

Department of English 2022-2023

## Fourth-Year Seminar Descriptions

Questions about these courses can be sent via email to the Undergraduate Director, Jennifer Blair, at [engdiru@uottawa.ca](mailto:engdiru@uottawa.ca), or to the professor who is teaching the course.

### ENG 4185 A (Fall 2022)

**Title: Beyond the Pale: Diverse Experimental Literature**

**Professor: K. Q. Andrews**

When we think about “experimental” literature, we often think of work by white men: David Foster Wallace, Ezra Pound, Vladimir Nabokov, Christian Bök. This class aims to reconfigure our sense of the “experimental” to include a wide-ranging body of work by writers with marginalized identities. Minoritized writers are often overlooked in histories of innovative and avant-garde writing; as critics have pointed out with increasing frequency, the history of the avant-garde is a deeply exclusionary one, one that has until quite recently foreclosed the possibility that writing about “identity” and literary innovation could go hand in hand. In contrast, the writers whose work we will read in this course continually try and subvert or expand our notions of what it means to write into, around, or from marginalized standpoints. From NorubeSe Philip’s *Zong!* to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*, Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* and Marlon James’s *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, along with many other contemporary texts and cutting-edge secondary readings, we will chart a territory that only continues to grow in richness and breadth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Students in this class will gain a deep appreciation for the ways in which generic forms can come to be defined by race and gender, and what breaking out of those forms can make possible for a truly varied expression of lived experience.

In addition to the above, our texts may include work such as:

Chase Berggrun, *R E D*

Anne Carson, *Nox*

Jos Charles, *feeld*

Leslie Kaplan, *Excess—The Factory*

John Keene, *Counternarratives*

Layli Long Soldier, *WHEREAS*

Canisia Lubrin, *The Dyzgraphxst*

Claudia Rankine, *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*

Melvin B. Tolson, *Harlem Gallery*

Jackie Wang, *The Sunflower Cast a Spell to Save Us From the Void*

C.D. Wright, *One Big Self*

Monica Youn, *Blackacre*

## ENG 4115 A (Fall 2022)

**Title: Impersonation, Voice, and ‘Character-Making’ in the Literature of the Medieval and Early Modern School**

**Professor: G. Rector**

**Course description:** From antiquity through the early modern period, literary education and literary composition were built upon processes of imitation and impersonation. At the heart of them both were the compositional exercises known as *ethopoeia* or “character-making,” and a series of related exercises – *prosopopoeia* (impersonating abstractions or “things unknown”), *idolopoeia* (impersonating dead people), and *ekphasris* (description) – that together made up the key exercises (*progymnasmata* or *exercitationes*) of the medieval and early modern literary classroom. These exercises of “character-making” asked students to imitate, impersonate, and inhabit the characters and voices of others. With surprising consistency, the mostly teenage male students of the schools, even students training to be monks and clerics, were asked to impersonate and inhabit the voices of women in moments of “feminizing,” powerfully emotional, and often eroticized lament and complaint. Thus, students were asked to become Dido as Aeneas abandons her; Penelope as she longs for the absent Odysseus; Niobe weeping for her children; Andromache lamenting over the dead body of Hector; Eve in her moment of terrible recognition; Ruth in the harvest fields lamenting her isolation. These schoolroom exercises of literary “character-making” had an enormous effect on literary practice throughout the period, from Ovid’s *Heroïdes* – and their innumerable imitations – to medieval romances, erotic poetry from the troubadours to the sonneteers, the poetry of complaint and lament, verse letters, and Elizabethan drama.

However, through the processes of literary “character-making,” students – and by extension, poets and readers – were also understood to be undertaking a process of personal “character-making”: that is, by inhabiting and impersonating the voices others, they made their own characters and social identities. This combination of different kinds of “character-making,” at once ethical and aesthetic, is the very heart of the humanist literary project and its function in the formation of elite, masculine social identities and communities. And yet, the literary characters inhabited and produced in these exercises were often disruptive – emotionally, ethically, psychologically, socially, politically – raising important questions about the nature of the characters and identities being formed: how were men being socialized through processes of becoming women? Given their association with elite masculine social identity, what happens when women undertake these exercises? What does it mean for women to “impersonate” women – is this a different kind of character-making? What do these processes say about the history of character and identity, of voice, gender, or emotion? How can they help us think about contemporary understandings of similar processes of impersonation?

This course combines literary history, the history of literary education, and creative writing. We will study this tradition of literary character-making through both the history of *ethopoeia* exercises and the texts that were influenced by them. We will read texts like Ovid's *Heroides* and Michael Drayton's *England's Heroick Epistles* that exemplify the 'character-making' tradition, as well as poems produced by students in the period, both male and female. But students will also be asked to do these exercises themselves, learning about these processes of imitation by imitating the work of medieval and early modern students: that is, we will write our own *ethopoeia*.

## **ENG 4180 (Winter 2023)**

**Title: African American Drama and Film: Literature in Performance**

**Professor: Thomas Allen**

**Course Description:** In this course we will explore the intersections of literature and performance through the media of stage drama and film. Performative genres have been central to the African American literary tradition. Stage plays were among the first genres explored by Black writers as means of political expression, drawing attention to the injustices of slavery and racism in the nineteenth century ever since William Brown's play *Shotaway; or, The Insurrection of the Caribs of St. Domingo* was performed at the African Grove Theatre in New York in 1822. Since then, Black playwrights, actors, and directors have employed the immediacy and collectivity of dramatic performance to engage crucial political and social themes while also building a positive vision of Black culture and history in America. In the twentieth century, African American filmmakers joined stage performers in working against the systemic racism of the dominant culture industries of the United States. As visual and auditory media, stage plays and film have also enjoyed significant intertextuality with the rich African American traditions of music and the visual arts.

In this course, we will gain an overview of the history of African American drama and film while considering important themes such as Black cultural identity in America, the role of Black writers and artists, feminism, LGBTQ+ possibilities, and intertextuality with other creative expressions such as music and the visual arts. Critical readings will be drawn from important theorists of representation such as bell hooks, James Baldwin, Robert Reid-Pharr, Fred Moten, Tavia Nyong'o, and Christina Sharpe.

**Plays:**

*Black Theatre USA, Plays by African Americans: The Early Period 1847-1938*, revised and expanded edition, edited by James V. Hatch and Ted Shine. Free Press, 1996.

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)  
Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* (1964) and *The Slave* (1965)  
Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (1974)  
August Wilson, *Fences* (1987)  
George C. Wolfe, *The Colored Museum* (1994)  
Suzan-Lori Parks, *Top Dog/Underdog* (2002)  
*The Red Letter Plays* (1999/2000)  
Jeremy O. Harris, *Slave Play* (2018)

### **Films:**

Oscar Micheaux, *Within Our Gates* (1920)  
Bill Gunn, *Ganja and Hess* (1973)  
Charles Burnett, *Killer of Sheep* (1977)  
Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)  
Cheryl Dunye, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996)  
Barry Jenkins, *Moonlight* (2016)  
Beyoncé, *Lemonade* (2016)

## **ENG 4185 B (Winter 2023)**

### **Title: Fiction in the Age of Twitter**

**Professor:** Lauren Gillingham

### **Description**

The prevalence of seriality and hypercurrency in twenty-first-century fiction is one material sign of literature's transformation in our social media age. Literature's intersection with Twitter in particular has produced some notable formal innovations: writers have tweeted instalments of short fiction over successive days; some have adapted their narrative form to reproduce Twitter's epigrammatic structure and disparate focus; others have reimagined the lyric sequence on the model of a digital network of loosely-connected threads. These developments have prompted some critics to decry the state of the novel and the debasing influence of social media. As the feminist journalist Laurie Penny observes in an article on the internet novel, "Some serious male novelists ... allege that the modern novel has become frivolous and fluffy, a lightweight accessory for lightweight thinkers. Yet there is nothing lightweight about [contemporary] fiction ... What is happening is not extinction, but evolution."

In this course, we will examine fiction's encounter with social networking, microblogging, and the internet, exploring the formal and aesthetic possibilities that this collision has engendered and the broad social and historical questions it raises. We will also address the fact, however,

that the twenty-first century is not the first moment in which authors have immersed themselves in the contemporary media ecology and used new technologies to key their fiction to the immediate present. The return in particular of seriality and hypercurrency in contemporary fiction alerts us to the important precedent of the nineteenth century, an historical age in which stereotype printing and serialization, among other innovations, enabled nineteenth-century authors to write to-the-moment narratives and use fiction to give form to the felt experience of unprecedented social, technological, and political change. Using scholarship on seriality and print technology and theories of history and contemporaneity to ground our literary analyses, and exploring media crossovers between print culture and TV, we will aim to set the phenomenon of Twitter-fiction in a larger social, historical, and literary context.

**Method:**

Seminar with discussion and presentations

**Grading:** (subject to change)

Seminar presentation 25%

Research paper 35%

Research paper proposal 5%

Annotated bibliography 25%

Participation 10%

**Tentative text list:**

Michaela Coel, *I May Destroy You* (TV series)

Olivia Laing, *Crudo*

Patricia Lockwood, *Nobody Is Talking About This*

Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*

Lauren Oyler, *Fake Accounts*

Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*

Plus: additional readings in short fiction and theory posted on Brightspace

**ENG 4151 A (Winter 2023)**

**Title: 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Black Voices**

**Professor: Sara Landreth**

This 4<sup>th</sup>-year seminar will examine literature and culture of the antislavery movement throughout the Atlantic regions between 1760 to 1830. Our syllabus will focus on writings by eighteenth-century Black authors of the English-speaking world, including Briton Hammon, Phillis Wheatley, Ignatius Sancho, Olaudah Equiano, and Mary Prince. We will also read the

anonymous novel, *The Woman of Colour* (1808), which features a biracial Jamaican heiress as its protagonist and primary narrator. In the final weeks of the term we will turn to historical fiction, and will delve into how 21<sup>st</sup>-century representations of 18<sup>th</sup>-century racialized writers both embrace and reject the historical record.

**Method:** Seminar

**Readings will include:**

Anonymous, *The Woman of Colour*

Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*

Briton Hammon “Narrative of Uncommon Sufferings”

Phillis Wheatley, *Selected Poems*

Ignatius Sancho, *Selected Letters*

Belinda X, “Petition of an African Slave”

Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic*

Olaudah Equiano, *An Interesting Narrative*

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Trials of Phillis Wheatley*

Francis Spufford, *Golden Hill*

**Marking Breakdown:**

Seminar = 30% (15% quality of written script; 15% oral presentation and discussion leadership)

Participation = 40% (online posts and in-person spoken contributions)

Final Essay = 30%

**Course Objectives:** To engage deeply and critically with a wide range of texts; to foster a generous intellectual environment where discussion and debate can thrive; and to hone our skills in oral presentation, in-person real-time conversation, and written communication.

## **ENG 4148 A (Winter 2023)**

**Title:** Thomas Middleton, Jacobean Dramatist

**Professor:** Jennifer Panek

**Course Description:** “The Tudor Tarantino” was what the BBC once called Shakespeare’s younger contemporary Thomas Middleton (c. 1580-1627)—an epithet that speaks to the violence, outrageous sexuality, black humour, and biting social commentary that characterize much of Middleton’s work. Beginning with his early satire of urbanization and consumerism, *Michaelmas Term* (c. 1604), this course examines seven of his finest plays, written alone or in collaboration. Among them will be his hilarious parody of the “revenge tragedy” genre, the aptly titled *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1606); one of the best exemplars of the popular “city comedy” genre, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613), in which a prosperous Londoner enjoys

being cuckolded for financial gain; and the bloody, sexually disturbing worlds of Middleton's two tragic masterpieces, *The Changeling* (1621) and *Women Beware Women* (c. 1621). If Shakespeare was, in Ben Jonson's famous words, "Not for an age, but for all time," Middleton was very much a playwright producing entertainment for his own time and place: London circa 1603 to 1625. For that reason, the study of his plays may offer even more insight into the fantasies and anxieties of ordinary early modern Londoners than those of his more famous contemporary.

**Method:** seminar and discussion

**Grading:** seminar presentation and formal responses to others' presentation, 25%; term paper, 35%; final exam, 30%; class participation, 10%.

**Texts:**

*Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, Oxford University Press, 2010.

This text, in paperback, will be available from Benjamin Books, 122 Osgoode St.

Additional required readings, both critical and contextual, will be provided either through Brightspace or in a course reader.

## **ENG 4397 (Winter 2023)**

**Title: Generative Fiction Writer's Studio**

**Professor: Suyi Okungbowa**

**Course Description:** This advanced class will function as part writing workshop and part writing studio. Throughout the semester, students will place a strong focus on generating a lengthy fiction work of up to novella-length (15,000 words and above), while taking advantage of opportunities for feedback and discussion of their work. This course will operate as a community of creation, functioning as: studio space for writing new work in class (alone or among peers); a learning hub for studying existing creative work across various genres; and for discussions on the artist life, writing as a practice and writing as a profession. Topics of interest include the novella as a form, ideation and the creative processes, unpacking fiction genres, deep-dives into elements of fiction like character, narrative arc, place, point-of-view, theme, language, tone/mood, etc. The aim is to prepare students for the realities and expectations of the creative pursuit of writing fiction post-graduation.

Excerpts from critical works like *Craft in the Real World* by Matthew Salesses, *Thrill Me: Essays on Fiction* by Benjamin Percy, *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott, etc; and excerpts from creative works of various lengths and genres, featuring authors like Nalo Hopkinson, Carmen Maria Machado, Margaret Atwood, P. Djeli Clark, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, etc. Students will be graded by

periodic submissions of their work-in-progress, as well as an end-of-term portfolio containing the completed work of fiction, an artist reflective statement and a publishing submission packet.