

Course Descriptions Fall 2018

M.A. in Literature

ENGL 518: Young Adult Literature
Dr. Emily Wender
T and TH 12:30-1:45

An introduction to literature for and about young adults. The course emphasizes critical study of the literature and its classification as well as resources and rationales for using young adult literature (YAL) in the middle, secondary, and college classroom. In its focus on YAL as a contemporary category literature, the course asks the following questions:

- How is “adolescence” defined in YAL? What are some common tropes, themes, or assumptions that create these definitions of adolescence?
- What textual forms, elements, and structures define YAL? In particular, how are non-conventional structures used, and to what end?

In this course we will explore the multiplicity of definitions, approaches to, and ways of reading YAL, including just a few of its many forms and genres: realistic fiction, magical realism, dystopia/science fiction, graphic novels, and historical fiction. We will also think about YAL's forceful cultural role and the ways in which it both reinforces and challenges society's perceptions of youth. We begin the course exploring our own conceptions of adolescence, building to a collective understanding of a youth lens and the potential usefulness of that approach in reading YAL. That said, the course values a range of productive approaches to the young adult experience as captured in YAL, with explicit attention to how race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability are explored in YAL.

This course also incorporates pedagogical experiences and concerns. In particular, in imagining various readers of YAL, we will think about what pedagogical structures and choices might serve potential students: What does YAL offer the adolescent reader? What does it offer the adult reader? What does it offer the teacher of adolescents and/or adults, and how might we take advantage of those opportunities? Thus, coursework puts students in the role of both scholars and teachers, asking them to write responses to readings and research particular texts as well as design curriculum for students and teach lessons on course material.

This course focuses primarily on American young adult literature and often features such authors as Jacqueline Woodson, Sherman Alexie, Laurie Halse Anderson, and David Levithan. Authors and works shift yearly.

ENGL 674 Research Trends in English (required course)
Dr. Michael Williamson
T 6:00 – 8:30

This M.A.-level course addresses several intertwined issues central to success in a graduate English program: professionalization, research techniques, reading and writing disparate academic genres, textual studies and bibliography, and archival work. Using a critique of Franco Moretti's essay, “Graphs, Maps, and Trees” (*New Left Review* 24 2003: 67-93) as a starting point, we will focus on

creating alternative modes for reading literary history and for engaging in research projects that contribute to a greater understanding and awareness of the function of literature in the academic world and in other worlds that intersect with academia. In particular, we will explore how literary inheritances take on new and strange forms as they travel across time, genre, space, and form. This class will be divided into three main units of 4-5 weeks each. Unit One will explore archival research in two emerging areas of scholarly interest – Peninsular Poetry (including classical, medieval and modern Arabic poetry) and Transnational Women’s Poetry (especially connections between poems written by Felicia Hemans and the sources she revised as she wrote *Records of Woman*). Digital and archival research will feature prominently in this unit. Unit Two will explore research trends regarding “traditional” and “modern” literature by focusing on Eileen Chang’s collection of short stories, *Love in a Fallen City* and her spy story, “Lust, Caution,” which was adapted into a controversial film directed by Ang Lee, and Chinese poetry from the T’Ang dynasty, which provided Chang with many of the motifs that make her fiction so strangely modern and traditional all at once. Close reading research techniques related to literature and theory will figure prominently in this unit. Unit Three will explore trends in African American Feminist Science Fiction literature and scholarship from twenty years ago to the present. The work of the HUGO award winning Octavia Butler (*Bloodchild and Other Stories*) and N.K. Jemisin (*The Fifth Season* and *The Stone Sky*) will provide students with opportunities to develop and present research projects related to a range of trends in English. As you pursue a variety of research leads, you will work to define their field(s) of study and become fluent in the resources and approaches necessary to make significant scholarly contributions to our discipline.

Required Texts:

Butler, Octavia. *Bloodchild, and Other Stories* 9781583226988
Chang, Eileen *Love in a Fallen City* (New York Review of Books) 978-1590171783
Jemisin, N.K. *The Stone Sky* 9780316229241 and *The Fifth Season* 9780316229296 (you might also want to buy and read the second book in the trilogy, *Obelisk Gate* 9780316229265)
Hemans, Felicia. *Records of Woman* (U of Kentucky P) 978-0-8131-0964-0
Sells, Michael. *Desert Tracings* (Wesleyan UP) 978-0-8195-1158-4
Young, David. *Five T’ang Poets* (Oberlin UP) 978-0-932440-55-6

Suggested Texts:

Butler, Octavia. *From Seed to Harvest* 978-0446698900
Jemisin, N.K. *Obelisk Gate* 9780316229265

ENGL 753/853 Literature as a Profession (required course)

Dr. Melanie Holm

TH 2:30 – 5:00

What does it mean to be a professional reader of literature? How does the profession work? This course explores these questions with the aim of preparing students to pursue their graduate study as professional training. By the end of the semester, students will have a clear understanding of the professional landscape and how to orient their study towards the kind of career they desire, a general understanding of the major journals and texts involved in their fields, practice in developing scholarly documents, writing proposals and cover-letters, and giving conference papers.

Goals and Objectives:

- Design your graduate career

- Develop professional documents
- Prepare to participate in scholarly and professional activities

Course Text:

Kelsky, Karen. *The Professor is in: The Essential Guide to Turning Your PhD into a Job*. Three Rivers Press, 2015.

ENGL 760/860 Teaching College Literature

Dr. Veronica Watson

W 6:00 – 8:30

This is a seminar and workshop course in which we'll focus as pragmatically as possible on current approaches to teaching introductory courses in literature--as informed by recent theory as well as the real constraints of the classroom, the institutional setting, and the needs of our students and ourselves. We will also consider the teaching of literature in non-academic contexts, which calls on many of the same skill sets and considerations as what happens in a college classroom. Employing the modes of reflective practice and critical pedagogy, we will explore both the theoretical and practical concerns of teaching college literature, with special attention paid to the design and implementation of pedagogical goals that encourage "significant learning" (Fink).

Evaluation will be based on workshop participation, critical evaluations, and on course materials prepared, including course descriptions, syllabi, policy statements, sample assignments, and so on.

ENGL 761/861: American Lit before 1870: Adapting the American Renaissance

Dr. Todd Thompson

M 6:00 – 8:30

The 2013 Academy Award for “Best Picture” went to *Twelve Years a Slave*, a movie adapted from the 1853 nonfiction work by Solomon Northup. In 2013, two of the “Best Picture” nominees—*Lincoln* and *Django Unchained*—also treated mid-nineteenth-century US subject matter. Similarly, recent T.V. shows such as *Sleepy Hollow* build on (but depart wildly from) antecedents in early American literature. Such recursions raise questions about what 19th century American literature and culture meant to readers then and what they mean to us now. How, and why, have 20th and 21st century writers, filmmakers, and other artists adapted source material written during the period retroactively labeled the “American Renaissance”? Just as important, what did these texts mean to their original audiences?

To answer these questions, we will first historicize these texts to understand them in their original contexts, and then consider how they have been repurposed to speak to a very different historical moment. Through such multiple historicizations, we will pay respect to distinct but sometimes overlaid time periods while finding ways to make early American literatures exciting and relevant for modern generations of students and readers. In doing so, we will read and apply multiple models of current adaptation theory. We will also think self-consciously about the American literary canon: how it gets established and re-shaped, what types of texts are embraced or forgotten at which points in history, and why.

Coursework will include regular response papers, a collectively created annotated bibliography on adaptation theory, a critical synthesis, and a seminar paper. Required books may include the following:

- James Fenimore Cooper, *Last of the Mobicans* (Penguin Classics, 1986)
- Mat Johnson, *Pym: A Novel* (Spiegel & Grau, 2012)
- Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (Telemachus Press, 2013)
- Edgar Allan Poe, *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (Norton 2004)
- Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* [Second Edition] (Routledge, 2013)

ENGL 763/863 Topics in Brit Lit before 1660

Shakespeare and Adaptations in the Contemporary Novel

Dr. Chris Orchard

W 2:30 – 5:00

The course will look specifically at adaptations of a selection of Shakespeare's plays in novel form, focusing in particular on the Hogarth Press that recently commissioned a number of contemporary novelists to rework a Shakespeare play into a contemporary context. We will discuss the ideological, gendered and political differences between the texts, examine the anxiety of influence, and explore the cultural arguments for the appropriation of Shakespeare's plays. Discussion will centre around theories of adaptation, both generally and specifically in terms of Shakespeare's work and final papers will consider these theories as part of the comparative analysis. There will be daily responses and a final paper that considers one of the plays and its novel adaptation.

Pairings:

Taming of the Shrew and Anne Tyler, *Vinegar Girl*

Merchant of Venice and Howard Jacobson, *Shylock Is My Name*

Othello and Tracy Chevalier, *New Boy*

The Tempest and Margaret Atwood, *Hag Seed*

Macbeth and Jo Nesbo, *Macbeth*

King Lear and Edward St. Aubyn, *Dunbar*

Winter's Tale and Jeanette Winterson, *The Gap Of Time*

ENGL 766/866: Topics in Comparative Literature

Topic: The Contemporary Graphic Novel

Dr. Christopher Kuipers

T 2:30-5:00

This course will explore the contemporary long-form graphic novel by placing it in both its historical and global contexts. Core readings will be selected from works published since 2000 (the titles cited below may vary from the course's final required textbook list). In addition to various American contemporary classics as Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*, Craig Thompson's *Blankets*, Charles Burns' *Black Hole*, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, and David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp*, we will explore the three other major international traditions—the American and British post-pulp superhero comic (e.g., *All-Star Superman*), the Franco-Belgian clear-line all-ages album (e.g., *Alan's War*), and the Japanese manga tradition (e.g., *Pluto*)—as well as visiting other global scenes of interest, such as *Persepolis*, *Palestine*, and *Pyongyang*. The theme of war, represented in all these global sites, will be a particular concern, particularly as we follow the global dissemination of comic books in the wake of World War II. Two other important themes will be that of childhood and the use of graphic novels in teaching (*American Born Chinese*), particularly in light of the canonical revolution of

cultural and visual studies in the field of English literature. One or more fascinating examples of what might be called “multimodal” comics (awkward of course since the comics form is quintessentially multimodal at heart) will also be sampled, such as *The Photographer* and *Alice in Sunderland*.

In our supplemental readings, the history of the graphic novel will be traced not only to the watershed of Will Eisner (*The Contract with God* and other works), but backwards to the first serial visual-textual artistry: in medieval manuscript illuminations, the Bayeux tapestry, William Hogarth, Rodolphe Töpffer, Japanese kibyoshi, and woodcut “wordless” novels. All of these appear to be evolutionary “dead ends,” largely, and we will examine the reasons why (particularly technological) American newspaper strips did so well, in comparison, regarding durability and influence (particularly in the full-color weekend page formats of artists like Winsor McCay, Frank King, George Herriman, and Hal Foster). Stemming from the collected reprints of newspaper strips, the evolution of the emergent “comic book” format will be traced from superhero and horror comics, to the Comics Code, to “underground comix,” to the first “graphic novels.” The terminological problem will be one key locus of discussion. Other theoretical concerns will include the grammar of “sequential art,” the dynamics of color vs. black and white, and seriality vs. long albums and collected editions—not to mention the overly vexed divide between “word” and “image.” Theoretical and critical readings will be drawn from such texts as Lessing’s *Laocoön*, McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*, Heer and Worcester’s *A Comics Studies Reader*, and the MLA guide to *Teaching the Graphic Novel*.

Course requirements will include weekly written responses to discussion questions, occasional “round-up” respondencies, a longer analysis of a graphic novel or series (possibly including their screen adaptations) developed in consultation with the instructor, and a pedagogical assignment focused on teaching a graphic novel as part of a literature course. There will be differential assignments for 766/866 (M.A./Ph.D.) as appropriate. Because of the large number of hard-copy texts that will be covered, the instructor will contact those enrolled ahead of time with a complete list of required titles.

ENGL 771/871 Topics in Postmodern Literature
Alternate Postmodern: Paradox, Fragment, Pastiche, and Magic
Dr. Tanya Heflin
Th 6:00 – 8:30



“You Are Not Yourself,” appropriation art, Barbara Kruger, 1981.

Continually wriggling out of static definition, postmodern literature remains notoriously slippery and difficult to define—yet in this course we will work to build arguments to support our working definitions of postmodern literature and culture. Characterized by experimentation, pastiche, paradox, fragmentation, fabulation, intertextuality, meta-awareness, unreliability, parody, and bricolage, postmodern literature has challenged notions of “truth” and the status quo in literature—and

yet critical response has too often viewed it, paradoxically, as largely a masculine endeavor. In this course, we will work to understand the features of modernity that led to postmodernity, and more distinctly, we will both explore the “classic” postmodernist writers (a fittingly paradoxical concept)

and push further to uncover voices who wrote in postmodern modes but have not always been exalted as postmodern writers—that is, an Alternate Postmodern. Theoretical and critical approaches we will apply include feminist theory, deconstructionism, reader response, and standpoint theory. Writers we will explore include Kathy Acker, Isabel Allende, Margaret Atwood, Aimee Bender, Italo Calvino, Robert Coover, Don DeLillo, Haruki Murakami, Ishmael Reed, Leslie Marmon Silko, Zadie Smith, D.M. Thomas, and Kurt Vonnegut.

Course components: Discussion, class blog, syllabus construction, “scholar-in-society” project, presentations, and seminar essay.

**ENGL 772/872 Topics in Women’s Literature
(American) Black Women, Black Plays**

**Dr. Mike Sell
M 2:30 – 5:00**

This course provides students the opportunity to develop critical understanding of the writers, texts, themes, and methods that comprise the canon—better yet, and with a nod to Beyoncé, the canon – in formation—of African American women playwrights and plays. We will consider (and support semester projects about) early twentieth-century women; for example, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Mary P. Burrill, Zora Neale Hurston, Eulalie Spence, May Miller, Marita Bonner, or Shirley Graham. As we will do with contemporary playwrights: Suzan-Lori Parks, Lynn Nottage, Lydia Diamond, Dael Orlandersmith, Anna Deavere Smith, Sarah Jones, Charlayne Woodard, Katori Hall, Christina Anderson, and Ifa Bayeza, for examples.

But our focus will fall strongest on black women who wrote plays between 1959 and 1973, the era that witnessed the rejuvenation of the Civil Rights Struggle; the emergence of the Black Power, Black Arts, and Black Feminist movements; and the comprehensive reformation of the U.S. literary and theatrical economy. This remarkable generation of playwrights explored—sometimes emphatically, sometimes warily—a conception of Blackness that was inextricably linked to political, cultural, social, and personal transformation. Among the playwrights we might consider: Dorothy Ahmad, Maya Angelou, Vinnette Carroll, Alice Childress, Pearl Cleage, Martie Evans-Charles, J.e. Franklin, Adrienne Kennedy, Sonia Sanchez, Ntozake Shange, and Sharon Stockard.

Beyond the obvious benefits of learning about African American women writers and what they wrote, this course will also give students the opportunity to further explore and apply relevant critical-theoretical approaches (critical race theory, black cultural studies, intersectional feminism, black feminist performance theory) and learn the specific disciplinary methodologies required for the effective study of dramatic literature.

**ENGL 797 Independent Seminar
Areas of Expertise and Interest**

Dr. Melanie Holm

British and European Literature 1660-1850 (Restoration, Eighteenth Century, Romanticism, Early Victorian); The Rise of the Novel; Women Writers; Intellectual History (Classical Period to Enlightenment); Empiricism; Aesthetics; Feminist Theory; Thing Theory; Literature of Conquest and Travel Literature; Fairy Tales, Folklore, and Mythology; the Gothic and Literature of the Uncanny

Dr. Tom Slater

Film studies, feminist theory, 20th c. American literature, horror, sci-fi/fantasy, postmodernism, war in film and literature

Dr. David Downing

Critical theory, American literature, cultural studies, institutional critique