

2025-2026

Psychoanalysis and Literature (Advanced Undergraduate)

Spring semester 2026.

This seminar has two goals: 1) to introduce students to some key psychoanalytic concepts through readings of essays by Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Jacques Lacan, Donald Winnicott, and Marion Milner; 2) to give students a sense of how these concepts – and psychoanalytic theory more generally – can be used to illuminate literary texts. Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette* (1853) will serve as a test-case through which we will explore the possibilities of psychoanalytically attuned literary criticism.

The Neutral (Graduate)

Autumn semester 2025.

This seminar is designed as an introduction to the late writings of a thinker who continues to exert a profound influence on Anglophone literary criticism and theory: Roland Barthes. We will focus our attention in particular on his 1978 lecture course *The Neutral [Le Neutre]*, in which Barthes attempts to give voice to that which 'would defeat, annul, or contradict the implacable binarism' that characterizes Western thought and discourse. We will reflect upon the ethical, political, and aesthetic implications of Barthes's thinking about 'the neutral' through close readings of a range of literary and theoretical texts by Sophocles, Herman Melville, Yiannis Ritsos, Rachel Cusk, Ottessa Moshfegh, Lauren Berlant, amongst others.

Fiction and Other Minds (Advanced Undergraduate)

Autumn semester 2025.

In this seminar we will explore the representation of fictional consciousness in two classic novels: Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). We will examine in detail how Austen and Woolf depict the inner lives of their characters through techniques like free indirect discourse. In dialogue with philosophers like Stanley Cavell and Candace Vogler, as well as recent work in cognitive literary studies, we will also grapple with the rich questions about 'other minds' that preoccupy Austen and Woolf: what can we know for certain about the thoughts and feelings of others? Does reading narrative fiction make us finer and more empathetic 'mind readers' who are better attuned to the mental states of others? Or does it fuel fantasies about the transparency of other minds that are not only unrealistic but ethically troubling?

2024-2025

The Pound Era (Advanced Undergraduate)

Spring semester 2025.

The title of this seminar is drawn from Hugh Kenner's landmark study of Anglophone modernist literature: *The Pound Era* (1971). In a recent special issue of *Nonsite* magazine,

several prominent critics assess the relevance of *The Pound Era* on the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. Joshua Kotin, to take one example, describes the book as 'idiosyncratic', 'virtuosic', and 'even genius', whilst also drawing attention to Kenner's 'untenably narrow' conception of the modernist canon and his 'wildly irresponsible' insouciance regarding the fascist politics of the poet who is his central object of study: Ezra Pound. In this seminar, we will read the notoriously difficult and allusive poetry of Pound and his circle (which included T.S. Eliot, H.D., Wyndham Lewis, and Marianne Moore) alongside extracts from *The Pound Era*. In addition to grappling with some of the most influential and controversial poems in twentieth-century literature, we will also reflect extensively on the limitations and strengths of Kenner's critical method, as well as the vexed question of what it might mean to read Pound 'responsibly' as we enter into the second quarter of the twenty-first century.

Stanley Cavell and Literature (Graduate)

Autumn semester 2024.

Although Stanley Cavell (1926-2018) was a philosopher by profession, some of his most dedicated followers have been literary critics. This is not surprising; few contemporary philosophers have been as invested as Cavell in staging a mutually enriching encounter between literature and philosophy, and even fewer still have articulated their ideas in such a lyrical, essayistic manner. In this seminar, we will read a selection of Cavell's essays on literature, including his bravura interpretations of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*. Reading Cavell alongside his literary interlocutors will enable us to explore rich and open-ended questions relating to character, genre, the ordinary, love, and moral perfectionism.

Close Reading (Advanced Undergraduate)

Autumn semester 2024.

What distinguishes literary studies from other disciplines? For many critics, the answer to this question is close reading. Jonathan Kramnick, for example, characterises close reading as nothing less than 'the symbolic as well as beating heart of literary studies' in the English-speaking world. The methodological principles and procedures governing close reading are nevertheless surprisingly hard to pin down. In this seminar, we will attempt to get a clearer picture of what close reading is by tracing its rich and storied history from the 1920s to the present day. Over the course of the semester, we will read influential essays by figures like I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, Paul de Man, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. We will also test the affordances of the different styles of close reading modelled by these critics through a series of practical exercises.

2023-2024

The Modernist Short Story (Advanced Undergraduate)

Spring semester 2024.

This seminar is designed to introduce students to the short fiction of two major modernist writers: James Joyce and Katherine Mansfield. We will approach their dazzlingly rich and inventive short stories through a combination of detailed close reading and historical

contextualization. Joyce and Mansfield's experiments with narrative perspective will be of particular interest, as will their creative appropriation of the work of Gustave Flaubert and Anton Chekhov.

The Portrait of a Lady (Advanced Undergraduate)

Autumn semester 2023.

This seminar is dedicated to Henry James's first masterpiece: *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). A landmark in the history of the novel, *The Portrait of a Lady* is home to one of English literature's most famous heroines, Isabel Archer, and its provocative ending is still fiercely debated to this day. Over the course of the semester, we will explore a variety of topics including freedom, authenticity, alienation, kissing, and money. We will also pay close attention to James's famously ambiguous style and the techniques he uses to represent fictional consciousness and agency.

Object-Relations Psychoanalysis (Graduate)

Autumn semester 2023. Co-taught with Simon Swift.

Psychoanalysis first became part of public health practice in Britain in the First World War, when it was used to treat 'shell shock'. The impact of this incursion on literary Modernism is a story that has often been told. But with the arrival of émigré Austrian psychoanalysts such as Melanie Klein in Britain in the 1920s, a perhaps even more significant revolution in the understanding of literature, and artistic creativity more generally, got under way. This revolution in turn fed into an extraordinary moment in post-World War II Britain in which the National Health Service invested heavily in psychoanalytic practice, especially for working class patients. This course will be divided into two parts: in the first we will read the works of Klein and her followers, often grouped together as 'object-relations psychoanalysis' (D.W. Winnicott, Marion Milner, Michael Balint, Wilfred Bion) in tandem with the fiction of Virginia Woolf in order to think about their shared concern with a range of issues, object, maternity, infancy, environment, play and reality among them. In the second part, we'll read essays by a range of more recent critics and psychoanalysts (Barbara Johnson, Eve Sedgwick, Elizabeth Abel and Adam Philips) in order to think about the extraordinary gifts that object-relations has given to literary criticism.

2022-2023

Literature and Life (Advanced Undergraduate)

Autumn semester 2022.

What is the relationship between literature and life? As the *oeuvres* of Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf readily attest, this question haunted some of modern literature's most well-known authors. But of all of them, no one responded to it as insistently and with the same depth of philosophical attention as Henry James. In this seminar we will explore some of these responses through close readings of a selection of his essays and short stories. What will emerge is a portrait of James that is quite different from that normally painted by critics, who have tended to exaggerate his commitment to the formalist idea that 'art makes life, makes interest, makes importance'. Instead, we will meet a more ambivalent James who is profoundly

interested in how we make sense of and give form to our lives, and the ways in which literature can both enrich, and disturb, this process.

2020-2021

Free Indirect Style (Advanced Undergraduate)

Spring semester 2021.

This seminar is aimed at students who want to enrich their understanding of a form of narration that is synonymous with the modern novel: free indirect style. Over the course of the semester we will 1) learn to identify examples of free indirect style, and gain awareness of the difficulties that can arise in doing so; 2) gain insight into the development of free indirect style in the history of the novel by reading excerpts from Jane Austen and Gustave Flaubert; 3) confront some of the philosophical issues posed by free indirect style, such as the representation of consciousness. Structuring our exploration of these areas of inquiry will be a careful reading of Henry James's *The Ambassadors* (1903), a novel that uses free indirect style to masterful effect.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Advanced Undergraduate)

Autumn semester 2020.

This seminar is designed as an introduction to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), a landmark of literary modernism which reshaped how we think about the novel. *Ulysses* has a reputation for being formidably difficult due to the vicissitudes of its style, the density and range of its allusions (Homeric and otherwise), and its daunting length. The novel is undoubtedly demanding, but never pretentious, and is a great pleasure to read, think with, and discuss. Patiently working our way through each of the novel's eighteen episodes, we will pay close attention to both the mechanics of plot, character, and allusion, as well as to Joyce's often startlingly original use of the English language. In so doing, we will have the opportunity to explore the multitude of themes that the novel confronts us with, such as the city, the body, the nation, gender, love, death, and religion. Lyrical, bawdy, and boundlessly inventive, *Ulysses* is nothing less than a profound meditation on the human condition in modernity.

2019-2020

The Decadent Movement in Literature (Advanced Undergraduate)

Spring semester 2020.

This seminar is designed to give students an overview of British decadent literature from the 1880s and 1890s. We will cover a range of genres and authors: the poetry of Swinburne and the Rossettis; the prose and plays of Oscar Wilde; as well as the literary-critical writings of Arthur Symons and Walter Pater. Through a mixture of close textual analysis and intellectual-historical contextualisation, our readings of these texts will enable us to explore some of the key thematic preoccupations of the decadent movement such as aestheticism ('art for art's sake'), perversity, and artificiality.

2018-2019Thinking in Time: Bergson and Modernism (Advanced Undergraduate)

Autumn semester 2018.

The intellectual superstar of his day, Henri Bergson played a vital role in shaping British literary modernism. In this seminar we will explore the impact of the French philosopher's ideas about time, life, and memory on the writings of a number of key modernist authors, including T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Wyndham Lewis. Overarching our close readings of these texts, we will also pause to think more broadly about the intimate relationship between literature and philosophy during the period, paying especially close attention to the literary qualities of Bergson's famously limpid and metaphorically rich prose.

2017-2018Blast: Modernism 1914-1915 (Advanced Undergraduate)

Spring semester 2018.

To quote Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman, 'modernism began in the magazines'. This seminar is dedicated to the most iconoclastic and influential of these magazines: *BLAST*. A heady mixture of experimental poetry, prose, and visual art by the likes of Ezra Pound, Rebecca West, and Wyndham Lewis, *BLAST* only ran for two issues (published in 1914 and 1915 respectively), and yet offers a fascinating snapshot of pre-war modernism in all of its brash energy and political ambivalence. Using scans of the original magazine as our primary texts, we will consider a range of topics, authors, and questions pertinent to understanding the development of modernism, such as the relationship between modernism and war; the influence of vorticist poetry and poetics; and the decisive role played by the 'life philosophies' of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Henry James's Late Style (Advanced Undergraduate)

Autumn semester 2017.

This seminar is designed as an introduction to Henry James's famously demanding – but immensely rewarding – late style. Through a slow and careful reading of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), we will explore how James's experiments with perspective, syntax, and metaphor bear upon the novel's key thematic preoccupations such as class, death, and desire (to name but a few). Drawing on a range of secondary criticism, we will also situate the novel in relation to its historical and cultural context, considering in particular the ways in which James's 'great sensibility' – to borrow Hugh Kenner's memorable phrase – 'brought in a generation' of modernist writers.

2016-2017Katherine Mansfield (Advanced Undergraduate)

Autumn semester 2016

In this seminar we will explore the phenomenon known as literary modernism through the short fiction of Katherine Mansfield. Each week we will draw upon one of her stories to map, think through, and problematise the thematic concerns commonly associated with the movement, such as exile, illness and consciousness. In addition to what Eugenie Brinkema calls ‘the slow, hard tussle of reading texts closely’, we will also contextualise Mansfield’s output by reading it alongside a range of short prose works produced by her peers as well as critical essays investigating the aesthetic and political upheavals of the period.