

SUMMER 2026 ENGLISH MA COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Session I (4-week session, June 1 to June 24)

English 719. Medieval Epic Literature

Online, Asynchronous

Prof. Edward Currie

Course Code: 6255

The epic is generally taken to be one of the oldest and most venerable genres, a literary form used by ancient cultures to represent their legendary origins and martial achievements. This course, a survey of medieval 'epics' (i.e., texts with qualities like those found in classical epic literature, e.g. *The Aeneid*) from the eighth century to the thirteenth, will explore the diversity of forms and purposes that can be found in the epic productions of the period and the difficulty of bringing these extremely varied texts under one denominator. Although works within this genre have much in common, they are also diverse enough that it is hard to speak of them as belonging to one tradition.

We will read narratives composed in medieval England, France, Scandinavia, and Carolingian Germany; namely, *Beowulf*, *The Song of Roland*, *The Saga of the Volsungs*, and *The Nibelungenlied*. The literature will be read in translation. Students will turn in weekly responses and write two papers. The first requires close readings of a text; the second is a research paper that requires some engagement with scholarship. This online course will be asynchronous. Class discussions will occur on our Brightspace site, where required lectures and other course materials will also be available. *This class satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MEd and MAT students.*

English 781. Addiction on the American Stage

MTWTh 6:00 to 7:40 pm, online synchronous

Prof. Rhoda Sirlin

Course Code: 6256

This special topics graduate class will focus on 20th and 21st-century American plays that dramatize the pervasive and persistent problem of addiction in American society. While not necessarily providing solutions to this social problem, these plays confront the root causes and consequences of addiction on American lives. We will begin with Eugene O'Neill's classic play about addiction—*Long Day's Journey Into Night*—and continue with other classic playwrights such as Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Then we will

explore more contemporary playwrights whose work looks at the problem anew—writers such as Paula Vogel, Quiara Hudes, Lynn Nottage, Rebecca Gilman and Tracy Letts.

Session II (7-week session in June 29-August 17)

English 640. The History and Theory of Comics and Graphic Narratives

MW 6:30 to 8:10 pm, online synchronous

Prof. William Orchard

Course Code: 6258

This class will survey a range of theoretical and historical writing about comics and graphic narratives, while also reading several graphic narratives from the alternative comic tradition. In addition to situating contemporary graphic narratives in a longer history in order to explore how they are in dialogue with innovative comic art of the early twentieth century, we will build a critical vocabulary for attending to comic art, especially its visual aspects. We will explore some of the guiding concepts and principles that shape comic studies, and consider the value and limitations of disciplines like literary studies and art history for interpreting these works. While we won't explore many types of comics—such as webcomics or superheroes—we will think about how comics outside of the alternative tradition call for different methodologies and approaches. Likely texts include Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*, *The Smartest Kid on Earth*, Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons*, David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp*, and comics by Phoebe Gloeckner, Justin Green, R. Crumb, Winsor McCay, Frank King, and George Herriman.

English 781. From the Fireside to Modernism: American Poetry and Changing Taste

TTh 6:30 to 8:10 pm, online synchronous

Prof. James Richie

Course Code: 6257

If you asked an American poetry-lover in the 1880s to name the greatest, most representative national poets they would most likely have immediately listed William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell and with the prime example of the best the US has to offer to be found in the works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The works of these authors are often sentimental and popular, simple in verse form, mostly positive in outlook. If you asked the same question of an American poetry-lover in the 1930s or 40s or 50s they might note T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound, poets whose complicated, ironic, allusive verse openly disdains notions of popular taste. Or they might propose William Carlos Williams or Wallace Stevens, two poets whose free verse, abstract musings often work to remake the world or renew

our sense of place in the world. Or they might point to Edna St. Vincent Millay, the Greenwich Village “girl poet” whose formal and structured love poetry gives subtle signals of her bohemian, bisexual life. Or they might offer Langston Hughes, the African American poet whose works hopefully anticipate a radical social restructuring, one that would allow all US citizens equal rights and opportunities. American poetry, and tastes in poetry, changed radically from the late 1800s to the early 20th century. This class will be an exploration of how and why. We’ll begin by looking at the poetry of 19th century America, visiting the Fireside as an example of the tastemakers of later in the century. We’ll veer backwards to the earlier part of the 19th century to examine the wild variety of verse (and purposes for versification) that proliferated in the young nation. Then we’ll take a look at some of the transitional figures at the turn of the century who anticipate certain tastes for the modernists. We’ll end by looking at a handful of modernists (and other 20th century poets) to think through how or why a new poetic canon for American writing developed and how that canon, as the canon of the 19th century, is still under review and revision. *This class satisfies the pre-1900 requirement for MAT and MEd students.*