

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

~ FALL 2023 ~

ENG 501 – INTRODUCTION TO SCHOLARLY METHODS

PROF. DAMIEN KEANE

Thursdays, 9:30 – 12:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 13538 (B) 15067

This course is a requirement for new students to the Master's program in English. The aim of the course is to assist students in making the transition to the kinds of practical work, methodological reflection, and critical thinking central to graduate study. To this end, the course will introduce students to some of the institutional relationships and social dynamics that have helped determine the present state of literary and cultural studies, with particular emphasis on the development of the discipline of English in the modern era. The syllabus will draw on both foundational works and more recent critical writing, as a way to sketch the history of antagonisms and continuities, over-loud controversies and unspoken alliances, that leads to our present moment.

The course will offer some pointers on methods of researching and presenting a piece of academic writing; some instruction in techniques related to using libraries, special collections, archives, and electronic repositories, for the purpose of discovering and accessing information; and some technical knowledge about the production, circulation, and storage of texts that bears strongly on how one might establish evidence, assess claims, and understand motivation in the transmission of information.

This course is divided into A and B sections, which have different formats: the A section is a seminar, whereas the B section is a three-credit-hour placeholder designed to provide full-time stats to first-semester Master's students. New students in the M.A. program must enroll in the A section, and full-time students can also enroll in the B section. It is not mandatory, however, to enroll in the B section, as some students prefer to take an extensive seminar with those three credit hours. If you have questions about enrollment options, please contact the Director of the Master's Program.

Please note that neither the A nor the B section of this course counts toward the four intensive seminars required for the Master's degree.

ENG 502 – INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL THEORY

PROF. JASON MAXWELL

Fridays, 9:00 – 11:30

Registration Number: 14188

English 502 is a survey class designed to introduce you to twentieth-century literary (and film) criticism and cultural theory. Proceeding chronologically, we will discuss several of the major schools of thought including Russian formalism, historical materialism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, feminism, gender and race theory, deconstruction, media theory, new historicism, and cultural studies. We will focus on foundational concepts, interpretive methodologies, and poetic analyses. Throughout the course we will utilize an array of primary materials—literary texts, motion pictures, and popular music—to illustrate and illuminate the theoretical approaches in question. By the end of the class, you should be ready to utilize these theoretical approaches selectively as you undertake advanced graduate level study.

ENG 523 – THE 18TH-CENTURY NOVEL: Realism

PROF. RUTH MACK

Thursdays, 12:30 – 3:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 23322 (B) 23323

The eighteenth-century novel has long been associated with “realism,” with a kind of referential writing that tries to get reality onto the page. Eighteenth-century realism usually puts readers in mind of passages like the one Defoe gives us on the contents of Robison Crusoe’s raft, as Crusoe salvages items from the shipwreck, telling us in a list that runs over a full modern page that he has procured everything from “five Pieces of dry’d Goat’s flesh” to “two very good Fowling-pieces” and the full contents of the “Carpenter’s chest.”

Crusoe’s need—Defoe’s inclination—to tell us just how many cheeses (and what kind) were pulled from the ship has been understood as “real” in multiple senses. It is at once a matter of philosophical ideas of perception and of new scientific standards for representing the world’s detail. It is also, critics have long argued, connected to the growth of commercial capitalism and a modern, secular world. Moreover, realism sometimes figures as a troubling “matter of fact,” a strategy of representation that is associated with an exercise of reason that is a motor of imperialism and, at its worst, a convention that participates in dehumanization of settler colonialism and slavery. In this view, texts, like colonists, make their own realities.

We begin the course with major theories of the novel, the genre writ large, as well as its eighteenth-century incarnation. Our goal at this stage is to understand the stakes of these debates and why the novel genre in particular has seemed the literary place to go to figure out how society really works and how representation plays a part in that working. What is novel about the novel? What is newly real about its realism? Answering these questions will require us to dig into the history of genre and the political and social context of eighteenth-century Britain.

Our next project will be to see how these theories of genre sit with other kinds of theoretical approaches, especially feminism, queer theory, and race theory. What does a theory of “realism” look like if we move our critical lens, or if we change the sorts of texts that tend to be considered under this term. Whose “realism” is this, and might there be more than one “real”?

Texts are likely to include:

Literature and other writing by Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Eliza Haywood, Olaudah Equiano, Alexander Pope, Frances Burney, Phillis Wheatley, Ann Radcliffe, Ottobah Cugoano, Sarah Scott

Theories of the novel and theories of realism by Frye, Lukacs, Bakhtin, Watt, Mckee, Jameson, Armstrong, Appiah, Sangari, Azim, Aravamudan

ENG 527 – POSTWAR AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

THIS COURSE IS OPEN ONLY TO UB TEACH AND MASTER’S-LEVEL STUDENTS

PROF. LAURA MARRIS

Tuesdays, 3:30 – 6:10

Registration Number: 23809

In this seminar, we will focus on the landscape of American poetry from 1945 to the present. Along with readings from Elizabeth Bishop, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sylvia Plath, Frank O’Hara, Adrienne Rich, Lucille Clifton, Marilyn Chin, Layli Long Soldier, Vievee Francis, Marwa Helal, and Forrest Gander (among others), we will look at the poetic schools and communities that have emerged across the US in response to changing creative and political forces. How have poets tried to document, protest, subvert, or expand the American idiom since 1945? We will explore the kinds of thinking and knowing poetry has made possible in the US, and how these ideas have percolated across individual and collective voices.

ENG 575 – PROBLEMS IN MODERNISM AND ACCESS

PROF. DAMIEN KEANE

Tuesdays, 12:30 – 3:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 23324 (B) 23325

The title of this seminar takes its shape and bearings from Raymond Williams’ Problems in Materialism and Culture, several essays from which will offer pedal points for its syllabus. The course will function as something of a survey of British and Irish modernism, less in the sense of a parade of greatest hits (although the syllabus will lean heavily toward canonical works) than as an investigation into the institutional settings in which agents in the literary field competed for recognition. If more conventional and/or outmoded understandings of literary modernism have tended to align its tendencies with elitist restriction, this course will consider the tensions of access and specialization that became manifest during the period as adjuncts to wider contests for political authority. In order to specify how literary writers engaged with changing conditions and practices of public access, the course will direct itself to some of the institutional formations that altered the social role traditionally occupied by literature: the commercial press, the publishing industry, sound recording, radio broadcasting, bureaucratic organization, the rise of the so-called information age. From the impact of new media technologies on practices of knowledge classification to cross-grained interactions of regulation and autonomy, the challenges of this earlier moment anticipate those of today, suggesting lines of continuity that can be suppressed in assertions of the unprecedented qualities of the present. Underwriting the entire seminar will be a commitment to hands-on work with materials in Buffalo’s Poetry Collection.

Primary works may be drawn from among those of: Samuel Beckett, Elizabeth Bowen, Nancy Cunard, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Louis MacNeice, Katherine Mansfield, Naomi Mitchison, George Orwell, Jean Rhys, Dylan Thomas, Virginia Woolf, and W.B. Yeats.

Critical readings may be drawn from those by: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Tony Bennett, Pierre Bourdieu, Terry Eagleton, John Frow, Simon Gikandi, Lisa Gitelman, Erving Goffman, Richard Hoggart, Jerome McGann, D.F. McKenzie, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, Lawrence Rainey, Edward Said, and (of course) Raymond Williams.

Course requirements for all registered students will include one or two short written responses to units on the syllabus; and, for intensively registered students only, a conference paper-length essay (ten pages) plus a bibliographic essay (ten pages), or equivalent final project, due at the end of the term. The expectations for the final project are realistic; as such, there will be no incompletes granted for the seminar.

ENG 583 – THE POETICS OF ABSTRACTION: Necessity, Violence, Promise

PROF. JUDITH GOLDMAN

Thursdays, 3:30 – 6:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 20605 (B) 20606

This course will explore a constellation of genres, processes, and technologies of abstraction, on the premise that real abstractions and their fallout form the matrix of the present. If abstraction may be an unconditional dimension of human thought, how and why are abstractions made exactly (and with what awareness), by whom, in what does their currency and authority inhere, what are their modes of operation, what are their effects? Part of our study will involve meta-inquiry into how abstraction is discussed: focus on fundamental abstractions, such as word, number, and value, seems to invite speculative stories of origin, along with projections of human natural essences and archaic (and contemporary) primitivity. How do texts not only “explain” abstraction, but also build the reality of abstraction’s consequence? Throughout the course, with each topic, we will read poets invested in in desublimating abstraction, producing work whose aesthetics defy or test various abstractions and at times unmask their violences. Yet, as we will see, many poets exhibit a fascination with abstraction – in probing its necessity and inevitability, its esemplastic power to contain contradiction.

We will begin by considering the epistemology and ontology (?) of *number*, the (embodied) activities of counting and computation, and the cultural specificity of numbers as semiotic systems. We will also study the representation of number in writing systems, the various guises and uses of zero, including as meta-semiotic, self-referential tool. This course unit (ha) will include a foray into the role of counting in biopolitics, while we will also examine art and poetry’s means of representing negativity, silence, and void, in relation to a larger culture partly founded on the determinate zero.

We’ll then inquire into economic abstraction, studying Marx’s account of the process of capitalization via abstract labor, and in turn take the thematization of creative labor in contemporary art and poetry as a potential foil to labor’s abstraction, examining strategies around demystification, alongside explorations of the potential promise of *poiesis*. We will then consider theories of value, and many of the functions, forms, tropic dynamics, and cultures of money as society’s prime mediator. As we examine the contemporary monetization of everything and financialization’s abstractions, we will seek to understand these as grounded in racial capitalism, through, for instance, accounting innovations running from the plantation formation to neoliberal social bond schemes, and as entangled with racial capital established in part through abstractive legal fictions of personhood, un-personing, and gradated sovereignty. We will also discuss capital’s shifting regimes of spatial and temporal abstraction, focusing, for instance, on the ruinous consequences of rationalization for Indigenous cultures.

From here we will turn to *language* as vehicle of conceptual abstraction, in part through Enlightenment fantasies of universal and perfect languages, alongside theories of language’s irreducible figurality and performativity. We will continue study of written systems’ abstractive tendencies through writing v. orality, alphabets/phonetics/orthography, and punctuation; and will consider translation in terms of various critiques of linguistic fungibility and the political economy of languages. We will then focus on deixis in language, especially that most abstract pronoun “I,” as it surfaces in deconstruction and theories of lyric poetry.

Our last meetings will focus on how abstraction manifests in several contemporary poetic projects, from the sometimes subtly paradoxical relation of abstraction to radicalized materiality, to the abstraction of discourse and form in autonomous aesthetic systems.

ENG 588 – 1ST YEAR PRACTICUM

PROF. JAMIE BARBER

Mondays, 3:30 – 5:10

Registration Number: 21828

ENG 588 is a teaching practicum designed as a follow up to English 599 and is a requirement for all graduate instructors teaching English 105 Writing and Rhetoric for the first time. In this course we will discuss teaching strategies such as: running class discussion, designing direct instruction, introducing new concepts, pacing course content, and grading. New instructors will also learn strategies to introduce and to support student writing in genres such as rhetorical analysis, personal narrative, persuasive research writing, and multi-modal documents. We will also discuss the use of supportive course tools such as Learning Management Systems, Eli Review, Panopto, Zoom, discussion boards, and Google docs. At its heart, this course will work to support new instructors as they embark on their first semester of teaching at the University at Buffalo, utilizing course activities and discussion to help graduate instructors build skills and confidence in the writing classroom.

ENG 625 – “Emily Dickinson’s Letters, a Case Study in Literary Editing”

PROF. CRIS MILLER

Mondays, 12:30 – 3:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 23326 (B) 23327

ccmiller@buffalo.edu, Clemens 402

To *Sarah Jenkins about 1883*

Transcribed MacGregor Jenkins?

Area – no test of depth.

Note: Missing. Publication: FN. Rev. Jenkins officiated at Gilbert [Dickinson]’s funeral, 8 October.

This course will begin with 2-3 weeks on literary editing, looking at various prefaces and organizational criteria for editions of poetry and letters—primarily of letters—asking: Why read prefaces? What interpretive impact do organizational and formatting choices have? What kind of editor inspires the most trust? The remaining weeks of the semester will consider the specific challenges of editing Dickinson’s letters. First, we will look at what is problematic in the most recent “complete” edition (1958). Then we will consider the various steps and hurdles/challenges of doing research for, organizing, and preparing a literary edition for publication—including attention to annotation. We will talk about working in archives, working with manuscripts and manuscript scraps, critical knowledge of a field as a necessary component of accurate editing, and potentially also of negotiations with a press.

Students will have a choice of writing a critical essay on some aspect of Dickinson’s letters (or on editing generally) or producing work toward a literary edition of their own, including minimally 20 pages of edited text, a 5-page preface explaining the necessity for, and criteria for organizing, the edition, and perhaps a proposal for a press. Editions must be of letters.

My edition of “Emily Dickinson’s Letters” (co-edited with Domhnall Mitchell) will be forthcoming from Harvard University Press in Spring 2024. I will ask the press to allow me to make page proofs of this new edition available to the class.

ENG 706 – PUBLICATION WORKSHOP

PROF. DAVID ALFF

Tuesdays, 3:30 – 6:10

Registration Number: 17817

In this workshop, students will rework a paper (typically a seminar paper) for publication. The workshop will help students to identify an appropriate journal for her or his work. It will then assist in the tailoring of the project for the format and focus of that publication. It will also offer guidance in the key characteristics of a successful submission. The workshop will feature several group meetings at the beginning of the semester and then regular consultations with the instructor for the remainder of the seminar.

NOTE: The workshop is open to 3rd year students only.
