

English Matters 5.3

Spring is just about happening, isn't it? Well, yes—when you look at the trees and flowers. But when you think of all the work that's piling up on you? Spring was sprung on us months ago. But even though we're still in the midst of it (Spring, that is), it is time once again to leap ahead to Summer and Fall.

What classes are you going to take? Have you registered yet?

Unless you are one of the lucky few who can say “yup” and “yup” to those two questions, you should find this edition of *English Matters* a real help. We've assembled a roundup of many of the amazing courses that the English department faculty will be offering.

So read on, and enjoy!

Major Notes



Prof. Caroline Reitz
English Major Advisor

The end of the semester is coming, and that means the end-of-year Awards Luncheon. So,

SAVE THE DATE!
12 noon
Friday, May 24

Come join us as we gather as a community to salute our best and brightest. We will honor our Outstanding Graduate, our Departmental Honors students, our essay award winners, and our classroom leaders, along with outstanding student fiction and poetry. We will also induct the new members to Sigma Tau Delta, John Jay's chapter of the national English Honor Society, in addition to showcasing our students who write for the *Quill* and the *Sentinel*.

Last year, there was also a burrito bar.

So let's face it: you don't want to miss this. So don't! See you there.

Spring Course Preview



Prof. Al Coppola

LIT 260: Introduction to Literary Study

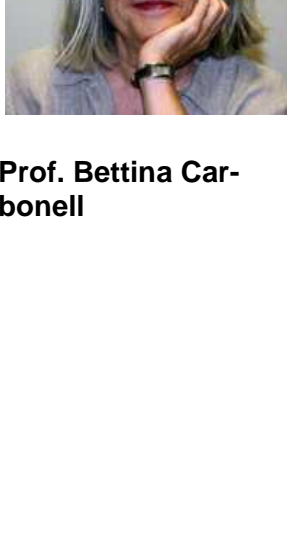
This is a class that is intended to teach you the skills you need for literary study. We'll do that, but my real goal is to teach you to read like it's the only thing worth doing. We'll begin with me talking about three books that changed my life: one each by Italo Calvino, William Blake and Alexander Pope. Then, I'll be asking you to write about a book that is incredibly important to you. And then, we'll journey together, largely in the eighteenth-century literature I've come to know and love so well: we'll read some poems, some short prose, a play, and a novel, and something very interesting is going to happen. Trust me.

LIT 260: Introduction to Literary Study

We will begin our class with what was, perhaps, your “introduction” to literature: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. While literature might seem like magic, it is a craft. Together we will acquire the tools to understand and analyze a range of literary texts from poems and short stories to Hamlet and Great Expectations (Dickens's and South Park's). As we study these tales of brave orphans, bossy ghosts, and the girls who love/hate them, we will learn how literature uses words (and occasionally wands) to bring us face to face with the inner demons and better angels of our nature.

LIT 260: Introduction to Literary Study

Why is the story of the quest or heroic task so pervasive in literature? How has the quest helped to shape English literature? We'll explore a series of such journeys in fiction, poetry, film, and the creative non-fiction essay.



Prof. Jean Mills

LIT 370: Topics in Ancient Literature

What is the ancient body, and how did it communicate? Topics in Ancient Lit will explore depictions of the ancient body, its health, sickness, gender, sexuality, and performance in the theater, athletics, and lawcourts. Emphasis will be placed on cultural and historical distinctions between ancient bodies and those of today.

LIT 372: Topics in Early Modern Literature: Hierarchy

Hierarchy -- 400 years ago it pervaded life and literature, ruling the universe, society, the family, gender, even the human psyche. We will use hierarchy as a lens in our study of early modern (aka renaissance) literature, looking at how authors and their characters used, abused, defied, and submitted to it. We will read, talk and write about a selection of plays, poems, stories, and essays by the likes of Surrey, Spenser, and Shakespeare, Marguerite De Navarre, John Milton and John Webster, Bacon, Castiglione, Donne, Erasmus.

LIT 374: Topics in Nineteenth-Century Literature: Poetry, Politics and Social Justice in the Romantic Period

From the French Revolution to Napoleon's defeat to the restoration of monarchies across Europe, the poetry of the British Romantic period is intimately connected to the political events and social questions of its time. The fight for freedom, justice, and equality, the slave trade, women's rights, the plight of the poor: Romantic texts engage with all these issues by offering sometimes hopeful, sometimes despairing poetic responses. The texts we will read in this course range from direct calls to political action to poetic contemplations of an aesthetic realm where hopes that proved unrealizable in political reality nevertheless remain alive.

LIT 374: Topics in Nineteenth-Century Literature: Revolution!

One way to think about the nineteenth century is to remember that it was bookended by two revolutions: French in 1789 and Russian in 1917. Revolution is serious business, and promises to remake the world in the image of great ideas. We will talk about these powerful ideas and the books they came from, and about why we still care about the ideas that broke the old world: justice, equality, and freedom.

LIT 300: Text and Context: Faulkner's Grand Design and Absalom, Absalom!

We'll be delving into the deep waters of William Faulkner's extraordinary novel ABSALOM, ABSALOM! (pub. in 1936) to consider how it addresses the issues that occupied -- I should say "plagued" -- the author throughout his career. These issues include: the relationship between the "old" agrarian South (pre-Civil War) and its in some sense always "fallen" present, problematic legacies of prejudice regarding race and social class, and questionable norms about women's rights and roles. The historical scope of the novel is broad, and we'll analyze how it both represents and avoids key moments in U.S. history. The formal complexity of Faulkner's modernist text will keep all of us very busy -- especially those interested in narrative structure and the treatment of voice and time. We will also examine arcs and trends in literary theory and criticism, and the specific critical reception of the novel. With these key contexts in mind, we will bring a major late 20th-century novel into the deep waters and consider matters of influence, individual creativity, and subject position. In past semesters that novel has been Toni Morrison's PARADISE, but for this semester I have other contenders in mind...

LIT 300: Text and Context: Democracy and the Costs of War

In this class, we will consider the ancient Greek tragedians about murder, revenge, and justice, the *Oresteia*. How can a just state set up a fair system of law? We will see how their author, Aeschylus, confronts this issue and others facing the young democracy of Athens. Aeschylus himself was active in Athenian affairs and helped fight off the Persian invasion of Greece, and we shall also look at his play *The Persians*, as well as *Prometheus Bound*, for their links to what was happening in Athens at the time. How can plays about mythical characters refer to contemporary affairs?

LIT 305: Foundations of Literature and the Law

How are Literature and the Law related? Not even the experts agree, and we will do our own exploration of the boundaries between law and storytelling, particularly when these two perspectives collide in acts of legalized violence or illegal justice. In this course, we will focus on myths of civil identity, from David and Bathsheba to recent court cases and documents, which “legalize” torture and solitary confinement by playing around with the definitions of “torture” and “punishment.” Fiction, not just literature, is part of the law. We will see how fiction can actually make law, in Old Testament stories of violence, medieval myths of monstrous races, Shakespeare’s portrayal of outsiders, and a novel about American Indian justice.

LIT 305: Foundations of Literature and the Law

“Legal interpretation takes place in a field of pain and death,” says Robert Cover, noting the violence that language can inflict on the law’s participants. Literary interpretation might not actually take place in a field of pain and death, but it is a field, nonetheless, with which literature is intimately familiar. In this writing intensive course, we will read articles that will introduce the ideas of justice, truth and personhood, consider legal constructs like the rule of law and rights, and read both literary and legal narratives that interpret these constructs.

LIT 265: Foundations of U.S. Latino/a Literature

If you're interested in how languages mix, pleasurable borders, what makes the pain of exile pleasurable; if you cross interested in identifying who Latinos were, are and will be, and when all this morphed into a literary tradition, then you'll be interested in U.S. Latino/a literature, and you should take this course!

LIT 275: The Language of Film

What is the difference between art and entertainment? This tricky question--and other tricky questions--will be addressed in this introductory film course. Get ready to have your expectations and assumptions about movies challenged by the works of creative filmmakers and the words of thought-provoking scholars.

LIT 290: Special Topics Reading Poetry

"So you think yourself a poet,/ and deem you know it?" If you find these lines' rhyme lame (it is), you should take this course. If you find these lines' rhythm alluring (it might be), you should take this course. If you want to learn from *and* write a poet who's been practicing the impossibly necessary craft of poetry for more than twenty years (that's me!), you should take this course. *You should take this course*, said the poet (that's me, and that's you, if you will).

LIT 316: Gender and Identity in Literary Traditions

In our “non-binary, gender queer, transgender, 3rd gender, androgynous, intergender, pangender, neutrois, trgender, androgynous, two-spirit, self-coined, genderfluid” world (*The New Yorker*, March 2013), it is more important than ever that we explore, interrogate, and redefine the variety of ways in which we understand sex and gender. Together, we'll read literature that illustrates how gender categories are made and unmade.

Lit 360: Mythology in Literature

What is myth? What function does it have for individuals, societies, and nations? How does it work to communicate ideas about justice, heroism, identity, and humanity? This course will investigate such questions through a close study of ancient myths and their reception in a variety of literary works from antiquity to modern times.

LIT 290: Special Topics Broken Laws, Dangerous Freedoms: Nineteenth-Century Literary Renegades

What happens when law and conscience conflict? The nineteenth century was a time in America when law and morality were in direct contest: slavery was commensurate with democracy, enslaved persons and wives were objects of property, and laws were violated in the name of justice. In such conditions, how was one to distinguish between righteous rebellion and criminal misconduct? In this class we will read controversial court cases, autobiographies, and fiction to examine the sometimes uncomfortable relationship between ethics and American law. Possible authors will include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Jacobs, Kate Chopin, and Charles Chesnut. This class will serve as an approved elective for Literature and the Law majors.

LIT 311: Literature and Ethics

This course will focus on the ways in which a literary text can become a laboratory for ethical inquiry. By creating specific conditions of time, place, character, and action, literary texts provoke readers to question their own positions and judgments. We will examine how cultural and societal norms, the rule-of-law, and “higher” or divine laws make competing demands on characters, how characters negotiate those demands, and how others respond. How do they (and we) decide the “right” thing to do? Selected readings from primary texts in ethics will provide a background for the analysis of literary texts.

LIT 327: Crime, Punishment and Justice in World Literatures

Like the scales of justice, like truth and fairness, and punishment is a binary concept that suggests commensurability. Yet critics like Wai Chee Dimock have argued that these binaries often blur other important issues related to justice: “For it is [the conceit of the scales of justice], with its attendant assumptions about the generalizability, proportionality, and commensurability of the world, that writes the self-image of justice as a supreme instance of adequation... one that perfectly matches burdens and benefits, action and reaction, resolving all conflicting terms into a weighable equivalence.” This Writing Intensive Course investigates this notion of the “fitness” of justice in literary and legal texts that trouble our sense of what constitutes crime, punishment and justice.

LIT 327: Crime, Punishment and Justice in World Literatures

This class will explore compelling works of literature, primarily novels, that depict the minds and actions of criminals, victims, prisoners, lawyers and other members of the criminal justice system in America and in other countries. We will study these novels and plays as works of literature, but we will also compare the insights of these authors with the theories and findings of criminal justice practitioners and scholars.

LIT 327: Crime, Punishment and Justice in World Literatures

This course examines literary texts about crime, punishment, and justice from around the world in order to explore how questions of right, wrong, and fairness have been and are understood in various cultures and historical periods. Students will read literary texts that question the psychological and social causes of crime, philosophies of law, the varieties and purposes of punishment, and what justice might mean in any given context.

LIT 362: The Bible as Literature

Who wrote the Bible? Who reorganized and rewrote, translated and selected the Bibles we have today? Take this class to find out why these ancient stories still have magic and still signify.

LIT 363: Il/Legal Subjects: U.S. Latina/o Literature & the Law

This course examines how law shapes contemporary Latina/o life in the United States. Students will examine how legal texts and literature are narrative systems that require judgment, social, and political contextualization, acts of interpretation, and a heightened attention to words. We will read court cases, law reviews, and literary analysis in order to study the way Latina/o literature exposes contradictions in the legal system. Topics covered may include the legal construction of race, the criminalization of youth, law and U.S. colonialism, violence against women, and contemporary challenges to individual civil liberties.

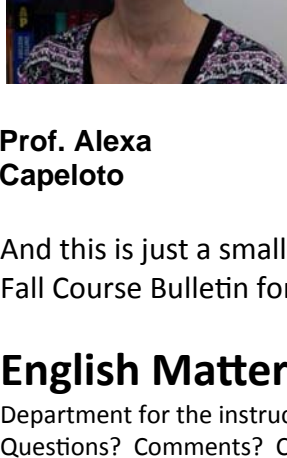
LIT 400: Senior Seminar in Literature Paradises Lost and Found

Paradise, the perfect place of life, love, leisure, peace. How did we lose it, and how do we get back? And whose damned fault is it any way? We will look at the ancient idea of the lost paradise as a way of understanding the loss of a real-world paradise in the European conquest of the “new world.” We will read the responses of some sensitive English observers, including Shakespeare, Behn, and, especially, Milton, along with Aztec, Spanish, and African voices.

LIT 405: Senior Seminar in Literature and Law The Idea of Justice

What is justice and why does it matter? Does justice mean something different today than it did for us last year? Different than it did on September 10, 2001, or August 17, 1920 (for women), or December 31, 1862 (for African Americans), or July 3, 1776 (for Colonial Americans)? (yes, you should know why all of these dates are important!). Does justice mean something different for us than it does for someone today in India, Senegal or China, or even for someone in Athens in the 5th century BCE? And if so, what are the differences and, more importantly, what is the significance of there being a difference? Authors of great literature have always been profoundly aware of the elusive character of justice, and this awareness is ever present in their texts. Join in conversation with some of these authors, and with your classmates, as we explore to the very frontiers of this problem.

Select Writing Electives



Prof. P. J. Gibson

For creative writers, there are a number of writing classes being offered next fall can be used to satisfy an English Major elective, or can be applied to the Writing Minor:

ENG 215: Poetry Writing and Reading

Prof. P. J. Gibson

ENG 216: Fiction Writing

Prof. Adam Berlin (section 1)

Jeffrey Heiman (section 2)

ENG 218: The Writing Workshop

Prof. Claudia Zuluaga

Students can also choose from a variety of Journalism classes.

If you like to write, take photos or do page design, and if you want to get published, then take a Journalism class, either for the Journalism Minor or as an English elective.

This summer, consider *ENG 395: Investigating Justice*, taught by Professor Cara Tabachnick.

For the Fall 2013, take *ENG 233: News Reporting and Writing*. This is a core course for the Minor and is worth four credits. Both Professor Capeloto and Professor Harner will be offering sections next semester.

Prof. Alexa Capeloto

And this is just a small sample of all the courses offered next semester! See the Fall Course Bulletin for full details on all our offerings.

English Matters 5.3 is a more-or-less regular publication of the John Jay English Department for the instruction and delight of students in our major and minor programs. Questions? Comments? Complaints? Want to get involved? Contact the editors, Prof. Al Coppola, acoppola@jay.cuny.edu, and Prof. Olivera Jokic, ojokic@jay.cuny.edu.