

**ENGLISH MA PROGRAM
FALL 2026
COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

ENGL 636: History of Literary Criticism

Prof. Steven Kruger

[27098] Th 4:40pm-6:30pm

We all read theoretically. That is, we all read with some set of assumptions (both explicit and implicit) about what the written (or other cultural) work in front of us is, how it was fashioned, how readers (like us) are meant to respond to it, whether and how we are supposed to “figure it out,” what its role in a larger cultural (and social and political) frame might be, and so forth. In this course, we will examine a wide range of literary and cultural theory, works that reflect explicitly on what it is that a text does in the world and how it means; what authorship is, and the ways in which authors are implicated in their historical moments; how the cultural, social, political, and historical surroundings of a text are significant; and how readers read. The course will touch on a number of influential theoretical approaches (such as psychoanalysis, Marxism/materialism, formalism, (post)structuralism, feminism, queer theory, critical race and post-colonial theory), but any survey of such a large field will be necessarily incomplete. Our main goals will be (1) to grapple with a set of challenging and exciting theoretical essays and (2) to examine how working with these texts might make us better, more self-aware, flexible, and innovative readers.

ENGL 701: Graduate Methodology

Prof. Kevin Ferguson

[29454] W 4:40pm-6:30pm (**ONLINE**)

In this class, we will learn how to think like a humanist in an academic context, employing a variety of reading strategies on literary and scholarly texts, transforming interpretive problems into research question, and using research to present a nuanced argument situated within a specific scholarly conversation. Through this process, we will consider how knowledge is created and re-created in the field of literary studies.

ENGL 719: Medieval British Literature 1100–1500

Prof. Glenn Burger

[28418] M 4:40pm-6:30pm

In this class we will survey the vibrant revival of writing in English that took place from the late twelfth through the fifteenth century. We will consider the transformation of chivalric masculinity brought about by the invention of romantic love in this period—seen in the *Lais* of Marie de France or in romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—as well as alternative modes of social expression made possible in the genre of fabliau, a form of bawdy folktale wildly popular with bourgeois and nobles alike. We will also consider Chaucer’s complex transformation of the gender politics of romance and fabliau in the *Knight’s, Miller’s and Wife of Bath’s Tales*. In addition, we will consider the premodern race making taking place in popular English medieval texts dealing with

East West contact: for example, in a romance such as *The King of Tars* and a travel narrative such as Mandeville's *Travels*. Finally, we will sample some of the lively dramatic output from the late Middle Ages in the immensely popular biblical Cycle dramas and a morality play, *Mankind*. While we will consider the impact of the trilingual nature of English culture in the period--English, French, and Latin--we will largely read literary texts in modern English translations. *The course satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MEd and MAT students.*

ENGL 721: Seventeenth-Century Literature

Poetry and Music

Prof. Carrie Hintz

[29453] M 4:40pm-6:30pm (**ONLINE**)

Our seminar will explore a range of seventeenth century poetic and musical genres. When we consider poetry and music together, we learn a great deal about seventeenth century history and culture, including religious and civil conflict, colonialism, gender performance, women's subjectivity, individualism and belonging, and solitude and community. Music was a powerful cultural force that registered political turbulence, but that also soothed agitated spirits in tough times.

We will begin with the metaphysical poetry of John Donne, exploring it alongside the expressive textures of the English Lute Song (John Dowland, Thomas Campion, Anthony Holborne). Private and public religious devotion in the period will be represented by poets like Aemilia Lanyer and George Herbert, and musical composers like Orlando Gibbons. Poems by Richard Crashaw, Katherine Philips, and Henry Vaughan—and music by Thomas Tallis and William Byrd—will allow us to trace the animating tensions between the sacred and the profane in the period. We will devote two weeks to cavalier poets like Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, and Ben Jonson, considering music by Henry Lawes and Alfonso Ferrabosco II (who set Jonson's masques). We will also look at Andrew Marvell's poetry and listen to the music of John Jenkins, who wrote consort pieces for viols to be played privately when public theaters were closed. Over a three-week period, we will read John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* and listen to the music of William Lawes and Matthew Locke. We will also read Milton's pastoral elegy "Lycidas" and reflect on how Claudio Monteverdi's laments (especially "Lamento della Ninfa") work within a similar aesthetic of sorrow and loss. Continuing in that vein, one week will be devoted to the Henry Purcell's portrayal of love and abandonment in his opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689). Our final unit of the course will consider women's lives and cultural production in a global context, with particular attention to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648–1695), a poet of the Latin American colonial period, including settings of her work ("Madre, la de los primores") and other *villancicos barrocos*. Throughout the course, we will read theorists of the relationship between poetry and music in the period, most notably Susan McClary and Diane Kelsey McColley.

No musical background (or previous knowledge of seventeenth-century literature) is necessary to thrive in—and enjoy—this seminar. Musical selections will be readily available on YouTube, streaming services like Spotify, and on reserve at the library. The literary texts will be available on Brightspace as public domain works. Assignments will include an in-class presentation and a final

paper. The course will be held fully online by Zoom. *The course satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MSED and MAT students.*

ENGL 727: Studies in American Literature, 1820-1920

Emerson and DuBois

Prof. Roger Sedarat

[29132] T 6:40pm-8:30pm (**ONLINE**)

While America's figurative formation begins with Ralph Waldo Emerson's infinite vision, its lofty ideal can't help but confront the limitations of what W.E.B. Du Bois demarcates as his nation's "color line." Such contradictory movement towards and away from freedom asks us to interrogate his famously elusive transparent eyeball as a point of entry into a greater yet more elusive lyric tension informed by marginality. While Harold Bloom considers Emerson's transformation into all seeing nothingness as central to the American literary tradition, he qualifies how "there is not too much to say (nor very original to say) about such an observation." Returning with Du Bois to the spot upon which Emerson stands near the start of Nature, the site of the snowy mud puddle challenges such critical and creative universality. His Oversoul in nature thus must reckon with Mark Twain's Jim fleeing slavery along the Mississippi and Melville's Pip losing his identity in the wake of the Middle Passage. This comparative reading that extends from the American Renaissance into the early twentieth century presents a series of dichotomies warranting greater interrogation: ascendance vs. descendancy, wholeness vs. fragmentation, individual as subject vs. object, prophetic voice vs. sociological voice, spiritual democracy vs. political democracy, etc. Using the writing of Emerson and DuBois as foundational texts, this course explores such comparisons in a survey of several writers that include Herman Melville, Frederick Douglass, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Robert Frost, James Weldon Johnson, Georgia Douglass Johnson, Claude McKay, Booker T. Washington, Wallace Stevens, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, Robert Hayden, and others. *The course satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MSED and MAT students.*

ENGL 734: Native American and Indigenous Literatures

The Novels of Louise Erdrich

Prof. William Orchard

[28155] M 6:40pm-8:30pm (**ONLINE**)

This class explores the novels of Louise Erdrich, one of the most influential contemporary American writers and a central figure in Native American literary studies. The course traces the evolution of Erdrich's formal experimentation, narrative strategies, and ethical commitments by reading work from early in her career (*Love Medicine*) and more recent works (*The Sentence* or *The Night Watchman*). The core of the class, though, will focus on Erdrich's "justice trilogy": *Plague of Doves*, *The Round House*, and *LaRose*. Students will examine key concepts, devices, and tropes central to Native American literary cultures: nonlinear storytelling, polyvocal narration, kinship networks, sovereignty, the sacred, survivance, and the ongoing presence of history. Particular attention will be paid to Erdrich's recurring settings and to her sustained engagement with Ojibwe lifeworlds, community memory, and intergenerational trauma. The class also foregrounds literature's relationship to the law. Through close readings of Erdrich's representations of tribal governance,

federal Indian policy, dispossession, and juridical struggle, we will consider how fiction intervenes in legal discourse—reimagining justice, sovereignty, and accountability. Throughout, students will situate Erdrich within broader debates about American literature, Indigenous modernity, and the political work of the novel.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar

The Novel and the Invention of Structural Violence

Prof. Gloria Fisk

[29332] T 4:40pm-6:30pm

Until the late 1960s, the English language left its speakers without words to name the kind of violence that needs nobody to lift a hand to make it happen. That silence posed a political problem to the Black activists Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) and Charles Hamilton, so they took a notably linguistic turn to solve it with the invention of “institutional racism.”

This course begins with the observation of that historical development in the English language to consider how the novel evolves alongside it. We’ll trace the history of the discourses of structural violence that have emerged over the past half-century ago to ask: How does the form of the novel change in this period to capture English speakers’ conversation about our unequal vulnerability to structural violence? Our reading will include Anna Burns’ *Milkman*, Virginia Guiffre’s *Nobody’s Girl*, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake*, and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Ministry for the Future*.

ENGL 781: Special Seminar

The Political Possibilities of American Romance

Prof. Karen Weingarten

[34465] Th 4:40pm-6:30pm

Can reading romance change us? This course begins with this question to investigate the political and social power of romance—broadly defined in the course as both a commercial genre and narrative structure. Romance novels as a genre have long been dismissed as “guilty pleasures”: unworthy of academic attention and even somewhat embarrassing. Today, their cultural impact is undeniable; even Mayor Mamdani recommended New Yorkers check out Rachel Reid’s wildly popular *Heated Rivalry* during the January 2026 snowstorm. Together, we’ll consider the popularity of the genre as we also ask what romance in more literary novels has to offer (or not). What makes a novel a romance, for example? What does genre fiction offer that literary fiction doesn’t (and vice versa)? What is the power of the happy ending? (Or the tragic one.) In short, this course examines American romances, loosely defined across literary fiction, historical and contemporary popular novels, and speculative narratives to compare romance as genre and romance as plot device. From early 20th-century explorations of marriage and desire to contemporary interrogations of race, gender, sexuality, sex, and reproductive autonomy, we will ask how love stories negotiate power, imagine alternative social structures, and create spaces for emotional and political transformation. Readings will include novels by Edith Wharton, James Baldwin, Beverly Jenkins, Octavia Butler, Helen Hoang, Peng Shepherd, Rachel Reid, and critical theory and criticism by Lauren Berlant,

Janice Radway, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Dorothy Roberts, and Sara Ahmed on desire, intimacy, consumerism, capitalism, marriage, and culture. The course will take a feminist lens to consider why romance has often been dismissed as a site of political transformation in the U.S. and whether its challenges to contemporary social arrangements can create real social change.