literature on such questions, which is diverse and engaging, will form the basis of our in-class translations. Other assigned readings will survey environmental criticism and allow us to compare today’s perceptions with those from a distant past.

This course combines language study with the investigation of a critical theme. The narratives set for translation provide a thematic coherence as we dig into the language of Old English, which is the vernacular used in England from the sixth century until about 1100. Although some of its features remain recognizable today, Old English needs to be learned as a foreign language with its own spelling, pronunciation, syntax, and so on. The term begins with an emphasis on grammar, which will be covered in graduated steps until midterm, after which the readings and translation will take up more of our class time.

The promise of this course: you will gain the skills to translate any text in Old English; you will learn a great deal about contemporary English including weird facts your inner word-geek will love; you will expand your knowledge of environmental criticism as we examine its deep history.

English 119ty English Literature: The First 1000 Years (*new) Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Alan Niles

This course is an introduction to the different voices, cultures, and traditions that made the first 1000 years of English literature, from Beowulf to Aphra Behn. We will study major and influential writings alongside lesser-known interlocutors—works by Marie de France, Geoffrey Chaucer, Margery Kempe, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Mary Sidney, John Milton, Alexander Pope, and more. We will engage with the (often contested) social, political, and religious contexts that gave rise to creative work. We will pay particular attention to the historical transformations of romance, epic, drama, fable, and lyric, and the ways these forms were embedded in the social worlds of their time.

English 123. Shakespeare Early Plays M

Marjorie Garber

The early comedies, tragedies, and histories, considered in the context of the origins of the English stage and the conventions of Elizabethan drama. Particular attention paid to Shakespeare's development as a dramatist, and to poetic expression, thematic design, stagecraft, and character portrayal in plays.

English 145a. Jane Austen’s Fiction and Fans M

Deidre Lynch

In this class we'll read at least five of Austen's novels and study the contribution they made to the remaking of modern fiction. Though our emphasis will fall on these works' place in the literary culture of Austen's day and on their historical contexts in an era of revolution, we'll also acknowledge the strong and ardent feelings that Austen's oeuvre continues to arouse today. To that end, we'll do some investigating of the frequently wild world of contemporary Austen fandom and the Austenian tourism, shopping, adaptations, and sequels that nurture it. At the same time, we'll remember that Austen knew fandom from both sides; part of our work will

be to learn about the early-nineteenth-century culture of literary appreciation in which Austen enrolled the heroines of her novels and enrolled herself.

English 152kd. Keats Isn't Dead: How We Live Romanticism S

Vidyan Ravinthiran

Our thoughts and feelings about identity, self-expression, and the power of the imagination draw on the British Romantic poetry of the Long Eighteenth Century--whether we've read any or not. Focusing on John Keats (his key poems, and his key ideas, about 'negative capability', the 'camelion poet', and so on), this course makes unconventional connections into the twentieth, and twenty-first century. Tracking issues of race, class, gender and sexuality, we'll bounce from Keats into war verse; African-American poetries; world/postcolonial writing; the literature of social class; feminist experimentalism; and constructions of masculinity. Concentrators will learn how to analyze poetry in both closed and open forms.

English 176tm. Toni Morrison (*new) Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Namwali Serpell

This course is a survey of the work of Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison from 1970 to 2012, including most of her novels, a few nonfiction essays, a short story, and a play. We will consider her literary antecedents; follow her influence on contemporaries and future writers; trace the social, historical, and political contexts and implications of her work; and explore the critical interventions she made in historiography and literary criticism. Throughout, we will focus on Morrison's rich and complex aesthetic project: how it came into being; how it resonates with a great range of philosophical questions from epistemology to ethics; and how it changed over time.

English 179h. The Harvard Novel Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Beth Blum

This course introduces the genre of the "Harvard novel," from W.E.B. Du Bois's notes toward his fictional work "A Fellow of Harvard" to Elif Batuman's *The Idiot* and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, in order to examine Harvard's cultural meaning and significance. It brings together novels (and films) where Harvard offers the narrative setting, supplies a character's backstory, or even serves as a character in its own right. We will address themes of tradition, access, privilege, race, anxiety, competition, and canonicity.

English 181a. Introduction to Asian American Literatures S-M

Ju Yon Kim

Aiiiiiiii! An *Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974) was one of the earliest attempts to collect writings that were, to quote the editors, "exclusively Asian-American." Yet as their lengthy—and controversial—explanation of the selection process makes clear, Asian American literature defies neat categorization. This course is both a survey of Asian American literature and an introduction to ongoing debates about what constitutes Asian American literature. We will study a variety of literary genres and ask how formal and stylistic conventions, as well as shifting sociohistorical circumstances, have shaped conceptions of Asian American literature.

English 184cf. City Fictions (*new) Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Tara Menon

This course examines representations of the modern city from the nineteenth century to the present. We will read novels and short stories set in London, New York, Paris, Berlin, New Delhi, Tokyo, Johannesburg, and Gwangju). How do these texts represent the constituent features of life in urban environments—estrangement, economic inequality, cosmopolitanism, crime, immigration? We will pay particular attention to techniques of realism. How do these novels represent social interactions? What kinds of characters are included in the field of vision? What kind of labour, if any, is represented? Alongside fiction, we will also read nonfiction accounts of city life and urban sociology. Readings by: Charles Dickens, Zadie Smith,

James Baldwin, Teju Cole, Aravind Adiga, Han Kang, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Boo, Erving Goffman, Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel, and more.

English 185e. The Essay M

James Wood

Matthew Arnold famously said that poetry is, at bottom, “a criticism of life.” But if any literary form is truly a criticism of life, it is the essay. And yet despite the fact that all students write essays, most students rarely study them; bookshops and libraries categorize such work only negatively, by what it is not: “non-fiction.” At the same time, the essay is at present one of the most productive and fertile of literary forms. It is practiced as memoir, reportage, diary, criticism, and sometimes all four at once. Novels are becoming more essayistic, while essays are borrowing conventions and prestige from fiction. This class will disinter the essay from its comparative academic neglect, and examine the vibrant contemporary borderland between the reported and the invented. We will study the history of the essay, from Montaigne to the present day. Rather than study that history purely chronologically, each class will group several essays from different decades and centuries around common themes: death, detail, sentiment, race, gender, photography, the city, witness, and so on. In addition to writing about essays – writing critical essays about essays – students will also be encouraged to write their own creative essays: we will study the history of the form, and practice the form itself. Essayists likely to be studied: Plutarch, Montaigne, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Woolf, Benjamin, Orwell, Camus, Primo Levi, Barthes, Baldwin, Sontag, Dyer, Didion, Leslie Jamison, Knausgaard, Ta-Nehisi Coates.

English 197gr. Gender & Representation S

Glenda Carpio

Margaret Atwood is often asked if the *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a “feminist” novel. Her response: “If you mean an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice, no. If you mean a novel in which women are human beings — with all the variety of character and behavior that implies — and are also interesting and important, and what happens to them is crucial to the theme, structure and plot of the book, then yes. In that sense, many books are ‘feminist.’” This course focuses on such feminist books. It explores issues of perspective: what happens when an author writes from the perspective of a woman? Since taking this perspective does not depend on biology, we will explore authors from a variety of backgrounds, especially those whose class, race, and/or ethnicity add another dimension. We’ll focus on contemporary Anglophone novels and drama.

GenEd- FALL

GenEd 1172. Poetry in America: Writing America 1620-1855 M

Elisa New

This General Education course will contemplate art's formative role in the development of civilizations by allowing students to trace the gradual development of America's self-conception through the lens of its poetry. “[P]oetry was all written before time was,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay “The Poet.” When Emerson wrote these words in 1844, nearly 75 years after the Revolution, he feared America had not yet found its “seers,” “sayers,” and “namers”—its poets. But Emerson's quest for “the poet” in fact applied to all those makers—essayists, orators, painters, architects, composers—whose creativity gives a culture its characteristic look and sound, its special vernacular and values. It was, in Emerson’s conception, the poet's--the artist's--integrity on which civilizations depend: a culture's attitude to its citizens and its non-citizens; the use or misuse of its natural resources; the treatment of its laborers; the standards of its schools; the meanings it assigned marriage, death, masculinity, femininity; its ideas of the spiritual, the beautiful, the entertaining--all these would be, Emerson believed, encoded in its art. What a nation's poets wrote was, finally, what that nation would become.

Students in *Writing America* will read, discuss, and debate poems written for these high civilizational stakes, and they’ll explore the diverse functions poetry played in a wide variety of print venues (from newspapers and

women's magazines, to funeral programs, to farmers' almanacs). The syllabus covers major poets from the colonial period through 1850 (including Bradstreet, Taylor, Wigglesworth, Wheatley, Freneau, Poe, Emerson, Longfellow); through these poets, students will be able to follow the emerging role of the "author" and "the arts" within American culture. But much of their study will be focused on poetry whose aims were not purely, or even primarily, literary. Beginning with the first book published in North America (The Bay Psalm Book, printed in our very own Harvard Square), they'll read jeremiads and funeral elegies sanctioning transfers of political power, as well as political ditties of the 1770's urging patriots to give up imported luxuries like tea and silk. They'll read selections from partisan satires and epics of the Revolution, mock-epics celebrating indigenous foods like cornmeal mush, and poetry celebrating the beauties--and exploitable resources--of the American landscape. They'll pay close attention to how the demonization--and romanticization--of indigenous peoples in popular verse rendered native Americans figuratively extinct, even while poetry enabled some African Americans and women to achieve not only visibility, but celebrity. Writing in America students will come to understand how poetry helped Americans embrace the virtues of labor and middle-class life, and how it supported emerging ideals of literacy and cultivated, and fed, robust mass cultural appetites. Throughout the semester, students will connect poetry's relationship to music, oratory, painting, statecraft, homiletics, and other expressive genres, considering throughout the role art plays not only in reflecting but in shaping distinctive cultures.

Spring 2022

English 20. Literary Forms **S**

Stephanie Burt

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James Simpson

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English 111. Epic S

Leah Whittington & Vidyan Ravinthiran

Epic is one of the most enduring and far-reaching forms of artistic expression. From the heroic poems of the ancient Near East to modern films of quest and adventure, epic speaks to the shared values and collective aspirations of cultures, peoples, and communities. But if it’s formal conventions and thematic interests endure, epic changes over time. In this course, you will study the historical and literary evolution of epic as it moves from oral verse into new genres and media, reading texts from the ancient Mediterranean alongside works of poetry, fiction, and cinema from early modern Britain, twentieth-century America, and the contemporary Global South. We will look at some texts in their entirety and others in extracts, focusing on Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, The *Mahabharata* (in prose and film versions), and George Lucas’ *Star Wars*, with detailed analysis of Gwendolyn Brooks’s American epics on Black life, *Annie Allen* and *In the Mecca*. If issues of identity, belonging, and community have always been explored in epic, what is the place of epic in a pluralist multi-culture? What are our contemporary epics today?

English 122iw. Imagining the World in Medieval and Renaissance Lit. (*new) Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Alan Niles

How did writers and audiences imagine the world before modernity? This course offers an introduction to the first 1000 years of English literature (roughly 700-1700) and the shifting terms through which writers were able to imagine the world beyond their borders. We will encounter hardy seafarers, fantastical monsters, and real and imagined peoples at the margins of Europe and beyond. We will study the genres of travel narrative, romance, epic, drama, and lyric, and the different ways these forms registered global connections, ideas of race, and cultural and religious difference. We will pay particular attention to the accelerated pace of global encounters and connections starting in the Renaissance, and the ways that English literature was able (or not) to register new peoples and places, new forms of economic connectivity, and the violence of colonialism and empire.

English 131p. Milton’s Paradise Lost M

Gordon Teskey

This course focuses on Milton’s most famous work, *Paradise Lost*, the greatest long poem in English and the only successful classical epic in the modern world. Milton went totally blind in his forties and composed *Paradise Lost* by reciting verses to anyone available to take them down, like the blind prophets and poets of legend. Yet the questions he raised are surprisingly enduring and modern. We will consider how he generates the sublime and how he builds great scenes and characters, especially his most famous one, Satan.

English 151an. The Age of the Novel (*new) Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Tara Menon

An introduction to canonical nineteenth-century British novels (Austen, Shelley, Dickens, Bronte, Gaskell, Eliot, Hardy, Conrad, Conan Doyle). We will pay particular attention to techniques of realism. How do these

novels represent social interactions? What kinds of characters are included in the field of vision? What kind of labour, if any, is represented? How do they depict interiority and consciousness? How do the country and the city figure as symbols for the social and economic changes that come with the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism in nineteenth-century Britain? Topics for discussion include but are not limited to: land, property, agriculture, enclosure, class divisions, factories, industrialization, family, friends, strangers, innocence, nostalgia, finance, greed, manners, tradition. Alongside these novels, we will read both classic and contemporary criticism in an attempt both to understand how the field developed over time and where it stands now.

English 162bb. Broadway Bodies, or Representation on the Great White Way S-M

Derek Miller

To many of its fans, Hamilton poses a problem. How can a show that presents so many talented artists of color represent a white-washed American history? And how should we evaluate the show's impact when sky-high ticket prices make it accessible primarily to a wealthy (read: white) audience? In its aspirational embrace of a multi-ethnic America and its failure fully to realize that promise, Hamilton embodies the paradox of Broadway. This course examines that paradox since World War II, particularly as it pertains to multiple aspects of identity including race, gender, sexuality, and disability. We will examine how shows such as *South Pacific*, with its famous anti-racist anthem, or *M. Butterfly*, which explored the intersections of Orientalism, gender, and sex, temper their inclusive representations to appeal to wide commercial audience. Broadway is a particularly fertile ground for exploring these issues because theatrical performances always call attention to the performative nature of subjectivity: that is, who you are is a product of what you do. As we shall see, though, theatrical performatives risk being "infelicitous," in the words of philosopher J.L. Austin: instead of affirming the subjects they represent, the performances can turn those subjects into mere theater. Our starting assumption is that many Broadway stakeholders genuinely desire broader representation in and for their work, but that the structure of the industry constrains how these shows challenge the status quo. To understand those constraints, we will ask what stories Broadway tells, who sees them, and how they are marketed—while always attuned to "who tells your story."

English 177am American Horrors S

Ju Yon Kim

This course will examine horror—defined expansively to include the uncanny, the abject, the monstrous, and the ghostly—in American literature, considering its formal and aesthetic implications and its relationship to major cultural and social issues. What are the methods and theories that critics have used to study horror in literature? How and to what effect have works of American literature used horror to reflect on contemporary social concerns or to depict historical events? We will explore a range of literary works from the nineteenth century to the present next to critical and theoretical studies of horror and the Gothic.

English 178x. American Novel: Dreiser to Present M

Philip Fisher

A survey of the 20th-century novel, its forms, patterns of ideas, techniques, cultural context, rivalry with film and radio, short story, and fact. Wharton, *Age of Innocence*; Cather, *My Antonia*; Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* and stories; Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* and stories; Ellison, *Invisible Man*; Nabokov, *Lolita*; Robinson, *Housekeeping*; Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye* and stories; Ha Jin, *Waiting*; Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station*. Stories by James, London, Anderson, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Gaitskill, Wallace, Beattie, Lahiri, and Ford.

English 182bf. Black Science Fiction (*new) Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Namwali Serpell

This course addresses two genres—black fiction and science fiction—at their point of intersection, which is sometimes called Afrofuturism. Our term "black fiction" includes texts that issue out of and speculate about the African-American experience. Our term "science fiction" comprises texts that speculate about alternative,

cosmic, dystopian, utopian, and future worlds. Overlapping and mutually transforming concepts include: genetics, race, diaspora, miscegenation, double consciousness, technology, ecology, biology, language, history, futurity, space (inner and outer), and the alien. We will consider the short stories, novels, comics, film, television, and music of black science fiction.

English 184. Foundations of Lyric Poetry S

Peter Sacks

An introduction to the fundamentals of Lyric poetry.

English 189vg. Video Game Storytelling (*new) Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Vidyan Ravinthiran

Although this course touches on blockbuster games—“ludo-narrative dissonance” and India’s role in *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy*; racism, satire, and the white-saviour narrative in the *Far Cry* franchise; Ayn Rand, US history and the illusion of gamer choice in *Bioshock*—it’s primarily concerned with indie titles which explore alternative forms of storytelling. More specifically, it’s about games pilloried—rather as free verse poetry is bashed as “just chopped up prose”—as mere “walking simulators”, in which there’s more exploration than action, more narrative than gameplay. These qualities have migrated into bigger titles like *Death Stranding*, as developers prioritize discovery over destruction, asking us to think differently about our relationship to game environments. We’ll examine the gendered deconstruction of horror-codes in *Gone Home*, and how the house-exploration theme plays out differently in *What Remains of Edith Finch?*; consider outsiderhood and English village life in *Everybody’s Gone To The Rapture*; the connection between pastoral and paranoia in *Firewatch*; and exploded conventions in *The Stanley Parable*.

English 190ve. Voices of Environmental Justice Accepting Waitlist Apps Only

Sarah Dimick

This course considers the relationships between systems of human injustice and environmental issues—including industrial disasters, ocean acidification, and resource extraction. We examine environmental justice writing and artwork with a transnational, interconnected approach. For example, we ask how the Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa’s writing on oil pipelines in the Niger Delta anticipates Native American protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline. We draw connections between a poem documenting silicosis in the lungs of West Virginian coal miners and a novel portraying the aftermath of the Union Carbide gas leak in Bhopal. We compare a nonfiction account of Kenyan women resisting deforestation and an iPhone app reclaiming public access along the Malibu coast. We explore questions of voice, genre, and narrative, cataloguing the strategies writers and artists use to reach a global audience.

GenEd- SPRING

GenEd 1153. Shakespeare's Timeliness S

Marjorie Garber

The First Folio of Shakespeare’s plays was published in 1623, seven years after the playwright’s death. A memorial poem by Ben Jonson, included in the book, described Shakespeare, famously, as “not of an age, but for all time.” This course will argue that the works of Shakespeare—like all great works of literature—are both “of an age” and “for all time.”

What we often call “timelessness” in literature and art is in fact more accurately described as multiple timeliness: the way a work can speak to its moment, whether the moment is that of its conception, its production, or its reception. The plays of Shakespeare, whether they are comedies, histories, tragedies, or romances, have their lives in at least three time periods: the time and place in which they are written (Shakespeare’s England during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James), the time and place in which they are set (medieval Scotland in *Macbeth*, ancient Rome in *Julius Caesar*), and the time and place in which they are produced, seen, or read (“now,” whether that means nineteenth century England, twenty-first century Cambridge MA, or global Shakespeare today).

Over the centuries since the plays were written, Shakespeare's plays have almost uncannily connected with developments in social and political history and in human character. It is not an exaggeration to say that in some cases Shakespearean characters, scenes, and phrases, have influenced the way subsequent ages have thought about people and politics, and even how they have acted, or reacted, to historical events. Like the eyes in a portrait that are described as following the viewer around the room, the plays of Shakespeare seem always to be trained upon the audience, no matter what the time or place.

This course will discuss Shakespeare's multiple timeliness and the effect of "timelessness" that is generated by it—and, by extension and analogy (including some analogies within the plays) the way "timeliness" and "timelessness" intersect in the production and consumption of works of art.

GenEd 1050. Act Natural (*new) M

David Levine

"To thine own self be true," runs the famous line in Hamlet. But which self? And why? And who's judging? Does this injunction to be authentic even make sense today, when profiles proliferate online and surveillance is ubiquitous? Acting—the art of creating and reproducing selves—can help us navigate these questions. Just as every century's approach to acting tells us something about their idea of personhood, so too can our own era's quandaries around empathy, personae, identity, work, art-making and politics be explored through our approach to acting. The course will examine the construction of private and public selves across eras and disciplines, through a combination of lectures, screenings, readings, and talks. Sections and examinations will be practice-based, focused on a single basic task: students will be asked to turn into each other over the course of the term.

GenEd. 1138. Consent M

Elaine Scarry

Consent will be studied in four domains: Part I—the relation of consent and the body in marriage, in medicine, and in state citizenship; Part II – the act of consent and dissent in war (beginning with the dissent of Achilles in the Iliad and including readings up to the present); Part III – freedom of movement, freedom of entry and exit in citizenship (including contexts where right of movement has been denied); Part IV – consent as the basis of cultural creation. The nature of individual and collective deliberation is at the center of the course throughout.