

ENGL 4313/ENGL 5313 **Powerful Rhymes: The Sonnet Tradition in English Literature**

Instructor: Jessica Slights

Course description:

This special-topics seminar for senior students will investigate one of the most intricate, vibrant, and enduring poetic forms in English literature: the sonnet. We will give detailed consideration to the sonnet's formal features, trace its development from the early sixteenth century to the contemporary moment, and discuss its powerful appeal for poets as diverse as William Shakespeare, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, e.e. cummings, Gwendolyn Brooks, Seamus Heaney, and Carol Ann Duffy. As we explore some of the intriguing variations of the form produced over the last five centuries, we will pay particular attention to the sonnet's paradoxical role as both an emblem of literary conservatism and a site of poetic and sociopolitical resistance.

ENGL 4173/5613 **Reading *Middlemarch***

Instructor: Thomas Laughlin

Course description:

Of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Virginia Woolf once quipped that it was "one of the few English novels written for grownup people." Yet few of us now have the patience for its encyclopedic breadth, which uses a large but still limited cast of characters to tell a story about subtle changes to the fabric of British social life in the Age of Reform. The novel's characters, however, form a microcosm, a kind of controlled laboratory experiment, in which Eliot seeks answers to larger questions about (1) the apparently slow pace of change, which often falls short of human desires, (2) the role of women in a changing society that has still to recognize their full potential; (3) the limits of human knowledge; and (4) the relation of art—and more specifically novel writing and aesthetic realism—to knowledge formation.

By devoting our attention to a single work, we will not only afford ourselves the time necessary to attend to the subtleties of this "mature" work, we will also be able to engage in a more focused fashion with the novel's historical contexts, the author's writing process, and the secondary criticism that now surrounds the novel. Here, the recent publication of a new Norton Critical Edition, edited by Ronjaunee Chatterjee, will prove especially helpful, as it brings into a single affordable volume a selection of contemporary reviews of the novel, relevant letters written by or to Eliot, excerpts from her notebooks, and essays representing new developments in the secondary literature on the novel. These secondary writings explore Eliot's relationship the philosophical and scientific controversies of her era and introduce new approaches to discussing Eliot's relationship to empire and colonialism as well as her treatment of sexuality and trans*gender identity and experience.

ENGL 4323/5023 **Natures, Machines, and Subjectivities in Ernest Hemingway's Short Stories**

Instructor: Lance La Rocque

Course Description:

This course will explore Hemingway's complex and contradictory depictions of nature, machines, and his various male protagonists. Throughout his many short stories, Hemingway seems to hesitate between humanist existential encounters with machines and nature and what might be seen as his prescient postmodern encounters. In conversation with philosophers and theorists including Heidegger, Adorno, Deleuze and Guattari, and Jameson, we will explore Hemingway's conceptualizations of the intersection between humans, machines, and nature, tracing his various positions, including his environmental ethic and his dismantling of the humanist subject.

Engl 4033/5113 **Fortune, Heroism, and Tragedy in Fourteenth-Century England**

Instructor: Kevin Whetter

Course description:

This is an advanced seminar in which we explore the generic, historical, and literary-cultural contexts of three late-mediaeval poems that critics agree are great, but don't agree on anything else, including what the poets are actually doing! The poets in question are Geoffrey Chaucer and two of his anonymous contemporaries: the *Gawain*-Poet and the poet of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Fourteenth-century England is one those periods, like fifth-century Athens, Shakespeare's London, or London and Haight-Ashbury in the mid-1960s, when an explosion of gifted artists dominate the landscape for a brief window. In this case, Chaucer, the *Gawain*-Poet and the alliterative poet are all exploring similar issues, especially questions of Fate, heroism, tragedy, and who or what is in charge of the universe. The fourteenth century has sometimes been labelled 'the Ricardian Age', but critics have not explored precisely the issues that I and my students will explicate.

Although on the surface quite different, each of these authors tap into some of the most important issues of late-mediaeval Europe: warfare; chivalry and courtly love; oral tradition and literary intertextuality; and ideas of tragedy and religion. For some modern scholars each poem exemplifies the genre of mediaeval romance; for others, each author interrogates and possibly critiques the ideologies underlying romance or heroism or masculinity; still others consider one or the other individual poet's focus on religion, gender, warfare, or homosocial relations. As this brief overview of the issues is meant to reveal, there is still much scholarly interpretation to be done on *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Morte Arthure*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Our weekly discussions of the text(s) and critics will allow us to re-examine these poems, their literary and historical contexts, and their possible meanings, including ways in which that meaning might change for a modern versus mediaeval audience. Given, however, that the most influential mediaeval discussion of Fortune was Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, we shall also touch from time to time on Boethius. I had toyed with beginning the course with a study of Boethius,

but since none of my poets ultimately subscribe to Boethius' providential view of history and the cosmos, I have decided to include the *Morte Arthure* instead – a text that brilliantly illustrates texts and contexts since it was written during the Hundred Year's War, a period that accepts violence and martial heroism as legitimate, but whose dominant critical reading since 1958 has been that war and warrior kings are bad. This reading, not coincidentally, overlaps with the backlash against the Vietnam War. So the critical history of our texts is as fascinating as the original historical contexts in which the poems were produced. Our seminar will explore all of these texts and contexts and inter-texts. The question of Fate and tragedy and in the fourteenth century will steer us through this maze.