

Department of English

Graduate Course Descriptions

Spring 2023

Note: Graduate student enrollment in Engl 5550 and Engl 5970 is initially limited to 8 seats per class so as to maintain open seats for undergraduate students. A waitlist will be kept for those graduate students requesting a class after the 8 seats are filled.

English 5550: Chaucer

Modality: Hybrid

CRN: 15452

Wednesdays, 4:00 – 6:20

Dr. Erin Sweany

Fulfills: M.A., M.F.A., and Ph.D. elective

Chaucer's Estates Satire & Fictional Class Mobility

Film representations of the Middle Ages often use the trope of rags-to-riches to tell the stories of their protagonists: a poor boy becomes a knight (*The Knight's Tale*) or a peasant is betrothed to a prince (*The Princess Bride*). But how does medieval literature itself tell such tales?

Conveniently, Geoffrey Chaucer, a central figure in Middle English literary history, filled his texts with representations of different social classes interacting with one another, most famously in his *Canterbury Tales*. As the pilgrims wend their way to the shrine of Thomas à Becket, Chaucer presents a tableau of character types and literary tropes that are then variously singled out and combined to tell different stories about medieval English social hierarchies and interactions. As idealizations, critiques, and satires unfold for the reader, we can ask:

How did medieval England imagine its class structure and class mobility? To what literary ends does Chaucer put social types, interactions, and clashes? How does Chaucer incorporate historical class turmoil of the fourteenth century, that he lived through, into his poems? Through a variety of Chaucer's texts (including, but not limited to, *The Canterbury Tales*), we will investigate these questions and more. All literary texts will be accompanied by relevant scholarship from the field and carefully situated within the historical contexts from which they emerged, contexts that are largely monarchical but also include the rise of a significant middle class in England and popular revolts that were, ironically, lent strength by the havoc that the Black Death played on working class populations (if there are clear parallels between the Black Death and COVID-19, it is in class rumblings that both



diseases brought to the surface, rather than in virulence or death rates). **Nearly all texts in this class will be read in Middle English.** Previous experience with Middle English is not required.

This course will meet synchronously once a week, every week, throughout the semester (alternating online and in-person meetings).

English 5670: Creative Writing Workshop—Poetry

Modality: Fully synchronous online

CRN: 14854

Mondays, 6:30 – 9:00

Professor Richard Katrovas

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

Poetry is the mother of all verbal expression. We shall honor the mother.

English 5970: Lexicography

Modality: In-person

CRN: 15453

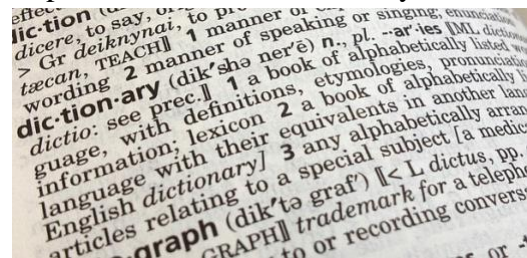
Tuesdays, 4:00 – 6:20

Dr. Lisa Minnick

Fulfills: M.A., M.F.A., and Ph.D. elective

Lexicography: Dictionaries Past, Present, and Future

Explores the more than 4,000-year history of dictionaries, their uses, ideological underpinnings, and processes for their creation. Students will examine a variety of dictionaries, primarily although not exclusively in English, from some of the earliest known cuneiform tablet lexicons to electronic innovations like the Oxford English Dictionary Online and the Urban Dictionary. We will also explore lexicographical theories and consider practical applications to dictionary-making, including 21st-century developments like crowd-sourced and corpus-based methodologies along with other tools and techniques.



English 6100: Old English Seminar

Modality: Hybrid

Dr. Erin Sweaney

Thursdays, 4:00 – 6:20

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

Bodies of Old English Literature

Bodies and flesh are sites of dialogue, divinity, and danger in early medieval literature. These debates can be literal, such as the Old English *Soul and Body* in which a disembodied soul engages with its decomposing corpse. Like this angry soul, bodies in Old English texts are often unsettled or endangered. In *Beowulf*, the struggle between the eponymous hero and his adversary Grendel is so situated around the contact of body-against-body that the textual lines between them blur, asking us to reflect on both the physicality and nature of monstrosity. Saints like Swythan intervene, posthumously, in the bodily health of the devout, transforming unwell bodies into well ones while demonstrating the veracity of Christian belief. Medical texts treat bodies as constantly invaded spaces, and flesh and skin as sites of health mediation, even for afflictions that we would regard as internal.

This class will explore the literary and cultural functions of bodies, flesh, and bodily remains in Old English texts. Some of the texts we will read **in their original Old English** include (but are not limited to): *The Dream of the Rood*, Old English riddles and medical charms, *The Tale of St. Swithun*, penitential and other religious texts, *Judith*, *Guthlac A & B*, and significant selections from *Beowulf* (reading list subject to change). **English 6760 is a prerequisite for this course.**

This course will meet synchronously once a week, every week, throughout the semester (alternating online and in-person meetings).

English 6110: Literary Forms—Playwriting

Modality: In-person

Thursdays, 6:30 – 9:00

Dr. Steve Feffer

Fulfills: M.F.A. *in-genre (Playwriting) or out-of-genre (Fiction, Poetry) Creative Writing Forms requirement; in-genre (Playwriting) Ph.D. Creative Writing Forms requirement*

Good Stories Going: Creating Theatre and Performance from Existing Materials (Adaptation, Docudrama & Collage)

“The theatre itself is much less high-minded than those who keep a watchful eye on its purity; the stage has always cheerfully swiped whatever *good stories were going*.”

-- Philip Pullman

“Character A: Adaptation is a profound process. It means you figure out how to thrive in the world.

Character B: Yeah, but it’s easier for plants. They have no memory. They move on to just whatever is next. But a person though—adapting is almost shameful. It’s like running away.”

-- Charles and Donald Kaufmann

Adaptation (screenplay)

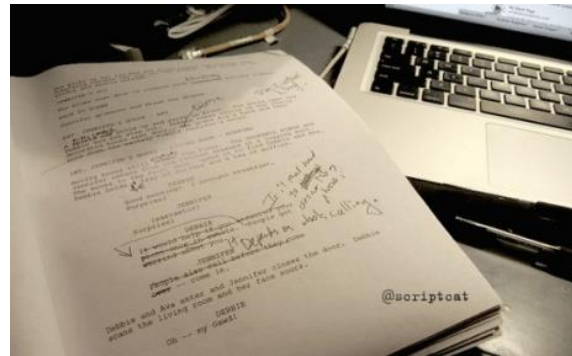
Based on Susan Orlean’s *The Orchid Thief*

“Adapt... or die.”

-- Charles Darwin

This semester's forms class in drama will focus on theatre and performance that is created, developed, written and staged from existing materials. These performance texts may include (though are certainly not limited to) stage adaptations of existing literary works, documentary theatre, collage, translation, re-assemblage, non-fiction performance and autobiographical work. The purpose for this exploration will be of interest to those working as playwrights, and for those in any genre who have wished to experiment with playwriting and/or discover writing for the stage may inform their current artistic practice, especially in regards to narrative, corporeality, hybridity, voice and language. Additionally, working with texts from existing materials can be a very efficacious way to consider and reconsider some of the assumptions writers may have about their own work and genre.

Our class will consider how creating texts from existing materials, such as adaptation, docudrama or collage, establishes an increased awareness of genre's role in the use of point-of-view, a change of frame or context, a shift in ontology, or the move from real to fictional (and vice-versa). Additional emphasis will be placed on the creative and interpretive act of appropriation and salvaging, such as re-envisioning old stories so they speak to a new audience, contest the values of prior work, or pay homage to an established text. We will also consider the ways that our intertextual engagement with existing materials can highlight or illuminate the palimpsestuous nature of memory and literary creation for artist and audience.



The semester will be divided into (highly uneven) thirds. In the first third we will read, do exercises and develop short writing projects in *adaptation*. In the second we will read, do exercises and develop short writing projects in *docudrama*. And in the brief last third, we will read, do exercises and develop (very) short projects around *collage*.

The nature of our study will be three-fold. 1) We will read widely (or use multi-media where available) in contemporary dramatic writing and performance texts that are examples of the exciting work being done in the areas of adaptation, docudrama and collage: These will include playwrights, performance artists, or theatre companies such as Tony Kushner, Branden Jacob-Jenkins, Len Jenkin, Anna Deavere Smith, Doug Wright, Annie Baker, Emily Mann, Yoko Ono, and The Wooster Group. In each section we will be guided and informed by a theoretical text exploring that unit: [Adaptation] *A Theory of Adaptation* by Linda Hutcheon; [Docudrama] *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present* by Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson; [Collage] *Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists and the American Avant-Garde* by James Harding. 2) You will do a series of in-class writing and performance exercises and workshop a five-minute dramatic text to experiment with each of these dramatic forms (much shorter for collage). 3) Each writer will develop one of these shorter pieces, or some other work of his or her interest, into a longer more developed twenty to thirty-page piece, as her or his final project.

For questions and information: Dr. Steve Feffer, steve.feffer@wmich.edu

English 6150: Literary Theory

Modality: In-person

Wednesdays, 6:30 – 9:00

Dr. Christopher Nagle

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

“There are no dangerous thoughts. Thinking itself is dangerous.” —Hannah Arendt

“The value of thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar.” —
Theodor Adorno

“To work is to undertake to think something other than what one has thought before.” —Michel
Foucault

Starting with these assumptions, the main goal of this course will be to provide a representative overview of the most important and exciting works of literary and cultural theory from the past two centuries. We will focus primarily on the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, but not before laying some vital groundwork for understanding our more contemporary texts: first, by tracing briefly the shift from Enlightenment modes of thought to the shaping forces of Romanticism; then, by focusing on the modern triumvirate whose revolutionary contributions have shaped theory as we know it today—Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. All of the work that follows (and some of what is paired with these readings) will feature interdisciplinary and intersectional theory that challenges and critiques the Western canonical tradition by centering the critical innovations of women, queer and trans folk, and BIPOC voices and perspectives. No previous expertise in any of this course material is expected or required.

Requirements: short, weekly response papers; at least one seminar presentation, in which the student leads discussion for the session; a final, medium-length seminar paper; and (most importantly) active participation in our discussions every week.

n.b.: as in previous years, we will try to incorporate the visits of exciting visiting scholars to the department’s Anthony Ellis Scholarly Speakers Series. More details will follow, but at present we are hoping to host two BIPOC scholars, one working at the intersection of queer and indigenous studies, and one who is a specialist in African-American rhetoric.

English 6300: Professionalization in English Studies

Tuesdays, 6:30 – 9:00

Mode: In Person

Dr. Scott Slawinski

Fulfills: M.A., M.F.A., and Ph.D. 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 the schedule allows, the English library liaison 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. There is no seminar paper in this course, and students will find that the most-demanding work occurs in the first six weeks of the semester before gradually decreasing.

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

ENGL 6660: Graduate Writing Workshop—Fiction

Modality: Hybrid

Fridays, 1:00 – 4:20

Hannah Assadi

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

In this course, we will focus primarily on reading and workshopping student work with occasional short reading assignments to further illuminate various aspects of craft. Each student should expect to workshop their original stories and/or novel excerpts at least three or four times during the course of the semester, depending on class size. I do not set page requirements, but generally speaking, submissions should range in length of 10-20 pages and are due the week before a workshop. Written feedback as well as thoughtful participation during class is required from all students.

English 6900: Scholarship and Writing in the Profession

Modality: In-person

Mondays, 4:00 – 6:20

Dr. Meghann Meeusen

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

In this seminar, students will analyze and evaluate journals and articles in areas relevant to a research topic, revise and edit a scholarly essay with the support of their peers and a faculty mentor, and prepare for oral presentation and discussion of the work in an end-of-semester event. This course also acts as the culminating requirement for the M.A. in English, wherein students

produce a capstone essay and present it at the public colloquium.

While ENGL 6900 is a requirement for MA students in their final year of study, I am especially encouraging students from creative writing and literature, both at the MFA and doctoral level, to consider the course as an elective option this semester. For many students with interest in pursuing futures in academia, scholarly publication or conference experience can be valuable in successfully applying for doctoral programs or entering the academic job market. This course provides an opportunity for focused attention these important projects as well as increased expertise in academic writing more broadly. ENGL 6900 provides a formal avenue to improve your research writing and pursue publication and conference presentation options, as well as build your relationship with a member of the faculty with expertise in your area of interest.

Class-time will include group discussions about academic writing/publication and as well as some opportunities to engage with guest speakers. Other class periods will be reserved for individual conferencing and work in small groups.