

Amherst College English Courses

Fall 2019

Eng 221 Writing Poetry I (200+ English elective)(creative writing elective)

Mon 2:00-5:00 Instructor: Kirun Kapur

A first workshop in the writing of poetry. Class members will read and discuss each others' work and will study the elements of prosody: the line, stanza forms, meter, free verse, and more. Open to anyone interested in writing poetry and learning about the rudiments of craft. Writing exercises weekly. Admission with consent of the instructor. Limited to 12 students.

Eng 222 Playwriting I (200+ English elective)(creative writing elective)

TuTh 10:00-11:20 Instructor: TBA

A workshop in writing for the stage. The semester will begin with exercises that lead to the making of short plays and, by the end of the term, longer plays—ten minutes and up in length. Writing will be done in and out of class; students' work will be discussed in the workshop and in private conferences. At the end of the term, the student will submit a portfolio of revisions of all the exercises, including the revisions of all plays. Not open to first-year students. Limited to 15 students.

Eng 222 Playwriting I (200+ English elective)(creative writing elective)

Mon 2:00-5:00 Instructor: Min Lee

A first course in writing fiction. Emphasis will be on experimentation as well as on developing skill and craft. Workshop (discussion) format. Admission with consent of the instructor. Limited to 15 students.

Eng 227 Electronic literature (200+ English elective)(New Media)

Tuesday 1:00-4:00 Instructors: Judith Frank and Marisa Parham

This introductory course explores a variety of approaches to digital storytelling, from branching narratives, to hypertext media and video games, to more recent developments in machine-generated poetry and also embodied and location-based narrative. A hands-on class, it will link conventional understandings of narrative form and content to contemporary conversations about interface and computation, and ask students to think about materiality and textuality by experimenting with digital composition.

Eng 238 Shakespeare (early British literature)(200+ English requirement)

MWF 10:00-10:50 Instructor: William Pritchard

Readings in the comedies, histories, and tragedies, with attention to their poetic language, dramatic structure, and power in performance. Texts and topics will vary by instructor. Limited to 50 students.

Eng 240 Reading Poetry (200+ English elective)

TuTh 11:30-12:50 Instructor: David Sofield

A first course in the critical reading of selected English-language poets, which gives students exposure to significant poets, poetic styles, and literary and cultural contexts for poetry from across the tradition. Attention will be given to prosody and poetic forms, and to different ways of reading poems.

Eng 250 Reading the Novel (200+ English elective)

TuTh 11:30-12:50 Instructor: Alicia Christoff

An introduction to the study of the novel, through the exploration of a variety of critical terms (plot, character, point of view, tone, realism, identification, genre fiction, the book) and methodologies (structuralist, Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic). We will draw on a selection of novels in English to illustrate and complicate those terms; possible authors include Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Wilkie Collins, Henry James, Kazuo Ishiguro, Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, John Edgar Wideman, Emma Donoghue, David Foster Wallace, Monique Truong, Jennifer Egan. Preference given to sophomores. Limited to 35 students.

Eng 253 Modernists (200+ English elective)

TuTh 10:00-11:20 Instructor: Anna Abramson

This class provides an introduction to literary modernism in two parts, each part in dialogue with the other. First, in their words: we will look at how early twentieth-century writers described their own formal experiments and aesthetic agendas. This section will pair modernist manifestos and critical essays with fiction and poetry written by those same authors. Second, in their worlds: we will examine the historical, geographical, and cultural dimensions of these famous literary experiments. This section pairs modernist primary works with brief readings focused on World War I, colonization and decolonization, the Harlem Renaissance, and urban technology. When it comes to the dynamic relationship between words and worlds, our goal will be synthesis rather than separation. How does historical change relate to changes in literary form?

Possible authors include Mulk Raj Anand, Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, Langston Hughes, James Joyce, Nella Larsen, Katherine Mansfield, Ezra Pound, and Virginia Woolf. Limited to 25 students.

Eng 278 Digital Africas (Anglophone or 200+ English elective)

Mon/Wed 8:30-9:55 Instructor: C Rhonda Cobham-Sander

This course will examine how African writers incorporate digital technologies into their work when they publish traditional print texts, experiment with digital formats, or use the internet to redefine their relationship to local and international audiences. We will reflect on how words and values shift in response to new forms of mediation; on the limits these forms place on the bodies they represent, and on the protections they occasionally offer. Students will read fictional works in print, serialized narratives on blogs, as well as other literary products that circulate via social media. Students also will be introduced to a selection of digital humanities tools that will assist them in accessing, analyzing and responding to these works. Course materials include print, digital and hybrid publications by Oyono, Farah, Adichie, Cole, Maphoto, and Wainaina, among others.

Eng 282 Knowing Television (200+ English elective)

Mon/Wed 2:00-3:20 Instructor: Amelie Hastie

For better or worse, U.S. broadcast television is a cultural form that is not commonly associated with knowledge. This course will take what might seem a radical counter-position to such assumptions—looking at the ways television teaches us what it is and even trains us in potential critical practices for investigating it. By considering its formal structure, its textual definitions, and the means through which we see it, we will map out how it is that we come to know television. Prior coursework in Film and Media Studies is recommended, but not required. Not open to first-year students.

Eng 282 Literature as Translation (200+ English elective)

TuTh 1:00-2:20 Instructors: Anston Bosman and Catherine Ciepiela

Acts of translation underwrite many kinds of cultural production, often invisibly. Writers of the Harlem Renaissance, for instance, engaged with black internationalism through bilingualism and translation, as Brent Edwards has reminded us. In this course we will study literary translation as a creative practice involved in the making of subjects and cultures. We will read key statements about translation by theorists and translators, such as Walter Benjamin, Roman Jakobson, Lawrence Venuti, Peter Cole and Gayatri Spivak. We also will directly engage in translation work: each student will regularly present translations in a workshop format to produce a portfolio as a final project. The class will be “polyglot,” meaning that students are welcome to translate from any language of which they have knowledge; when they share translations, they will be asked also to provide interlinear, or “literal,” translations for those who may not understand the language they are working in. Requisite: two years of college-level study of the chosen language. Limited to 15 students.

Eng 324 Writing Poetry II (300+ English elective)(English 356 equivalent course)

Weds 2:00-5:00 Instructor: Shayla Lawson

Poetry is often a study of density and lineation but, as the expectations of genre continue to bend, more and more poets are exploring the lyric nature of the personal essay. In this class, we will assess the expansion of poetic form to include “the lyric essay,” reading essays written by poets and lyric memoirs written by essayists. The course will be primarily generative, with students selecting a specific topic to explore throughout the semester as they build their own, long-form, poetic project. Requisite: ENGL 221 Writing Poetry I. Admission with consent of the instructor. Limited to 12 students.

Eng 332 *Canterbury Tales* (early British or 300+ English elective)

TuTh 2:30-3:50 Instructor: Ingrid Nelson

Geoffrey Chaucer’s medieval masterwork, *The Canterbury Tales*, represents pilgrims from all walks of life, from peasants to artisans to nobility, telling tales that are comical, tragic, religious, and fantastical. In this course, we read almost the entirety of the Tales in its original language. The course aims to give the student rapid mastery of Chaucer’s English and an active appreciation of his poetry. Our focus will be on Chaucer’s poetry and the ethical and political questions this complex and delightful literary work raises, and how we can understand these questions within a modern context. No prior knowledge of Middle English is expected, although a knowledge of grammar in English or another Western language will be helpful.

Eng 343 Nature and Imagination (300+ English elective)

TuTh 2:30-3:50 Instructor: Amelie Worsley

Can reading poetry change our understanding of our environment? How might the way we perceive nature be conditioned by the ways in which writers have imagined it? In turn, how might the way we perceive our own imaginations be conditioned by ideas about the natural world? Although “nature” might seem like a universal and unchanging concept, British Romantic writers did much to invent our modern perception of it. This course questions what “nature” might mean, and how it developed alongside changing ideas about the imagination.

We will read the writings of William Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith, Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, Keats, and Felicia Hemans alongside seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theories of the imagination by David Hume, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant. We will also make frequent visits to the Mead Art gallery in order to experiment with some

of these imaginative theories. Finally, we will debate what impact this history has had on current environmental discourse, contemporary ethics, and the Green movement. Some critics have argued, for instance, that the Romantics' reverence for nature is more destructive than it might at first seem. Might it be more environmentally responsible to get rid of the Romantic concept of "nature" altogether? Permission with consent of the instructor.

Eng 357 Race and Relationality (American literature after 1865 or Anglophone/ethnic American or 300+ English elective)

Wed/Fri 12:30-1:50 Geoffrey Sanborn

When we say "race relations," we are using a phrase drawn from early twentieth-century American sociology, a phrase that conjures up a scenario in which already-existing racial groups are separated by prejudice and misunderstanding. As many sociologists and historians have argued, we need a new paradigm, one that implies neither that race is a primordial reality nor that racism is merely an information problem. In this class, we will be using histories of the race-concept and theories emerging from the "relational turn" in psychoanalysis to explore the interplay of race and relationality in American literature written between the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The aim of this necessarily experimental course is to see what happens if we combine a historically informed understanding of the race-concept with a psychoanalytically informed understanding of relationality and bring both of those understandings to bear on works like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, William Wells Brown's *Clotel*, Herman Melville's "*Benito Cereno*," Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. All of the varieties of American racial identification will be part of our discussions but the focus will be on the literary evocations of white-black conjunctions. Admission with consent of the instructor. Limited to 25 students.

Eng 372 Reading the Romance (300+ English elective)

Tues 1:00-3:45 Instructor: Krupa Shandilya

Do people the world over love in the same way, or does romance mean different things in different cultures? What happens when love violates social norms? Is the "romance" genre an escape from real-world conflicts or a resolution of them? This course analyzes romantic narratives from across the world through the lens of feminist theories of sexuality, marriage, and romance. We will read heterosexual romances such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, alongside queer fiction such as Sarah Waters' *Fingersmiths* and Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*. We will also pay attention to the Western romantic-comedy film, the telenovela and the Bollywood spectacular. Limited to 18 students. Not open to first-year students.

Eng 376 Disability Media (300+ English elective)

Tuth 10:00-11:20 & Sun 7:00-10:00 pm Instructor: Pooja Rangan

Moving image and audiovisual media frequently assume a fully able subject despite the infinite variety of our embodied capacities and debilitations. This course will explore how this assumption has shaped the design, narrative forms, audiovisual poetics, exhibition contexts, and modes of spectatorship and engagement of a range of media forms, from cinema to digital interfaces. We will examine how critical, experimental, and therapeutic approaches to media, the uses of media by people with disabilities, and media made in collaboration with disabled makers and protagonists enable us to fundamentally rethink what media can be and do. Readings will draw from disability studies and film and media studies as well as philosophy,

science and technology studies, performance studies, sound studies, and other areas. Topics may include: disability tropes and rehabilitation narratives in film and TV; prostheses and “assistive” technologies; subtitles, captions, and the politics of accessibility; inclusive product and interface design; staring as spectatorial mode; sound art and polymodal listening. Three hours of lectures and three hours of film screening each week. Prior coursework in ENGL or FAMS is recommended but not required. Open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Open to first-year students with consent of the instructor. Limited to 25 students.

Eng 377 The Documentary Impulse (300+ English elective)

TuTh 1:00-2:20 + Mon 7-10 pm Instructor: Pooja Rangan

Documentary is one of the fastest-growing areas of media production today, enjoying unprecedented commercial success in theaters, on television, and online streaming services. What drives the urgent desire to represent reality? Where did this impulse originate, and how do documentarians continue to channel it today? This course focuses on the innovative forms and ethical dilemmas that have resulted from the pursuit of reality. We look at different approaches to documentary (ethnographic, personal, observational, interactive, essayistic, activist) and emerging forms such as fake news, true crime podcasts, mockumentaries, web-docs, and documentary art. Our discussions consider the shifting boundaries of the documentary genre, the unique ethical and political considerations involved in making documentaries, and the impact of technological and socio-cultural changes on historical trends in documentary. Open to students with no prior film classes. Not open to first-year students. Limited to 35 students.

Eng 416 Archives of Childhood (400+ English elective)

Thurs 1-4 pm Instructor: Karen Sanchez-Eppler

Children’s books have always been part toy. The odd duality of all books—simultaneously object and text, commodity and meaning—is particularly evident in books made for children. Think how much more varied in the shape and size of volumes, the font and layout of print, the style and quantity of illustration are books intended for children compared to books for adults. Sites of innovation and experimentation in book production, children’s literature provides an excellent ground for studying book history. So too, book history provides a good gauge of shifts in cultural attitudes towards childhood. This course is interested in tracing both the history of childhood and the history of books, and what each can tell us about the other.

The course will provide an extraordinary opportunity for original archival research in the world’s finest collection of early American children’s literature. Half of the course meetings will be held at the American Antiquarian Society, in Worcester, Massachusetts, granting students access to one of America’s premier research libraries and enabling students to work directly with the rare materials housed there and with the society’s knowledgeable curators and librarians. This research will culminate in a substantial independent project. Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 18 students.

Eng 448 The Body In Peril (400+ English elective)

Thurs 1-3:45 pm Instructor: Shayla Lawson

Writing is the landscape through which poets explore the human body. The fluidity of a text often mirrors our relationship to memory—the recollection of the sensory discovering harmony with the fluidity of a poem’s language and syntax. But what happens when a disruption in one’s fundamental experience of being alters the ways in which we experience the world?

In spaces of distress, poetry often makes courageous leaps in formal reinvention. As opposed to dwelling heavily on the subject of physical disruption, this class will examine ways contemporary writers have discovered, or reimagined, prosody as a way to explore the human experience through vulnerability and authenticity. The course will include close-readings of four to six collections of poetry, some creative writing, and discussions on mindfulness practices—all culminating in a critical/personal essay exploring a selected poem of your choice. Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 18 students.

Eng 453 Value of Literature (400+ English elective)

Wed/Fri 2-3:20 Instructor: Geoffrey Sanborn

Why, Rita Felski asks, are people “willing to drive five hundred miles to hear a band playing a certain song, or spend years in graduate school puzzling over a single novel?” Concepts like “cultural capital,” “the hegemonic media industry,” or “interpretive communities” do not fully explain “why it is this particular tune that plays over and over in our heads, why it is Virginia Woolf alone who becomes an object of obsession.” Something else has to be involved, a “rogue something,” in the words of Toni Morrison’s narrator in *Jazz*, that you “have to figure in before you can figure it out.” In this seminar, students will first explore the phenomenon of aesthetic valuation, then turn to a consideration of when, why, and for whom literary experiences are valuable, and finally embark on independent research projects in which each of them studies a single author in depth and experiments with ways of articulating (in a class presentation and in a final essay) the kinds of value that that author may be said to have. Admission with consent of the instructor. Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 18 students.

Eng 458 Indigenous American Epics (American literature before 1865 or Anglophone/ethnic American or 400+ English elective)

Mon/Wed 12:30-1:50 Instructor: Lisa Brooks

This course will delve deeply into Indigenous literatures of “Turtle Island,” or North America. The Kiché Maya Popol Wuj (Council Book), the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Great Law of Peace, the Wabanaki creation cycle, and Salish Coyote Stories are rooted in longstanding, complex oral narratives of emergence and transformation, which were recorded by Indigenous authors and scribes. These texts will enable us to consider how the temporal and spatial boundaries of America are both defined and extended by colonization, and disrupted by Indigenous texts and decolonial theory. We will close read these major epics as works of classical literature, narratives of tribal history, and living political constitutions, which embed ecological and cultural adaptation.

Reading each long text (in English translation) over several weeks, we will study the tribally and regionally-specific contexts of each epic narrative as well as the “intellectual trade routes” that link them together. We will also consider the place of these epics within American literature and history and their contributions to historical and contemporary decolonization. We will discuss the ways in which the narratives challenge conceptual boundaries, considering categories such as land/place, gender, sexuality, and other-than-human beings. Open to juniors and seniors, and to sophomores with consent of the instructor. Limited to 18 students.

Eng 470 Decolonial Love (Anglophone or 400+ English elective)

Wed 2:00-4:45 Instructor: Alicia Christoff

In this upper-level course, we will read literary and theoretical texts that, although loosely grouped in terms of period, geography, and style, are all driven by the same set of questions: Is decolonial love possible? What does it look and feel like? We will read scholars and writers who

describe the ways that imperialism, capitalism, racism, and heteropatriarchy structure conventional ways of loving, caring, and forming social bonds, as well as conventional ways of telling stories and writing novels. And we will follow these writers as they imagine alternatives to these conventional structures, asking how we might alter the aspects of ourselves and our worlds that seem as fundamental and as intractable as our aesthetics, our desires, our very pleasures. As a class, we will build transportable definitions of colonialism, anticolonialism, and decoloniality from the texts we study and the contexts in which they were written and that they reflect. We will investigate the power of these analytic categories to interrogate aspects of personal as well as geopolitical experience, particularly aspects of experience that we have sometimes mistakenly believed to be without historical or sociological determinants. Possible texts include: Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Moraga and Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back*; Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself*; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic"; Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*; Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*; Mahajan, *The Association of Small Bombs*; Cole, *Open City*; Sollett, *Raising Victor Vargas*; Lee, *BlackKkKlansman*; Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love*.. Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 18 students. Fall semester.

Eng 481 Experimental Filmmakers (40+ English elective)

Tu/Th 2:30-3:50 + Weds 7-10 pm Instructor: Joshua Guilford

Experimental film is a vital area of contemporary media culture where artists engage the moving image from a wide range of creative approaches, exploring film as an aesthetic, poetic, or political medium, rather than a commercial enterprise. By departing from the conventions of mainstream film, experimental filmmakers present their audience with a stimulating challenge, asking viewers to develop new critical frameworks through which to assess films that often resist classification and traditional interpretive approaches.

In this seminar, students will take up this challenge by exploring different ways of entering into conversation with the work of experimental filmmakers. Through weekly screenings, in-class visits by contemporary filmmakers, and group discussions of course readings (such as artists' writings, interviews, and related theoretical material), we will develop critical and creative vocabularies that help us to analyze and respond to an array of experimental films and videos. Along with completing writing assignments and in-class presentations, students will plan and execute a final project that can assume a number of critical or creative forms, such as an interview with a filmmaker, a short video, or an analytical essay. Requisite: At least one foundational course in FAMS, ARHA, or ENGL. Open to juniors and seniors, and to sophomores with consent of the instructor. Limited to 20 students.