# **English Literature**

# **Module Descriptions 2024/25**

# **Level H (i.e. Final Year.) Modules**

Please be aware that all modules are subject to availability.

For these modules, strong knowledge of Literature and a near native level of English is required. All applications for Level H modules are subject to approval by the English Literature department.

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 2 MODULES**

**Only ONE of the following four modules can be taken:**

## **Bringing Out the Bodies: Technology, Transhumans and Skin**

MODULE CODE: 27598

CREDIT VALUE: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1 x essay (100%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

***Please note: this module is only available to students who study English Literature at their home institution.***

**DESCRIPTION**

The word "technology" is used extensively throughout popular discourse to describe our material culture – something different is meant to be going on right now, something electronic, digital, microscopic, biological. Technology, however, is nothing new, either as a concept or as a fact of human life. What, then, is distinct about the ways in which we use tools in the 21st century and how do the representations of technology, in all forms of media, question the ways in which our contemporary uses of technology might (or should) unfold?

This module focuses on the user’s body, how it might be supported and invaded, improved and supplanted by technology. The aim is to worm our way into the skin, starting with graspable and wearable technologies, then implants, before looking at genetic modifications, pharmaceuticals, the end of aging and, finally, the “ideal” shedding of the human body for another kind of existence entirely, uploading consciousness into "the cloud." In exploring these topics we will consider why we might want to modify ourselves, the role literature and film plays in shaping our desires, how we might go about doing any project of human enhancement, and why we might want to shape or even resist it going forward.

Students will consider a provocation from a theoretical, philosophical, legal, and/or scientific work and then pair these insights with an artwork (typically literature or film). The aim is to explore cutting edge thought, so many examples will be drawn from the 21st century, but ideas about technology and the body will also be grounded in work across history so that we might talk about the first stone tools and their direct lineage to mobile phones and beyond. Students with an interest in any time period will therefore be able to pursue many of these same discussions and find their own examples.

**INDICATIVE READING LISTS**

* Ramez Naam – Nexus
* Ramez Naam – More Than Human
* Sabrina Vourvoulias – Ink
* Kate Devlin – Turned On: Science, Sex and Robots
* Daniel Keyes – Flowers for Algernon
* Nancy Kress – Beggars in Spain
* Altered Carbon: Season 1
* Douglas Lain – Aubrey de Grey: Advocate for an Indefinite Human Lifespan
* Caroline Bassett, Ed Steinmueller, and George Voss – “Better Made Up: The Mutual Influence of Science fiction and Innovation"
* Nick Payne, Elegy
* Robert Venditti, The Surrogates Volume 1
* Limitless
* Advantageous
* Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
* Gattaca
* Her
* Muireann Quigley and Semande Ayihongbe, “Everyday Cyborgs: On Integrated Persons and Integrated Goods,” Medical Law Review, Volume 26, Issue 2, Spring 2018, Pages 276–308

These kinds of materials will be analysed and critiqued from a range of theoretical perspectives including discussions of race, class and economics, gender, sexuality, and disability. We will also discuss attitudes towards mental health.

## **Islamophobia and the Novel**

MODULE CODE: 30677

CREDIT VALUE: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Book review (30%) and 1x Essay (70%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

***Please note: this module is only available to students who study English Literature at their home institution.***

**DESCRIPTION**

Islamophobia and the Novel will offer students an opportunity to study contemporary novels that address the question of intercultural relations between Muslims and others in an era of rising anti-Muslim prejudice. Taking examples from Britain, the United States and beyond, it will explore how novelists have addressed the issues of cultural difference and a perceived ‘clash of civilisations’ – in terms of the form and content of their work – while also considering the contexts of dissemination and reception which help give these novels their meaning in the world.

The module looks at texts that have appeared in the last 30 or so years, exploring topics which have become central to today’s society such as multiculturalism, citizenship, migration, cultural difference, and the role of the literary market in creating and preserving certain hegemonic values. We will think about what the experience of Muslims, and the prejudice they often face, tells us about ideas of Britain and ‘the West’, while also thinking about how these debates are constructed and by whom.

The role of literature is central to our considerations, not least because of the claims that are often made about it. Since the 1989 Satanic Verses affair, when Salman Rushdie’s novel created widespread offence among Muslims, issues of freedom of expression and censorship have often been taken to mark a civilizational divide between the secular West and Islam. We will interrogate this binary, see how some writers tend to reinforce it while others deconstruct its terms and the stereotypes it often creates. The role of readers, critics, academia, the publishing industry, and cultural elites all serve to shape this debate.

For these reasons, Islamophobia and the Novel is very much a module about the way we live today and how we orient ourselves in the world.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* *Martin Amis, ‘The Last Days of Muhammad Atta’*
* Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album*
* John Le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man*
* John Updike*, Terrorist*
* Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*
* Amy Waldman, *The Submission*
* Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*
* Kamila Shamsie, *Home Fire*
* Sanjeev Sahota, *Ours Are the Streets*
* Ayisha Malik, *This Green and Pleasant Land*

## **The Pre-Raphaelite Circle**

MODULE CODE: 27755

CREDIT VALUE: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Presentation (25%) and 1x Essay (75%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

***Please note: this module is only available to students who study English Literature at their home institution.***

**DESCRIPTION**

This module focuses on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of mid-nineteenth century artists and writers, as an entry point to explore a series of art/text movements of the Victorian era. Derided in the press as the “Fleshly School” of poetry, the PRB engaged many of the most pressing debates of literary and artistic production and consumption during the period: the role of craft versus inspiration, the relationship between realism and idealism, the pressures of facing an increasingly vocal public, and the wages of industrialization, among others. In this module, students will consider the ways that that Pre-Raphaelites—as well as the Aesthetes, the Arts and Crafts movement, the Century Guild, and other groups that the PRB inspired—responded to these debates in the various artistic forms they advocated.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

Texts to include verse by Tennyson, Keats, Browning, Barrett Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, Swinburne, and Wilde; prose by Pater, Ruskin, Arnold, Morris, Beerbohm, and Buchanan; and images ranging from the fine arts to cartoons from the popular periodical press.

## **Literary Ecologies: Environmental Crisis in American Writing**

MODULE CODE: 39959

CREDIT VALUE: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Written assignment (30%) and 1x Essay (70%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

***Please note: this module is only available to students who study English Literature at their home institution.***

**DESCRIPTION**

This module explores the relationship between literary expression and environmental concerns in American writing. Drawing on novels, poetry and non-fiction writing from the nineteenth century to the present across a range of genres (which may include sci-fi, nature writing, and journalism), we will read texts through an ecological lens that traces the connections between an emerging environmental crisis and human values. By exploring a diverse array of imaginative American writing, we will explore urgent themes about the current climate emergency and its roots in American history. We will see how powerfully literature represents the burgeoning awareness of a crisis at the heart of nature and how it exists within a web of interrelated issues about land, social justice, colonialism, and community.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* Ursula K Le Guin, The Word for World is Forest
* Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony
* Rachel Carson, Silent Spring
* Richard Powers, The Overstory
* Grace Paley, ‘Faith in a Tree’ and ‘Enormous Changes at the Last Minute’ (short stories)
* Poems: e.g. Denise Levertov; Tommy Pico, Joyce Harjo

**Only ONE of the following three modules can be taken:**

## **Making Global Literatures in Britain**

MODULE CODE: 30727

CREDIT VALUE: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: 1x Written reflection OR poster (25%) and 1x Essay (75%) SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

***Please note: this module is only available to students who study English Literature at their home institution.***

**DESCRIPTION**

This module studies writing from – or somehow connected to – Britain's former colonies from 1831 to 2021.

In weeks 1-5 we’ll examine a handful of case studies of writers from places like Jamaica and Nigeria who “made” their careers in imperial Britain. Weeks 7-11 switches focus as we explore how contemporary literature and art reckons with how to “archive” the global entanglements and difficult histories born of colonialism.

This module will be of interest to undergraduates with interests in postcolonial, twentieth century and contemporary literature. It will introduce you to literary voices from the archive – that is, writers beyond the conventional canon of “English Literature” -- and some contemporary voices too.

We’ll talk about “race”, cultural identity and the role of artistic craft amid the fraught past still haunting the present. Along the way we’ll visit an archive and a gallery or two, learning more about how “gatekeeping” institutions like the BBC, literary publishing and even the courts have shaped what we read in this country.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

Part one: colonial writers in the metropolis

* Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831)
* Una Marson, *London Calling* (1934)
* Edgar Mittelholzer, *A Morning at the Office* (1950)
* Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952)

Part two: contemporary literature: a living archive?

* Hazel Carby, *Imperial Intimacies* (2019)
* Jay Bernard, *Surge* (2019)
* Shola von Reinhold, *LOTE* (2020)
* Zoe Wicomb, *Still Life* (2020)
* Gail McConnell, *The Sun is Open* (2021)

## **The Figure of the Witch**

MODULE CODE: 37352

CREDIT VALUE: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Essay (100%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

***Please note: this module is only available to students who study English Literature at their home institution.***

**DESCRIPTION**

The Figure of the Witch explores how pre-modern communities in Europe and America understood magic and witchcraft, how they 'thought' with the figure of the witch, and how we might critically engage with their complex legacies today. In this module you will be introduced to the development of magical beliefs and moral panics across three hundred years of 'witch-writings' and two continents, as well as their later reception.

The module encompasses a rich variety of texts, beginning with medieval and early-modern magical practices, alongside literary narratives of supernatural transformation and flight, before considering the ways in which earlier beliefs and stories appear in writings of the early-modern witch hunts. These will include the famous witch-hunter's manual, the Malleus Maleficarum (1487), James VI's Daemonologie (1597), and the records of the seventeenth-century Salem Witch Trials. We will encounter the testimonies of the accused and their accusers, alert to gaps and absences in the record, before finally we turn to modern creative responses to the trials (including Maryse Conde's I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem; the writings of feminist activist Starhawk; and the recent Netflix film Coven of Sisters). The module therefore concludes with an exploration of the voice of the witch as it has been reclaimed by modern authors writing back to the archive.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487)
* James VI's *Daemonologie* (1597)
* the records of the seventeenth-century Salem Witch Trials
* Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*
* the writings of feminist activist Starhawk
* Netflix film *Coven of Sisters*

## **Virginia Woolf**

MODULE CODE: 37163

CREDIT VALUE: 20

ASSESSMENT METHOD: Essay (100%)

SEMESTER: 2 (Spring term only)

***Please note: this module is only available to students who study English Literature at their home institution.***

**DESCRIPTION**

This module explores the work of one of the most iconic and important writers of the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf. The module will address Woolf’s works chronologically in order to explore the complex development of her writing across the span of her career. Reading all nine of Woolf’s novels alongside selected short stories, essays and forms of auto/biography, we will consider the full range of literary genres Woolf adopted and adapted as a writer. Paying close attention to Woolf’s formal and stylistic innovations, the module will also consider the various political, historical and social contexts that influenced her writing, and you will become familiar with the kinds of conceptual and theoretical questions that Woolf’s work has provoked in subsequent criticism. Discussion will cover topics as diverse as war and violence, pacifism, the visual arts, gender and sexuality, the city and everyday life, race and empire, science and nature, class and social inequality. Across the course of this module, students will gain a broad yet intimate knowledge of Woolf’s writing, as well as a developed understanding of the place this work occupies within wider cultural and critical debates.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST**

* The Voyage Out (1915)
* Night and Day (1919)
* Jacob’s Room (1922)
* Mrs Dalloway (1925)
* To the Lighthouse (1927)
* Orlando (1928)
* The Waves (1931)
* The Years (1937)

Between the Acts (1941)