

Course Descriptions | Fall 2023



*****You can take any course number a second time as long as the topic of the course is different. No course number can be taken more than a total of four times.*****

ENGL 674: Research Trends in English: War, Love, and Science (ZOOM or in person)

Wednesday 3:45-6:15

Dr. Michael T. Williamson

This course introduces MA students to trends in literary study in which time and place have become dislocated, disoriented, and shifted. Unit One will consider the poetry of survival and what opportunities for researchers are created out of that survival: Abraham Sutzkever's Holocaust poetry, Zelda's post Holocaust widow poetry, Medieval Arabic poetry (translated into Spanish and then into English), and the survival of classical T'ang dynasty Chinese poetry. How does reading poetry that takes us out of time and place speak to the resilient creativity of language? Unit Two will consider research trends that emerge out of shifts in time and place before, during and after the Second World War in the United Kingdom, Poland, and the wartime Shanghai/Hong Kong nexus. How does the often "queer" time of the 1930s change during wartime, if it changes at all? Unit Three will focus on research trends related to a specific genre: global science fiction/fantasy/Afrofuturism and research methods related to science fiction/fantasy/Afrofuturism. Students will be encouraged to choose their own place/time research areas, and connections to professional research organizations will be a central feature of the course.

Required Texts:

Bowen, Elizabeth. *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* (Anchor) 978-1400096565

Chang, Eileen (Zhang Aileen). *Love in a Fallen City* (New York Review of Books) 978-1590171783

MacInnes, Helen. *While Still We Live* 978-1781161555

Sutzkever, Abraham. *The Full Pomegranate: Poems of Avrom Sutzkever* 978-1438472508

VanderMeer, Ann and Jeff, *The Big Book of Science Fiction* 978-1101910092

Young, David. *Five T'ang Poets* (Oberlin UP) 978-0-932440-55-6

Zelda. *The Spectacular Difference* (Hebrew Union Press) 978-0-878202226

ENGL 763/863: Topics in British Literature before 1660 (ZOOM or in person)

Th 3:30-6:00 PM

Dr. Christopher Orchard

The course will focus on gender constructs, such as gender fluidity, hypermasculinity, heterosexual performance and the queering of identity in the medieval and Renaissance periods of British literature before 1660. There will be a variety of literary forms that will be discussed ranging from Anglo-Saxon epic poetry such as *Beowulf*, courtly love poetry of the Medieval era such as *Gawain and the Green Knight*, and allegorical poetry such as selections from Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* and plays of the Renaissance including those by Shakespeare, Decker and Jonson. Such readings will be informed by historical documents and appropriate contemporary theoretical approaches. Evaluation criteria will include weekly responses, discussion threads and a conference length paper.



**ENGL 765/865: Literature as a Genre
Memoir and the Literature of Witness
(ZOOM or in person)**

Th 6:15-8:45 PM
Dr. Chauna Craig

This course will focus on mostly contemporary memoirs that aim to bear witness to (and motivate social actions around) human rights violations and injustice “then” and now. We will read foundational and theoretical texts on both the literature of witness (a concept that runs through many literary genres) and, specifically, memoir as a form—its rhetorical moves, ethical boundaries, and relationship to personal and cultural memory in a time of injustices past, present, and anticipated.

The final reading list has not yet been determined, but 5-6 memoirs from these primary texts will be assigned to the whole class, and everyone will choose an additional book from a longer list according to their specific interests. Secondary sources will be essays and book chapters that both elucidate and critique the genre. Major assignments include an in-class presentations and a seminar paper of 15-20 double-spaced pages with scholarly sources.

Possible Texts:

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*
Cho, Grace. *Tastes Like War*
Coates, Ta-Nahesi. *Between the World and Me*
Forché, Carolyn. *What You Have Heard Is True*
Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*
Trethewey, Natasha. *Memorial Drive*
Ung, Loung. *First They Killed My Father*
Zamora, Javier. *Solito*

**ENGL 773/873: African American and Afro-Caribbean Poetry in the 20th Century
(ZOOM or in person)**

Dr. Kenneth Sherwood
T 3:30-6:00

This course looks at the rich range of 20th-century African American and African-American poetry by writers who might include James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, Kamau Brathwaite, and Marlene Nourbese Philip.

We will close read poems while considering the politics of language and performance traditions, as related both to vernacular orality and music. There will be some attention to notable movements such as the Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts; however, we will also look to read against the grain of national or regional categorization and periodization, seeing the poems as both singular “texts” and in relation to broader themes of “innovation” in modernist and postmodern poetics.

In 1921, James Weldon Johnson--author of the now famous “Lift Every Voice and Sing” -- wrote that “dialect is at present a medium that is not capable of giving expression to the varied conditions of [black] life in America” yet his masterpiece, *God’s Trombones*, aims to transform the oratory of black preachers into new poetic forms. Claude McKay published dialect poems in *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* before migrating to the US, and writing his famous “If We Must Die,” a Shakespearean sonnet published by the *Liberator*, the journal of the Workers’ Party of America.

In these two examples, we see the intersection of vernacular language, politics, poetic traditions, and formal experiment. Similar issues continue to animate poets such as Baraka and Brathwaite as they explore variants of "nation" language in their poetry while drawing connections to blues, jazz, and calypso.

Students will also have the opportunity to take advantage of the collection of small press books in the new poetry room in the English department, which may inspire some interesting and applied bibliographic projects as we consider how to exhibit and interpret these works for a broader community. We may also explore the "poetry reading" as a stimulus to creative expression and a venue for community action and formal experiment.

Ramey, Lauri. *A History of African American Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
Ramey, Lauri and Aldon Nielsen, eds. *Every Goodbye Ain't Gone: An Anthology of Innovative Poetry by African Americans* U Alabama, 2006.

ENGL 955: The History and Theory of Criticism (ZOOM or in person)

M 6:15-8:45 PM

Dr. Michael T. Williamson

This course will explore ways in which "criticism" opens up, closes down, interferes with, and stimulates the ways in which we make meanings out of literary texts. It will also explore the history of the transmission of those meanings to others. That history is, of course, still happening. Sometimes, we will explore theories of criticism that have become entrenched in our discipline. At other times, we will explore ways of reading that offer alternatives to those theories. We will consider the following questions: When does a "history of criticism" start and when does it restart? Why does the starting or restarting point matter? Should our discipline promote or challenge the idea that there has to be a start, a progression, a "history" at all? The course will be divided into three units that address these questions in different ways. **Unit One** will address a fundamental question: how might human, natural, non-human/divine/supernatural (sometimes called mythological) worlds react to one another? We will read Pindar's Victory Odes (5th century BCE), excerpts from Tamil Love Poetry (2nd to 3rd century CE), classical Arabic odes (7th century CE), and mystical poetry of the Kabbalah (12th century CE to present). We will move away from conventional notions of "Western" critical traditions towards Revathi Krishnaswamy's concept of "world literary knowledges." **Unit Two** explores "Romanticism," a literary movement that also became a theoretical and critical movement. We will read Isaiah Berlin's *The Roots of Romanticism*, selections from Thomas Pfau's *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840* (not good beach reading!), William Wordsworth's poetry, *Records of Woman* by Felicia Hemans, and selections from the theorists Susan Wolfson, D.W. Winnicott and Catherine Maxwell. **Unit Three** will explore some major critical works of the 20th and 21st century. We will start with Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle: A Study of the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* and move to essays and book chapters from Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, Catherine Stimpson's essays on Gertrude Stein, Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*, Howard Brody's *The Social Power of Expert Healers*, Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Street*, and Carolyn Burke's biography of the surrealist photographer and writer Lee Miller. Most of the critical and theoretical readings will be reasonably short and are available electronically. Each unit will offer you literary test cases that will help to anchor our explorations of theory and criticism, and each unit will prepare you for sharing the skills and content you have learned with a wider audience.

Required Texts:

Peter Cole, *The Poetry of Kabbalah* (Yale University Press) 9780300205695

William Wordsworth, *The Major Works* (Oxford World Classics) 9780199536863

Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* 9780691156200

Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study of the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* 9780374529277

J.G. Ballard, *The Drought: A Novel* 9780871404015

Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life* 978-0226080673

ENGL 985 Composition Literature Theory

Playful Literature

(ZOOM or in person)

Dr. Michael Sell

W 6:15-8:45 PM

This course explores the formal, historical, and theoretical dimensions of what I call “playful literature,” a body of texts comprised of literary and cinematic representations of games; literary texts designed to be played (e.g., videogames, board games, TTRPGs, pop-up and other books with playable affordances); and critical and philosophical texts that address games and play in literary history and theory. We’ll approach this field from several angles, including Caroline Levine’s notion of the affordance, the dramaturgy of empathy, ludic literacy, and the various methods deployed by the contributors to the forthcoming *Ready Reader One: The Stories We Tell With, About, and Around Videogames*. Semester projects include an annotated bibliography and a journal-length critical essay.