# **English Literature**

# **Module Descriptions 2024/25**

# **Level I (i.e. 2nd Yr.) Modules**

Please be aware that all modules are subject to availability.

For many of these modules, some experience of studying English Literature may be required, and you should remember this when choosing your modules.

Please note that at the time this document has been prepared (March 2024) the following information is provisional, and there may be minor changes between now and the beginning of 2024/25 academic year.

**Please note: Forms of assessment are currently undergoing review for 2024/25, and as a result the assessment information listed within this handbook may be subject to change.**

# **Semester 1 Modules**

## **Shakespeare: Elizabethan**

MODULE CODE: 39982

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1 x essay (100%)

SEMESTER: 1 (Autumn term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

Shakespeare: Elizabethan will explore Shakespeare's development as a creative artist on both page and stage within the political and theatrical contexts of the last decade of Elizabeth's reign. Yet the plays we will cover will not only be considered as products of time, place, and circumstance, but also as transhistorical works of art that speak to the present, in ways that are not always comfortable. We will consider what Shakespeare is as much as what he was, and you will have the opportunity in your assessment to write about his work from whichever critical vantage point you choose in a final summative essay, as well as perform a close analysis of the performance possibilities of his text. Using a selection of plays from across the first half of his career to highlight the development and fluidity of his powerful poetic language, sophisticated stagecraft, endlessly expressive dramatic moods, and powerful tragi-comic vision through these famed masterworks, we will see Shakespeare both within his own time and very much within ours.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* *The Taming of the Shrew*
* *Romeo and Juliet*
* *Henry IV Part 1*
* *Hamlet*
* *Twelfth Night*

## **Students must select ONE of the following:**

## **Literature 1950-Present**

MODULE CODE: 36230

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Portfolio of close readings (40%) and Essay (60%)

SEMESTER: 1 (Autumn term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

In this module, we study a broad range of fiction, poetry and drama from the 1950s to the present, examining the ways in which writers represented the new political, social and cultural landscapes of the later twentieth century, and exploring whether twenty-first-century literature may be registering new social and political formations, and new literary concerns. How does literature work, and to whom is it addressed in an age of abundant communication, and a perpetual narrative of crisis?

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Sam Selvon, The Lonely Londoners (1956)
* Shelagh Delaney, A Taste of Honey (1958)
* B. S. Johnson, The Unfortunates (1969)
* Ama Ata Aidoo, Our Sister Killjoy (1977)
* Brian Friel, Translations (1980)
* Toni Morrison, Paradise (1997)
* Alison Bechdel, Fun Home (2006)
* Jesmyn Ward, Salvage the Bones (2011)
* Eve Ewing, Electric Arches (2017)
* Billy-Ray Belcourt, A History of My Brief Body (2019)

## **Restoration and Revolution**

MODULE CODE: 36228

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Portfolio of close readings (40%) and Essay (60%)

SEMESTER: 1 (Autumn term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

In this module we will engage with the poetry and drama of one of the most vibrant and innovative periods of English literature, from 1660-c.1700. The period is framed by major political events that shook the nation: from Charles II’s Restoration in 1660 (which some celebrated and others regarded as the greatest calamity of their lives), to the ‘Glorious’ Revolution in 1688, to the end of the Stuart line in 1714 with the death of Queen Anne. The Restoration saw the reopening of theatres after the interregnum, and a new dramatic culture that welcomed female actors onto the public stage. In that culture, Aphra Behn would rise to become the first commercially successful female playwright in English literary history. London revelled in its consumerist possibilities, and playwrights and poets responded with energy to the burgeoning metropolis. In the midst of these events, John Milton was writing his great epic, Paradise Lost, which was first published in 1667. This module will move in chronological order and take in major works of drama and poetry from across the period.

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**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Andrew Marvell, An Horatian Ode
* Earl of Rochester, Selected poems;
* John Milton, Paradise Lost 1-4, 9-10;
* Aphra Behn, Oroonoko, The Rover
* John Dryden, Absalom and Achitophel;
* Alexander Pope, Windsor Forest, The Rape of the Lock
* Addison and Steele, The Spectator

## **Eighteenth-Century and Romantic Literature**

MODULE CODE: 39915

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Portfolio of close readings (40%) and Essay (60%)

SEMESTER: 1 (Autumn term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

This module offers students the opportunity to read widely and deeply in the literature of the Eighteenth-Century and Romantic periods, engaging with the work of authors such as Pope., Swift, Defoe, Richardson, Burney, Wollstonecraft, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron, and Austen and reading enduring masterworks in tandem with a selection of diverse intertexts and modern criticism. Spanning a century marked by rapid social change, which culminated in violent revolutions, this was an era of exceptional artistic energy and achievement. During the period, gifted poets radically transformed the traditions of English verse and prose writers began to explore the full psychological and historical possibilities of the novel. The module will provide students with a thorough grounding in the key aesthetic, cultural, professional and material contexts for this body of literature, and introduce them to a range of modern critical and theoretical approaches to the era.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*
* Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (extracts)
* Lady Mary Wortley Montague*, Turkish Embassy Letters*
* Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina*
* Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (extracts)
* Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*
* Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*
* Jane Austen, *Emma*
* Keats and Shelley, selected poetry
* Lord Byron, *Don Juan* (canto I and II)

## **Students must select ONE of the following:**

## **Popular Fiction Before the Novel**

MODULE CODE: 37896

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Portfolio of close readings (40%) and Essay (60%)

SEMESTER: 1 (Autumn term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

What kind of fiction did people enjoy before the novel? This module explores popular genre fiction produced between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, from medieval romance -- stories of quests and monsters – to the bawdy tales of medieval fabliau. Investigating questions around gender, sexuality and race, we will discover the appeal of these texts, and the imaginings, prejudices, and social worlds they explore . Reading works across named and anonymous authors, you will be introduced to a core set of popular medieval texts, comparing and contrasting their key themes and learning how to read them in their original forms and language. You will explore these narratives within their wider historical and cultural contexts, and understand how they both offer a window onto the medieval world and speak to concerns of our own age.

 This module is structured through four major thematic two-week blocks, outlined below, exploring i) medieval constructions of gender; ii) medieval representations of queer love and community; iii) medieval race and racisms; iii) medieval imaginings of, and attitudes towards, the natural world.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Canterbury Tales (‘Miller’s Tale’; 'Prioress’s Tale’)
* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
* Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle

## **Earliest English**

MODULE CODE: 37686

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Old English word study (40%) and 1x Old English translation study (60%)

SEMESTER: 1 (Autumn term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there’. This module will introduce you to the language, literature and cultural context of the early medieval period. By reading some of the first writings in the English language, you will gain insights into what it was like to be alive and thrive in a world very different to our own. Here, you will encounter mournful warriors, ravenous monsters and women on a mission. Exploring how writers of Old English texts represented the harsh realities of life on and off the battlefield, we will grapple with issues of gender, class, monstrosity and more. The module will also introduce you to the Old English language, and equip you with the tools needed to interpret and translate original texts into modern English.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* ‘Beowulf’
* ‘Judith’
* ‘The Rune Poem’
* ‘The Wanderer’
* Magical charms
* and more

# **Semester 2 Modules**

## **Students must select ONE of the following:**

## **Literature and the Environment: Crisis and Resistance**

MODULE CODE: 39765

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Critical essay (60%) and 1x Creative/Reflexive assignment (40%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

This module tackles one of the most urgent questions for literature as a discipline at the current time: how can literature and literary criticism help us to respond to climate change and the biodiversity crisis? These problems are often framed in scientific terms, but they are also social, political and personal issues which require critical scrutiny, imaginative solutions and empathy. In this module you will engage with a range of contemporary and earlier literature that has a bearing on humanity's relationships with the natural environment. The environmental crisis is a global problem that is impacting on poorer countries and communities especially hard, so this module is especially attentive to diverse voices from around the world. Alongside influential pieces of ecocriticism and canonical writers such as Wordsworth, Clare and Shakespeare, texts studied may include essays and poems by recent Indian writers, nature poetry by indigenous Canadian poets, legal codes and documentaries from South America, and writing on nature in Birmingham itself.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*
* Jason Allen-Paisant, *Thinking with Trees*
* Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton (eds), *Ecocritical Shakespeare*
* John Ruskin, *Unto this Last*

## **Colonial/Postcolonial**

MODULE CODE: 39968

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Short commentary on theoretical writings (20%)

And 1x Comparative essay (80%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

Colonial/Postcolonial will explore a range of cultural artefacts (which might include novels, plays, poems, films, and essays) from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, in relation both to the history of colonization and decolonization and to the writings of significant activists and theorists. Contending that colonialism involved both the conquest of territories and the conquest of truth, this module will invite you to consider how colonial thinking on topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, power, history, and the environment has persisted, and been challenged, in the postcolonial world. It asks how the long epoch of European colonization not only shaped the world map, but defined ways of imagining the world and what it means to be human. For each theme a selection of key theoretical or critical texts will also be assigned, in order to expose students to ideas and arguments that are fundamental to the field.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

The module will include fiction, poetry and film from diverse postcolonial regions such as Africa, Asia, Australia, the Caribbean, and Ireland. Texts will range from the imperialist period of the late nineteenth century to the present.

## **Students must select ONE of the following:**

## **The Social Life of Literature**

MODULE CODE: 38960

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Project (60%) and 1x Critical Reflection (40%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

This module explores how we interact with literature today. Far from books existing in a vacuum, they come to us through multiple channels—newspaper reviews, word of mouth, prizes, Instagram pictures, Goodreads—and we read in multiple ways—on our own, in groups, online, offline. In this module we will consider the ways in which communities discover, read and talk about books in the twenty-first century has changed from earlier eras and how these changes affect reading practices.

Questions we might cover include:

How might Amazon recommendations, book prizes and Tweets shape who, what and how people read?

What is the value of an author interview for literary critics?

How might attendance at poetry readings or book festivals change how people access literature?

What does it mean to listen to an audiobook rather than ‘read’ it?

Are fan fiction and adaptations a kind of reading?

Does the layout of a bookstore affect what people read?

What are the implications of university canon formation and funding policies on the kinds of texts that get read?

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

This module will introduce students to a range of case studies (literature, criticism and related media) as we think about how texts exist in society, and the ways in which reading can be a social activity. Texts might include: marketing tweets, literary podcasts, bookstore layouts, publishers’ websites, book covers, GCSE syllabi... basically, everything except novels.

## **Our Digital World**

MODULE CODE: 39969

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Essay (100%) OR Recorded presentation/Video essay (100%) SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

How can we make sense of our digital present? What led us here? And what will the future of digital culture look like across the globe? Our Digital World invites you to think about past, present and future versions of digital cultures in everyday life, print, and on screen. We will explore the role played by authors, theorists, filmmakers, and videogame developers, alongside social media companies, artificial intelligence, and software developers, in co-creating the media landscape we live within.

This module will introduce you to the ways you might read and critique the digital world around you: from interactive storytelling to social media, and consider big global issues, from the impacts of AI to the environmental impact of big tech. We will also address how digital culture impacts people differently around the world. This includes an exploration of the interplay between the digital world and topics such as race, gender, social and economic inequality, disability, and other real-world societal factors.

This module provides a range of skills and experiences to enable you to understand and critique our increasingly digital world.

## **Rags and Riches**

MODULE CODE: 39768

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Essay (100%) OR 1x Presentation (50%) and 1x critical reflection (50%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

From Benjamin Franklin's"self-made man" to the "greed is good" ethos of the 1980s, the aspiration to - and acquisition of - wealth has been central to American myths and narratives of self and nation. That cultural emphasis on money means that its absence has also been keenly felt, so that, for example, the economic crisis of the Depression in the 1930s became a crisis of national identity. Visions of abundance exist alongside deep structural inequalities, and endemic poverty that disproportionately affects people of colour.

The module will explore key themes in stories of wealth and poverty, such as work, precarity, consumption, inequality, and upward and downward mobility. It will consider the narrative and aesthetic strategies that shape depictions of rich and poor, and the ethics of celebrating wealth and documenting poverty. American writers have been particularly attentive to the fissures and divisions created by the disparity between the rich and poor; what it means to acquire, lose, pursue, or eschew wealth; and how money or the lack thereof defines American experience.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Jesmyn Ward
* John Steinbeck
* Edith Wharton
* F. Scott Fitzgerald

## **Students must select ONE of the following:**

## **Aspects of Modernism**

MODULE CODE: 32447

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Portfolio of close readings (40%) and 1x Essay (60%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

How did writers respond to the experience of modernity and modernisation? And what do we mean by the term 'modernism'? This module aims to familiarise students with the aesthetic debates and cultural scene of Anglo-American literary modernism. We will read a range of modernist texts written from the turn of the twentieth century to just after the Second World War. Following shifts in accepted ideas about gender, nation, religion and psyche, writers in the early twentieth century turned against bourgeois Victorian culture and its paradigmatic ways of seeing and representing the world, both through a focus on ‘modern’ life and experiments in narrative style and poetic form. Over the course of this module, we will think about the various ways in which writers in this period responded to social change and challenged literary conventions to 'make it new'**.**

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness
* James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
* Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway
* Short stories by Katherine Mansfield
* Poems by T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and H.D.

## **Gender and Sexuality**

MODULE CODE: 39763

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Two of the following (each worth 50%):

* Presentation
* A3 zine or poster
* Essay
* Radio or podcast segment

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

Gender and Sexuality Studies offers an overview of contemporary gender and sexual theory and their relationship to literature. It is not a module about feminism, per se, nor does it provide a history of the women's rights movement or women's writing. Instead, it uses a mix of feminist, queer, and postcolonial theory and philosophy – written primarily in Britain and North America – to read a variety of modern and contemporary literary and visual texts, written from a range of gendered identities.

Topics should include: contemporary and mainstream feminisms; social concepts of gender, sex, and sexuality; histories of Black feminism in the United States; gender and sexuality as constructs and tools of colonialism; LGBTQ+ identities and queer theory; compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity; camp, 'bad' taste, and kitsch aesthetics; disability studies and queer approaches to body politics; surveillance and hypervisibility of gender non-conformity.

## **Victorian Literature**

MODULE CODE: 27776

CREDITS: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Portfolio of close readings (40%) and 1x Essay (60%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

**DESCRIPTION**

This module offers students the opportunity to read widely and deeply in the literature of the Victorian period, engaging with the work of such canonical authors as Dickens, Gaskell, Eliot, Tennyson, H. G. Wells and Oscar Wilde. It will also provide the opportunity to study cultural movements such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and its circle, as well as introducing the works of lesser-known Indian writers, such as Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu.

The main texts for each week will be introduced in lectures with reference to the visual arts, politics, economics and the broader culture of the age. The module will thus provide students with a thorough grounding in the key aesthetic, cultural, professional and material contexts for Victorian literature, and familiarise them with a range of modern critical and theoretical approaches to this era and its texts.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*
* Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford*
* Poetry from Swinburne, Rossettis, Tennyson, Browning
* Women’s supernatural stories (George Eliot’s *The Lifted Veil*)
* Olive Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm*
* William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*
* Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*