



# English Matters

Boo!

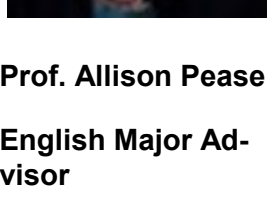
What—Halloween’s over, you say? Well, that doesn’t mean that John Jay doesn’t have some surprises in store. Fact is, you’re probably neck-deep in work for this semester at the moment, and now all of a sudden—whammo!—registration for *next* semester begins this week.

Good thing we here in the English Department have got you covered. This issue of *English Matters* is dedicated to all things registration, so that you can get the help and information you need to plan not just a great spring line-up but also a sound and well-rounded course of study that will move you through the major in a timely fashion. Below you’ll see that we’ve asked professors who will be teaching courses in the major next spring to say a few words about what they have in store for you. The courses they are planning are truly worth crowing about!

So about those singing skeletons: our banner this month features the inimitable iconography of the Day of the Dead celebrations that are so important in Mexico, and across Latin America. Depending on how your semester is going, you might find some wry solace in that tradition’s emphasis on finding rebirth amid the remembrance of the dead and gone. But the Day of the Dead is first and foremost a day for people to come together and retie the bonds of kinship and community. So why not take this opportunity to “come home” to the English department by making an appointment to see your advisor? All the faculty will be having office hours this week, and there will even be drop-in advising hours in Westport.

So read on, and enjoy!

## Major Notes



**Prof. Allison Pease**  
English Major Advisor

Dear Majors,

In this season of skeletons, let me remind you of the four courses that form the backbone of the English major: LIT 260, LIT 300, LIT 305, LIT 400 or 405. As you sample from our rich selection of historical topics and electives, keep in mind that you should be proceeding with the four courses above, preferably one semester at a time, leaving the senior seminar for your final year, if not your final semester.

LET US HELP YOU: This week I, along with your professors, will be sitting in the Westport building and in my office, ready and able to help you choose the best courses to complete the major in a way that works for your interests and aspirations. Come see me. Better yet, make an appointment to see your faculty advisor. We want to make your experience at John Jay as meaningful as possible.

Still don't know who your faculty advisor is? All English professors have the complete list and can tell you. If that's not convenient enough, contact Alicia Kelly: [akelly@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:akelly@jjay.cuny.edu)

## Spring Course Preview

*In this issue, English Matters looks ahead to next semester. We asked some of the professors who will be teaching spring courses in the major to give us a sneak peek at what they're planning. Here's what they said they are looking*



**Prof. Richard Perez**  
Prof. Jay Walitalo

LIT 344: Caribbean Literature and Culture

I invite students to take my Caribbean Literature course: where magic is real; where the ocean becomes an uncanny site of history; where our sensibilities are sharpened by an acute legacy of violence, cultural mixture, and creative pleasure.



**Prof. Marny Tabb**

Lit 284: Film & Society

With the internet in your pocket and a video camera on your phone, you are both a consumer and creator of moving images. But when does a moving image become something important, something that helps us understand who we are and where we might be going? This course will examine the work of professional, amateur and accidental filmmakers in an attempt to answer this and other related questions.



**Prof. Toy-Fung Tung**

LIT 313: Shakespeare in Performance

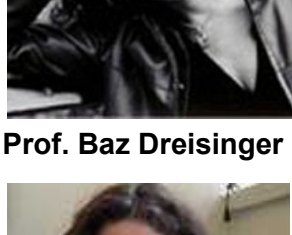
Shakespeare's plays were originally meant for the stage not the page. We'll study them both ways, using film and your own performances (no memorization required!) of individual scenes as we closely read of a sampling of the plays -- a history, a comedy, a couple tragedies, maybe a romance. If we get lucky we'll be off to watch a professional production of one of the plays we study.



**Prof. Helen Kapstein**

LIT 371: Topics in Medieval Literature

Read all about the knights and ladies of King Arthur's court--of their deeds of valor and naughty exploits! Sex and sin abound in these tales, which ask the eternal questions of "what is love?" and "what is justice?" We will look at love and violence, medieval theories of sexuality, and ideas of political order.



**Prof. Baz Dreisinger**

LIT 332: The Films of Spike Lee

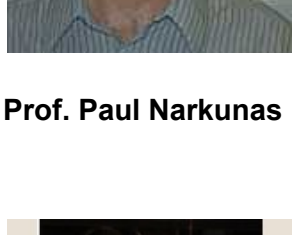
From "She's Gotta Have It" to "Bamboozled" and "Inside Man," we'll watch, analyze and read film criticism about one of cinema's most inimitable filmmakers.



**Prof. Paul Narkunas**

LIT 375: Topics in Twentieth Century Literature: The Nature of Literature

What do oil spills, plastic flamingos, and organ transplants have in common? They all focus our attention on the tensions between nature and culture. This course examines contemporary and postcolonial literatures through the lens of the exciting, emerging field of ecocriticism in order to determine how literature depicts the changing, controversial relationships between humans and the environments we live in.



**Prof. Dale Barleben**

LIT 290.03 Special Topics: Introduction to Literary Theory: Race and Gender

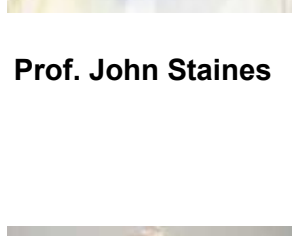
Why did Plato want to exile all the poets from his perfect Republic? How can we explore race, gender, and sexuality as contested social identities in literary texts? Introduction to Literary Theory will address these questions and more as we mix theories of rhetoric, poetics, sublimity, narrative, semiotics, psychoanalysis, feminism, postcolonialism, and racial, ethnic, sexual, and economic "otherness" to probe the recurrent questions: what is literature, how is it produced, how can it be understood, and what is its purpose now?



**Prof. John Staines**

LIT 305: Foundations of Literature and the Law

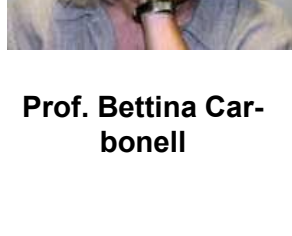
This course will ask central questions about literary and legal and narratives, as well as the nature of "justice" and "truth" in each discipline. We will examine testimony and trials, linking reality to the imagined. "Legal interpretation takes place in a field of pain and death," says Robert Cover as he describes the roles language plays in enacting violence 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 famil-



**Prof. Bettina Carbonell**

LIT 300.01: Text and Context

For John Milton, the greatest epic poet in English, poetry was a public art, one that sought to make changes in people and the world. He was also a political radical who wrote some of the earliest defenses of free expression, divorce, and the killing of tyrannical kings. While reading his poems and selected prose, we'll enter some of the enduring debates about him: Was he an early feminist, or an oppressor of women? A prudish Puritan, or a celebrator of sex and the body? Was he a secretly part of the devil's party, rebelling against a tyrannical God? Did his defense of the individual



**Prof. Jay Gates**

LIT 300.02: Text and Context

William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) weaves personal histories, regional histories, national histories and human history into a stunning and highly complex narrative of love and hate, success and failure, incest and revenge. We will read the novel in multiple contexts, such as its contemporary history, its author's biography, and its effect on later writers and critics. Since the text immerses active readers in a landscape of gender relations, race relations, labor relations, colonialism, and post-colonialism, our work will inevitably bring us around to our own historical moment(s). To my mind, this course was made for this novel!



**Prof. Allison Pease**

English 398: History of the English Language

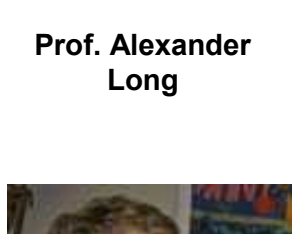
This class is a practical and wide-ranging introduction to the development of the English language from its roots to modern use. You will be introduced to various forms of the language, from Old English to Modern. We'll discuss dialects and how communities shape language to their own needs. And yes, we will spend an entire class on naughty words and how they became naughty. This class is recommended particularly for anyone interested in going on to grad school or



**Prof. Alexander Long**

LIT 346: Cultures in Conflict

A long-running joke in my family is that I am Japanese; I was just born on the wrong continent to the wrong parents. I've always had a fascination with Japanese culture and this spring I'm going to share my love by teaching Cultures in Conflict as a course in modern Japanese literature. What's in it for you besides free sushi and green tea in every class? Okay, that's a bribe, and I will only bring it to one class. However, I *can* promise you the experience of a literature that haunts you with its familiar strangeness, its depth and simplicity, its reminder of our common humanity. Join me and see for yourself.



**Prof. Liza Yukins**

LIT 290-04 Reading Poetry

Don't be afraid. It's just poetry. Well, maybe you should be, a little, in a healthy way. I know I was, at first. In the presence of masters, humility happens. In "Reading Poetry" we'll explore the pleasures and challenges—or if you prefer, the beauty and the truth—found in poetry that spans centuries. Leading the way will be an empathic, experienced, published, and award winning poet ... me, Professor Alexander Long. We'll read and write about poets as diverse as Shakespeare and Chuck D.



**Prof. Olivera Jokic**

Lit 340/AAL 340: The African American Experience in America: Comparative Racial Perspectives.

In this course we will explore literary representations of African-American experience by both black and white writers. As we read a broad range of authors including Frederick Douglass, Herman Melville, Harriet Jacobs, Mark Twain, Toni Morrison, and Audre Lorde, we will examine how authors of different races and different socioeconomic histories "speak" to each other. In the process, we will investigate how these authors reckon differently—or similarly—with such complex issues as enslavement, miscegenation, the politics of folklore, Jim Crow culture, and diverse civil rights efforts.



**Prof. Pat Licklider**

LIT 311: Literature and Ethics

What is the right way to treat others—do we have a universal standard? If we don't all agree on the distinction between the right and the wrong thing to do, how can we have justice? These are the sorts of questions posed by ethics, a branch of philosophy that deals with questions of morality. We will use literary works as laboratories in which such questions can be posed and contemplated. In these texts characters ask themselves, Should I follow social conventions? Must I do what's best for me, or should I break an unjust written law? Should I break the promise made to a



**Prof. Baz Dreisinger**

LIT 400: Senior Seminar in Literature

Goddess, Wife, Whore, Slave: In this senior seminar, we will read ancient stories, plays, and poems in which women of all kinds play important roles. What myths about women started in the ancient world? We will also look at actual women's lives, both then and now: women's bodies, marriage customs, and women's language. One potential area of student research is a topic I call "Whatever Happened to \_\_\_\_\_?" in which you would trace the appearances in later literature of an ancient female character, such as Antigone.



**Prof. Baz Dreisinger**

LIT 405: Senior Seminar In Literature And The Law: Representing Prisons

Spend a semester "inside": This seminar explores representations of prisons and punishment in 19th and 20th-century literature and film, setting them in the context of the development of the prison industrial complex. Readings will include works of fiction, memoirs, literary and film criticism, sociological texts about prisons and philosophical texts about punishment. Among the films to be studied: *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Farm*, *In the Land of the Free*.