

# Department of English

## Graduate Course Descriptions

### Spring 2021

#### **English 5220: From Slavery to Harlem Renaissance: African Americans and Literature**

Thursdays, 6:30—9:00

Mode: In Person

Dr. Scott Slawinski

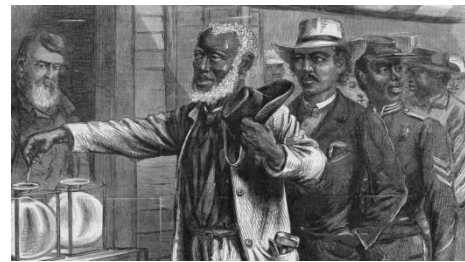
*Fulfills: M.A.- and Ph.D.-level elective*

In this class we will look at literature written by African Americans as they navigated times of enslavement, Reconstruction and raised hopes, disappointment in Jim Crow segregation and disfranchisement, and artistic



triumph and the birth of the New Negro during the Harlem Renaissance. We'll look at how American blacks met the challenges of their times, beginning with some of the earliest poetic and prose expressions in the eighteenth century and expanding through select antebellum slave narratives, post-bellum narratives of racial uplift, and rediscovery of African roots in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Focusing a lens on these

writings from the past, we'll consider early manifestations of race and racism and their evolution over time while keeping an eye turned toward contemporary thinking and events.



Likely authors will include Phillis Wheatley, Briton Hammon, Frederick Douglass, Francis Harper, Harriet Jacobs, Pauline Hopkins, Charles Chesnut, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Booker T.



Washington, W.E.B. Dubois, James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and various Harlem Renaissance writers of prose and poetry.

Course requirements include a fifteen-minute oral presentation, a short first paper, a seminar-length second paper, and, for graduate students, a fifteen-minute “teaching moment.”

#### **English 5380: Modern Literature**

Mondays, 4:00—6:20

Mode: Partially Synchronous

Dr. Todd Kuchta

*Fulfills: M.A.- and Ph.D.-level elective*

Literature written in the first half of the twentieth century is usually called “modern” or “modernist.” These adjectives have come to mean brashly experimental, highly self-reflexive, notoriously complex, and pessimistic if not apocalyptic in tone. Modernist literature was once

thought to privilege art's transcendence over everyday life and its separation from the social sphere. But this way of viewing modern writers overlooks their engagement with the past, with popular culture, and with their own social and political status.

More than anything, modernism is a movement of innovative and experimental literary styles. We will examine a range of those stylistic innovations, but we will do so by considering how they both reflect and respond to the dramatic cultural and historical changes of the early twentieth century. This was a period when urban society—with its new media, modes of communication, and forms of transportation—created an increasingly unified and interconnected globe. These technologies made time speed up and distances shrink, profoundly altering how people perceived and experienced the world around them—a world that seemed to expand and contract simultaneously. This condition is also typically described as “modern,” and it inspired the era's writers to create forms and styles that could come to grips with these exciting and sometimes overwhelming changes.

Modern literature is also international in scope, a product of exiles, émigrés, and travelers. While we will focus on writers from the British canon, they represent a broad range of national contexts. As critic Terry Eagleton once put it, “the seven most significant writers of twentieth-century English literature have been a Pole, three Americans, two Irishmen and an Englishman.” We will focus on most of these authors: Polish-born Joseph Conrad, American expatriate T. S. Eliot, Irishmen James Joyce and W. B. Yeats, and Englishman George Orwell, as well as two of the crucial female authors Eagleton overlooks—Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf. Alongside the literature, we'll also read some important works of theory and criticism.

Course requirements will likely include consistent participation, a 5-page essay, a 10-15-page research paper, and regular postings to E-Learning. For questions please contact [todd.kuchta@wmich.edu](mailto:todd.kuchta@wmich.edu).

### **English 5660: Creative Writing Workshop—Fiction**

Wednesdays, 6:30—9:50

Mode: Fully Synchronous

Professor Richard Katrovas

***Fulfills: Creative Writing Ph.D. or M.F.A. workshop requirement***

This is a creative-writing workshop that acknowledges the range of storytelling regarding veracity. We shall proceed on the assumption that the best prose fiction lies its way to truths about the human heart, and that the best personal essays and memoirs seek to “tell all the truth but tell it slant,” as Emily Dickinson said we must do. All narrative may be regarded on a spectrum of veracity from fact to fancy: There are short stories and novels that track authors' lives as closely as any autobiographies, and there are genuine memoirs rife with whimsy (*Angela's Ashes*: McCourt “sees” his parents conceiving him!). Each student will compose two minimum



ten-page narratives, either short form (short story or personal essay) or long form (memoir or novel fragment/chapter). The class will proceed on the assumption that making art is a form of “play for mortal stakes,” as Robert Frost famously asserted, which is to say that fun is good and we’ll try to have some. We’ll discuss the “hybrid” nature of the course at our first meeting, whether it’s face-to-face or not.

### **English 5670: Creative Writing Workshop—Poetry**

Mondays, 6:30—9:00

Mode: Fully Synchronous

Professor Richard Katrovas

***Fulfills: Creative Writing Ph.D. or M.F.A. workshop requirement***

Recalling that Aristotle posited three types of poetry—dramatic, epic, and lyric—and noting that what we think of as “poetry” is usually lyric verse, this course will dovetail the composition of lyric with an exploration of the defining issues of American poetry, especially regarding the transformation of lyric in the crucible of modernity. We will consider “lyric” broadly, and regard such matters as the relation of popular song lyrics to lyric poetry. Each student will compose five poems over the course of the semester, as well as one minimum five-page explication (close reading: I’ll show you how!) of a “great” poem. The class will proceed on the assumption that making art is a form of “play for mortal stakes,” as Robert Frost famously asserted, which is to say that fun is good, and we’ll try to have some. We’ll discuss the “hybrid” nature of the course at our first meeting, whether it’s face-to-face or not.

### **English 6100: Monstrosity in Old English Literature**

Thursdays, 4:00—6:20

Mode: Fully synchronous

Dr. Jana Schulman

***Fulfills: M.A.- and Ph.D.-level elective; Ph.D. foreign language requirement (coupled with English 6760: Old English)***



In this class, we will explore what monstrosity was in early medieval England and how texts depict the monstrous—whatever that may mean. We will work to define and/or identify the monstrous—what makes a being monstrous? Fear producing?—and to determine if those deemed monstrous are natural or supernatural beings (with the caveat that the people of early medieval England did not distinguish between these categories). Reading various texts (or selections from them) in Old English, all from the Nowell Codex, the name given to the manuscript which contains a fragment of “The Life of St. Christopher,” “Wonders of the East,” “Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle,” *Beowulf*, and “Judith,” and secondary works on monster theory will give us the opportunity to negotiate the world of monsters and their significance. **Prerequisite:** One semester of Old English

### **English 6300: Professionalization in English Studies**

Tuesdays, 6:30—9:00

Mode: In Person

Dr. Scott Slawinski

***Fulfills: M.A.- and Ph.D.-level elective***

Considering a career in academics? Planning to apply to doctoral programs? Wondering what lies ahead in your doctoral program once you complete your coursework? Thinking about the academic job market?

English 6300 focuses on professionalizing graduate students and preparing them for a career in English studies at the college and university level. Invited guests will cover topics such as the various sub-fields within English studies (literature, rhetoric and writing, creative writing, English education), conference going and other public readings, scholarly and creative publishing, academic administration, textual editing, and searching and interviewing for an academic job. Discussion topics will also include library research, alt-ac careers, graduate- and professional-level writing, qualifying examinations, and dissertations and other genres of academic composition.



If her schedule allows, English library liaison Kate Langan will join us for portions of some class periods to discuss research techniques and other library-related skills.

Assignments are designed to mirror writing in the field beyond the scholarly journal article and include an annotated bibliography, an essay on prose conventions, a conference abstract, a short encyclopedia article, and a book review.

Anyone who is considering pursuing a career in English studies will find this course useful.

### **English 6660: Graduate Writing Workshop—Fiction**

Fridays, 2:00—4:30

Mode: Partially Synchronous

Professor Thisbe Nissen

***Fulfills: Creative Writing Ph.D. or M.F.A. workshop requirement***

This is a traditional fiction workshop. Students put up at least two pieces each to be workshopped during the semester, and class members are responsible for reading weekly workshop stories, making detailed editorial line notes for the author, and writing a thoughtful and substantive end note. We learn better to edit ourselves by carefully and conscientiously editing others. Workshop stories are the texts from which broader conversations on craft and technique will spring. Discussion of additional readings—published fiction and/or craft essays, etc.—may compliment workshop discussions.

**English 6660: Graduate Writing Workshop—Playwriting: “Like History”**

Wednesdays, 6:30—9:00

Mode: In Person

Dr. Steve Feffer

*Fulfills: Creative Writing Ph.D. or M.F.A. workshop requirement*

“Every play I write is about love and distance. And time.  
And from that we can get things like history.”

-- Suzan-Lori Parks

This is a workshop in the writing, development, and presentation of your playwriting and performance texts. We will spend most of our time in class on the sharing and workshopping of your dramatic writing. However, we will also spend a portion of each class devoted to playwriting exercises that will help you develop your existing work, start something new, or to integrate into your own writing process.

Our weekly play readings this semester will consider a series of “state of the art” plays or performances; that is, a group of plays, performances and playwrights drawn from the current moment that have made a significant impact on the art and profession because of their response to today’s artistic, cultural and political circumstances; frequency of production; awards garnered; critical acclaim and/or commercial appeal; embrace of new technologies and genres; and/or cultural cache. They will also provide us with a common vocabulary of work to use in our discussions.



Graduate Playwriting this semester will also provide an opportunity for workshop participants to consider or develop their material for and across an array of media platforms, as we focus on liveness in a mediatized culture. While this may seem a response to our current necessity to include virtual work—dramatic writing, theatre and performance, created by artists for an audience who are not live in a space together or in a hybrid form—have been proliferating

for a few years and will continue to grow even after we are no longer social distancing.

Additionally, we will have a couple of classes of “ice breaking” and additional play development work. The emphasis in the class will be the process by which your playwriting ultimately is about writing theatre and performance and their unlimited iterations and possibilities.

### **English 6780: Holocaust Studies and the Teaching of English**

Tuesdays, 4:00—6:20

Mode: Partially Synchronous

Dr. Jonathan Bush

***Fulfills: M.A. and Ph.D. requirement in English Education; M.A.- and Ph.D.-level elective in Literature and Language and Creative Writing***

This course will explore Holocaust Education and consider the theories and methods of teaching the Holocaust with/in/through English language arts, from the middle grades through college. We will explore the cultural histories of the Holocaust through the lens of rhetoric, writing, and literature as we develop and articulate ways to address and teach Holocaust, genocide, and social justice concepts as defined the Shoah Foundation, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Holocaust Educators' Network.

This course will be of interest to anyone who wants to integrate Holocaust materials into their classes at any level, and graduate students from all our programs are welcome.

### **English 6900: Scholarship and Writing in the Profession**

No assigned date/time

Mode: Asynchronous

Dr. Meghann Meeusen

***Fulfills: M.A. requirement; M.F.A. and Ph.D. elective***

ENGL 6900 is a graduate-level seminar that will aide students in developing their skills as academic writers. Students will spend the semester studying the conventions of academic writing in venues specific to their field of interest, analyzing and evaluating journals and articles in order to produce an article-length academic text and present a conference-paper version of this work at a formal academic Colloquium. For students pursuing an MA in English, this capstone essay acts as the culminating requirement for the degree, but any student who wishes to improve his/her ability to write for academic publication and engage in academic discourse is welcome to use this opportunity to devote specific attention to writing technique and academic scholarship. Students will also develop a relationship with an outside faculty mentor, participate in “workshop”-style review and editing of their writing, and consider how one might best overcome the challenges of academic publication in their field of study.

