Overview of Second-Year and Fourth Year Undergraduate Seminar Courses, 2020-2021
(Spring 2020 through Winter 2021)

*Please scroll down to view detailed course descriptions*

Fourth-Year Seminars

ENG 4115 A  Geoff Rector, “Epic Fail: The Strange History of the English Epic” (3 credits) (Spring)

ENG 4151 A  Sara Landreth, "Reading the Passions" (Eighteenth-Century Literature) (3 credits) (Winter)

ENG 4165 A  Mary Arseneau, “Traditional and Digital Approaches to The Pre-Raphaelite Movement” (Victorian Literature) (3 credits) (Winter)

ENG 4180 A  Anne Raine, “Contemplating Cli-Fi: Literature, Mindfulness, and the Climate Crisis” (American) (3 credits) (Fall)

ENG 4180 B  Thomas Allen, “The Cinematic Imagination in American Literature” (American) (3 credits) (Winter)

ENG 4182 A  Gerald Lynch, "Canadian Short Story Cycles" (Canadian) (3 credits) (Fall)

*Note: ENG 4148 A will become ENG 4152 A  Ian Dennis, “Three Long Poems of the Romantic Period” (Romantics) (3 credits) (Fall)*

Second-Year Seminars

ENG 2124 A  TBA (Fall) (3 credits)
ENG 2124 B  Sara Landreth, “Literatures of Epidemic” (Fall) (3 credits)
ENG 2124 C  Sara Landreth, “Literatures of Epidemic” (Fall) (3 credits)
ENG 2124 D  TBA (Winter) (3 credits)
ENG 2124 E  Geoff Rector, “Form, Metamorphosis, and Literary Transformations” (Winter) (3 credits)

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Fourth-Year Seminars:

Course Area: Medieval Literature  
ENG4115 A  

Term: Spring 2020  
3 credits

Title: “Epic Fail: The Strange History of the English Epic”

Professor: Geoff Rector

Introduction:

“...is Achilles possible with powder and lead? Or the Ilia with the printing press? Do not the song and the saga and the muse necessarily come to an end with the printer's bar, hence do not the necessary conditions of epic poetry vanish?

Karl Marx.

This is a course about literary failure: the failure of authors to write the texts that they hoped for, or to finish the texts they were writing; a sense of failure to live up to the enormous expectations of their genre; or in some cases, failure even to conceive of what that genre actually was. This is the history of the English epic. And yet, the failure of the epic has also given us some of the greatest works of English literature, including Paradise Lost, which many would describe as the greatest of all English epics. To write this epic of a “war in heaven,” Milton abandoned earlier plans to write an epic of the “high-souled heroes” and “native kings” of Arthurian England; the English epic was either beneath Milton’s ambitions or simply impossible to write.

And with that decision, Milton effectively put the English epic to rest. From the 18th through the 20th centuries, we see writer after writer lamenting the impossibility of epic, reaching out to other-worldly fantasies, or literary frauds, or purposeful failures to replace the epics they could not write. Just as odd is the fact that Milton's failure to write an epic of the “native kings of England” is entirely characteristic of a long history of epic failure that reaches back to the very first attempts to write the story of King Arthur. In the Middle Ages too we see unfinished texts, literary frauds, fantasies of national foundation dissolving in tragic violence and mist, and a deep sense of the loss or impossibility of the epic. For their models, these medieval authors looked further back still to Rome, whose two greatest epics—Virgil's Aeneid and Lucan’s Pharsalia—were both left unfinished by their authors.

That is, the whole long history of the epic in England seems marked by “an aesthetics of failure.”

This course will chart this “aesthetics of failure” in the long history of the English epic. We will read these often weird and wonderful texts to look at how failure is expressed in the epic and to wonder why. Why does it seem impossible to write an epic? What is a genre if it can’t be written? We will start with two foundational medieval texts—Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History of the Kings of Britain and Thomas Malory’s Death of Arthur (including his account of the Grail legend, which haunted the English epic well into the 20th century)—move through the strangely displaced epics of Spenser and Milton (in excerpts); to look more closely at the crisis among 18th and 19th-century writers, whose desperate longing to “achieve” the epic resulted in strange medieval fantasies, literary frauds, and parody. We will read some of the epics themselves, along with other primary materials—such as the authors’ letters, prologues, and attempts to theorize the genre—and a fair bit of secondary material to help us understand this long, strange, epic fail.
Introduction:

What does it mean to be “moved” by a text? How is it that black marks on a white page can make us cry or laugh or feel disgusted or aroused? This course traces the history of emotion from early modern humours to eighteenth-century sentiments and forward to the MRI images of twenty-first-century neuroscience. We will examine cultures of feeling and unfeeling in a number of genres, including erotic fiction, the sentimental novel, the Gothic novel, it-narratives, travel writing, essays on aesthetics, and slave narratives. Our primary readings span from a 1712 play to a 2016 novel set in eighteenth-century New York. We will pursue a series of important questions: how do theories about emotion shape how we study literature? How can we make meaningful distinctions between what eighteenth-century writers called “passions,” “affections” and “sentiments”? How might the history and philosophy of emotion influence how we understand concepts of action, causation, blame, and guilt? The first unit (Unit A) traces five different ways of thinking about representations of emotion in eighteenth-century literature: philosophy, studies in gender and sexuality, studies in race and ethnicity, theatre studies, and neuroscience. The second unit (Unit B) focuses in on five states of feeling in eighteenth-century novels: love, sentiment, transport, insanity, anger, and sorrow.

Seminar 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 both oral presentation and written communication.

Method: Seminar and discussion

Grading: Seminar Presentation (oral & written) (30%); Participation (30%); Final essay (40%)

Texts:
Mary Wollstonecraft, The Vindications (Broadview)
Eliza Haywood, Fantomina and Other Works (Broadview)
Laurence Sterne, A Sentimental Journey (Oxford)
Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Life (Broadview)
Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Huntly ... Sleepwalker (Broadview)
Anonymous, The Woman of Colour (Broadview)
Francis Spufford, Golden Hill (Scribner)
Introduction:

This seminar will chart the evolution of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, beginning with the moral aesthetic embraced by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848-1853), and tracing Pre-Raphaelitism through its diverse later expressions. Our study in this course will be organized around the poetry and prose of three central Pre-Raphaelite figures—Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, and William Morris—and a wide variety of critical and digital approaches will be embraced. In addition, in this course we will include a digital humanities approach, and all students will be expected to learn some digital skills and apply them to scholarly research. If public health circumstances necessitate it, we will adjust course delivery as required and keep you informed of any changes.

From its inception Pre-Raphaelitism was an inter-art movement. In keeping with this, our seminar will have an interdisciplinary dimension as we examine Pre-Raphaelite verbal/visual relations in Pre-Raphaelite painting, drawing and book illustration. We will also have the opportunity to examine musical settings of Pre-Raphaelite poetry as an exciting new field in Pre-Raphaelite studies and to consider interdisciplinary methodologies to describe how meaning functions in a text/music hybrid. In particular, students will engage in primary research on musical settings of Christina Rossetti’s poetry and will learn how to identify, catalogue, and archive digital materials using JSTOR Forum, an asset management system. For their major course assignment, students will have the choice of submitting traditional written scholarship in essay form or digital humanities projects of various kinds.

We will situate the Pre-Raphaelite movement in a broad historical context, first by exploring Pre-Raphaelite roots in the aesthetic principles of the early Christian church, early Italian painters and the medieval poet Dante Alighieri, and second by situating Pre-Raphaelite arts within their contemporary Victorian social and cultural milieu. Themes and issues to be considered include Pre-Raphaelite medievalism, the Pre-Raphaelite interest in the “fallen woman” as subject and object, the place of the woman poet in the brotherhood, Tractarian poetics, the Rossettis and Dante, the Rossettis’ role in the Victorian revival of the sonnet sequence, and all three poets’ place in the evolution of the dramatic monologue. In the final stage of the course we will consider the later trajectories of our three main figures: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s turn toward aestheticism; William Morris’s politicized views on art; and Christina Rossetti’s late-life devotional writing. Although the original impulse of Pre-Raphaelitism was diffused, to the end the movement retained an opposition to convention and to mainstream bourgeois Victorian culture.

Grading:
Two seminar presentations: 30%
Attendance and participation: 10%
JSTOR Forum catalogue project: 25%
Major term paper or digital humanities project: 35%

Texts:

Other readings will be posted on Brightspace. Books available at Benjamin Books.
Title: Contemplating Cli-Fi: Literature, Mindfulness, and the Climate Crisis

Professor: Anne Raine

Introduction:

In 1989, Bill McKibben launched the climate action movement with the publication of *The End of Nature*. Since then, scientific research has provided ever more evidence of the devastating scale of human impact on the earth’s climate and ecology. But how to understand and live with the implications of this evidence remains an open question. Scientists, activists, journalists, novelists, and poets struggle to find new modes of storytelling that can raise awareness, combat denial, and turn the “slow violence” of catastrophes like global heating, toxic contamination, and species extinction into cultural forms dramatic enough to motivate people to action. Meanwhile, activists, educators, and health professionals are exploring how contemplative practices such as meditation can help address the problems of climate denial, “eco-anxiety,” and political polarization that get in the way of constructive action.

In this course, we’ll explore what happens when we combine ecocritical literary studies with mindfulness practice as complementary strategies for responding to the climate crisis and the struggle for multispecies environmental justice. In other words, the course is both a survey of contemporary literatures of climate change and an introduction to mindfulness meditation. We’ll examine how contemporary novelists, poets, graphic artists, journalists, and activists are responding to the climate emergency. And we’ll use both literary analysis and contemplative exercises, including a regular practice of mindfulness meditation (in class and on your own), to reflect on what form our own responses might take.

Questions we’ll explore include:
- How are the processes and effects of global heating represented, explained, imagined, and experienced in literature, the arts, popular culture, and everyday life?
- How do different kinds of written and visual texts help us attend to, think about, or be present with the anxieties, uncertainties, and social and material impacts of climate change?
- In addition to ideas, thoughts, and questions, what emotional and bodily responses emerge as we engage with representations of and public debates about the climate crisis? What happens when we deliberately make space for attending to those responses over time? What can we do with these affective states?
- How do literary and visual culture complement the sciences in helping us think about ecological problems and imagine more livable futures for humans and nonhumans?
- How can contemplative practices complement intellectual analysis in helping to facilitate open-ended learning, ethical engagement, and practical response?
- As students, writers, artists, citizens, community members, and embodied beings, what is our role in fostering constructive conversations about the climate emergency?

Method: Seminar with discussion, informal presentations, and guided meditations

Grading: Preparation and participation (readings, class discussion, online forum posts), 15%; meditation practice assignment, 10%; reading response/presentation, 15%; creative/activist project, 20%; 10-12 page term paper, 40%

Texts: Stephanie Kaza, *Mindfully Green*
Philippe Squarzoni, *Climate Changed* (graphic novel)
Juliana Spahr, poems from *Well Then There Now* (in coursepack)
Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*
Nathaniel Rich, *The Odds Against Tomorrow*
Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*
Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation*
Matt Hern and Am Johal with Joe Sacco, *Global Warming and the Sweetness of Life*
*This Is Not a Drill: An Extinction Rebellion Handbook*

**Recommended:** Sarah Jaquette Ray, *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety*
Introduction:

In 1902, Talley’s Electric Theater opened in Los Angeles. It was among the first commercial theaters to show exclusively motion pictures, and it marked the onset of a new era in American culture, one dominated by the film industry. In the ensuing decades, screenwriting would become an attractive career path for aspiring American writers, and many authors with established literary careers would dabble in the film industry. Meanwhile, the new form of cinematic representation challenged the conventions of literature by transforming the way people saw the world. In many respects, the modern and postmodern eras of twentieth-century American culture were defined by the moving image, and literary representation had to adapt in response.

This course will begin by looking at some works of literature that feature or respond directly to the film industry, then move on to consider more broadly how cinematic and literary representations influenced one another in the twentieth century. We will read some theoretical texts (e.g., Walter Benjamin, Christian Metz, Gilles Deleuze, Laura Mulvey, Fred Moten, bell hooks) that explore the relationship between cinematic and textual representation (e.g., narrative structure, montage, suture) and specific issues such as gender, sexuality, and racialized identities (e.g., scopophilia, queer cinema, blackness). While we will touch upon the topic of adaptation, that will not be a focal point of the course and we will not watch any direct literature-to-film adaptations.

Grading: Discussion forum 15%; class participation 15%; presentation and short paper 30%; research paper 40%.

Texts:

Jean Toomer, Cane (1923)
H. D. and William Carlos Williams, selected poems (1920s-30s)
Nathaniel West, The Day of the Locust (1939)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon (1941)
James Baldwin, Giovanni’s Room (1956)
Joan Didion, Play It as It Lays (1970)
Steve Erickson, Zeroville (2007)

Films (some of these are shorts):

The Great Train Robbery, dir. Edwin S. Porter (1903)
Within Our Gates, dir. Oscar Micheaux, (1920)
Emak Bakia, dir. Man Ray (1926)
Borderline, dir. Kenneth Macpherson (1930)
Sunset Boulevard, dir. Billy Wilder (1950)
Singin’ in the Rain, dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen (1952)
Rear Window, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1954)
Scorpio Rising, dir. Kenneth Anger (1964)
The Shining, dir. Stanley Kubrick (1980)
Paris is Burning, dir. Jennie Livingston (1990)
Barton Fink, dir. Joel and Ethan Coen (1991)
Adaptation, dir. Spike Jonze (2002)

Textbook:

Course Area: Canadian Literature
Term: Fall 2020

ENG4182 A

3 credits

Title: Canadian Short Story Cycles

Professor: Gerald Lynch

Introduction:
Since the early nineteenth century the short story cycle has been a distinctive Canadian literary form. Occupying the generic space between the miscellany of short stories and the novel, it continues to serve many of Canada’s best writers intent on representing a small town or region, its history, its characters, its communal concerns. Other story cycles include focus on the growth of a single character. In this seminar we will consider some of the fundamental questions about this comparatively new genre, while studying the history of the story cycle in Canada as represented by many of its major achievements.

Method: Seminar

Grading: Presentations 30%; attendance and participation 20%; essay 50%.

Texts: D.C. Scott, In the Village of Viger (Tecumseh)
Stephen Leacock, Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town (Tecumseh)
J.G. Sime, Sister Woman (Tecumseh)
Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House (M&S)
Alice Munro, Who Do You Think You Are? (Penguin)
Thomas King, Medicine River (Penguin)
Margaret Atwood, Moral Disorder (Emblem-Penguin)
Introduction:

Few undergraduate courses can devote the time necessary to read some of the most significant literary works of the Romantic period. This course will devote a month each to three such works: Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, P. B. Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, and Byron’s *Don Juan*. We will examine the complete texts (including the three stages of *The Prelude*), look at some of the critical literature on these poems and on their reception history, and attempt to place their achievement in context. This will be an intensive course for students with a genuine interest in poetry.

Method: Seminar / Small Class

Grading: Seminar: Seminar Presentations, 50%; Final Essay, 50%
Small Class: Midterm, 15%; Final exam 35%; Final Essay, 50%

Lord Byron, *The Major Works* (Oxford)

* This text is indispensable, but any good scholarly edition of the other two poems will do.
ENG 2124-B & ENG 2124-C (both in Fall 2020)

Title: Literatures of Epidemic

Professor: Sara Landreth

Introduction:

Winter 2020 was a term like no other in living memory as COVID-19 forced us away from our campus communities and routines. We are all firsthand witnesses to loss, fear, and uncertainty as well as to the unexpected discoveries and joys of life under lockdown. As unprecedented as these events are in our lifetime, English literature has a long and rich history of engaging with global pandemics. This class will explore representations of infectious disease from 1722 to 2020 in poetry, prose, theatre, television and the autobiographical essay. Why are apocalyptic narratives so compelling? In what ways do pandemics spark conspiracy theories and fan the flames of prejudice? How will our current crisis change how metaphors of contagion and pestilence inform our work, travel, and social interactions? What does it mean to engage with literature in order to imagine or even fantasize about the breakdown of “modern society”? Our class discussions and a series of short assignments will develop your skills in close reading, argumentation, and engaging with literary criticism and theory. This work will prepare each student to write an excellent final essay; the writing process will include personalized feedback from the professor and hands-on guidance through a careful process of revision.

Method: Seminar and discussion

Grading: Participation: 20%, Short Assignment 1: 5%, Short Assignment 2: 5%, Short Assignment 3: 10%, Short Assignment 4: 10%, Seminar Talk: 20%, Final Essay, 30%

Texts:
Selected poems from Michael Salcman (Ed.), Poetry in Medicine
Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year
Tony Kushner, Angels in America
Octavia Butler, “Speech Sounds”
Alice Sheldon, “The Screwfly Solution”
Junot Diaz, “Monstro”
Emily Mandel, Station Eleven
ENG 2124 E (Winter 2021)

Title: Form, Metamorphosis, and Literary Transformations

Professor: G. Rector

Introduction:

Whether in the form of ancient epics, medieval tales, science fiction, films, or graphic novels, we have told stories of the metamorphosis of humans into animals in many different ways. Depending on where and when and how the stories are told, the transformation might be variously attributed to gods, magic, poetry, science, or our own sins, moral or environmental.

This course will start with stories of animal transformation in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a Roman catalogue of ancient myth that would later be known as the ‘poet’s bible.’ It will follow the story-type through works like the *lais* of Marie de France— a 12th century writer of werewolf and animal transformation stories—Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Dr. Moreau*— a nightmare of modern scientific experimentation— and Charles Burns’ *Black Hole*, increasingly viewed as a classic graphic novel, in which horror-movie-esque transformations are closely tied to sexual transformations.

The purpose of this course is to prepare students for the kinds of critically-informed debate, analysis, research, and writing that they will encounter in upper-year courses. As a seminar, the course trains students how to engage with their subject matter in several different formats: in-class discussion and dialogue; regular written responses to the reading; oral seminar presentations; and a research paper. More broadly, it asks students to pose discipline-relevant questions about their texts, and to pursue the solution to those questions according to discipline-relevant methodologies: that is, to develop and apply the tools of literary analysis.

Texts:
- Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Arden Shakespeare)
- H. G. Wells’ *Island of Dr. Moreau* (Penguin Classics)
- Charles Burns, *Black Hole* (Pantheon Books)

Available as pdf:
- Critical readings

Evaluation:
- In-/ For-Class Writing and Presentation Exercises: 4x5% (20%)
- Seminar Reading Responses: 3x5% (15%).
- Seminar Presentation: 25%
  - format to be handed out in class. The presentation requires an in-person meeting with me at least one week prior to the presentation. Failure to make the interview within the time period will reduce the presentation grade by 50%; failure to follow the seminar presentation format will reduce the presentation grade by 50%.
- Final Paper: 25%.