GHENT UNIVERSITY

Course Specifications

Valid in the academic year 2023-2024

Literature in English: Older Period I (A005255)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2023-2024

A (semester 1)	English	Gent	seminar

Lecturers in academic year 2023-2024

McCausland, Elly	LW07	lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2023-2024	**crdts**	**offering**
Master of Science in Teaching in Languages(main subject Linguistics and Literature)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject Dutch - English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - German)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Greek)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Italian)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Latin)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Scandinavian Studies)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Spanish)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject French - English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Historical Linguistics and Literature	5	A
Exchange Programme Cultures and Languages in Context	5	A
Exchange Programme Linguistics and Literature	5	A
Exchange Programme Medieval Studies and Auxiliary Sciences	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Music, genre, feminism, narrative, intertextuality, trope, metaphor, authorship, theory

Position of the course

Literature (Taylor's Version)
This course offers an in-depth look at key themes, topics, genres and techniques from English literature (c.900-1900) via the lens of modern popular music; specifically, the work of Taylor Swift.

Contents

This course takes a fresh look at English literature, from the medieval period to the Victorian (plus a couple of more modern texts as a bonus), through the lens of one of our most popular modern music artists: Taylor Swift. Highly prolific and autobiographical in her songwriting, Swift makes frequent allusions to canonical literary texts in her music - something noted by New York University, who now offer a course on her music. Her songs have referenced, among others, *The Great Gatsby*, Robert Frost, *Jane Eyre*, Emily Dickinson, *Peter Pan, Alice in Wonderland, Romeo and Juliet, Rebecca*, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Charles Dickens. In addition to this, her diverse corpus of music embraces a kaleidoscopic range of genres, both musical and literary, adopting a variety of textual techniques that have centuries-old roots in English literature. The aim of this course is to explore in depth the tropes, allusions and intertexts of Swift's songs, linking them to key texts from

English literature, as well as the ways in which she uses her music to craft a shifting public persona, which we can in turn link to literary theory regarding reception, intertextuality, reader response and the 'intentional fallacy'. Using Swift's work as a springboard, we will explore, among other topics, literary feminism, ecocriticism, fan studies, and tropes such as the anti-hero. Swift's enduring popularity stems, at least in part, from the heavily intertextual aspect of her work, and this course will dig deeper to explore its literary roots, covering everything from feminism to Romanticism, elegy to chivalry, and taking a new look at both canonical and lesser-known texts in the process. It will take an analytical and critical look at Swift's music and popularity, and explore the far-reaching roots of English literary textsfrom the tenth century onwards, putting them in new contexts that will emphasise their enduring relevance.

Important note: this course is open to all, including those who do not consider themselves fans of Taylor Swift (or may never have encountered her music). The purpose of the course is to think critically about Swift as an artist and writer, and to use the popularity of her music as a 'way in' to a corpus of literature that may have shaped her work. The focus of the course will be predominantly on English literature, with Swift used to introduce and contextualise the literature in question.

Initial competences

To have successfully completed at least one of the 'English Literature III' courses, or to have achieved the intended learning objectives (including a thorough command of the English language) by other means.

Final competences

1 Acquire a nuanced understanding of the cultural, political and historical context of a diverse variety of English literary texts.
2 Consider a selection of literary texts through the lens of various narrative concepts and techniques introduced via Taylor Swift songs.
3 Connect the themes and techniques of modern popular music to long-standing literary traditions and tropes, and recognise intertextuality as a significant force shaping contemporary writing.
4 Utilise an array of literary theoretical approaches in the study of different texts.
5 Develop and practise advanced oral and written communication skills.
6 Develop and hone close-reading skills and analysis.
7 Cultivate and showcase the sharp analytical and argumentative skills needed to persuasively communicate ideas about literature and culture.
8 Situate ideas in relation to existing literary, theoretical and scholarly debates and, where relevant, build on and challenge those debates.
9 Acquire the academic research and writing competence necessary to produce a high-quality written assignment showcasing original research.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Group work, Seminar, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

The lessons take the form of an in-person seminar with class discussion.

Learning materials and price

Students must purchase the following texts for this class, in the editions specified.
All other materials will be available via Ufora. Estimated cost: €80-90.
1 Charlotte Bronte, *Villette* (Oxford World Classics edition)
2 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Norton Critical Edition ed. Peter Hulme and William Sherman)
3 Simon Armitage, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Faber, 2018)
4 William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (Oxford World Classics edition)
5 Margaret Atwood, *Hag Seed* (paperback edition)
6 Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. Barry Windeatt (Oxford World Classics edition)

References

Course content-related study coaching

Individual feedback can follow the lessons, via Ufora or by appointment via e-mail with the instructor.

Assessment moments

continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Oral assessment, Participation, Peer and/or self assessment, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

Extra information on the examination methods

Periodic evaluation:

- **30%** of the grade: reflection report (in a format of your choice – see below)
- **70%** of the grade: written paper (essay), including mandatory **research proposal & peer feedback exercises** (see below)

The reflection report can take any format you choose (presentation; piece of art; song; graphic novel; podcast; video, etc.) – I encourage you to be creative! The report should focus on what you have learned from the course and how this might shape your future engagement with both music and literature. One possible idea for this report is to explore the connection between a song/album we have not covered on the syllabus, and a literary text of your choosing. You will also be required to present your report in person (to me), with a 5-10 minute brief presentation discussing your choice of format and content.

The written assignment should be 4,000 words in length (10% variance) and should be formatted using MLA or Chicago style. Some further specifications:

1 The essay should include at least eight (preferably more) high-quality, peer-reviewed scholarly sources, from academic journals and books. Students are expected to select the best and most relevant secondary resources (and not simply the first secondary resources they find).**Note**: seminar notes or slides should not be used as sources.
2 The essay must focus on one or more of our primary (literary) texts from the course. Other relevant texts may be discussed briefly, but the focal point should be on curriculum material. **Note**: there is no requirement to discuss music/songs/Taylor Swift in the assignment, although you are very welcome to.

Each student should devise their own essay topic. Early in the semester, you will be required to submit, via Ufora, a brief research proposal for your assignment (max. 1 page) in which you outline some, or all, of the following:

1 The motivation for the research or a problem statement: What gap in our understanding of a literary text or problem will your essay correct or amend?You may want to think about this in relation to existing scholarship: how will your essay build on, or even challenge, existing debates about this/these texts?
2 A description of your method, procedure or approach to the problem: what will you analyze? How?
3 Your thesis or argument: what will your essay argue? What point will it make?
4 A bibliography of three to five peer-reviewed, academically published secondary resources you will use for your essay.

You will receive brief feedback (from me) on your proposal. The goal of the proposal is to make sure you are on the right track with your essay topic: that it is viable for the scope of the assignment, and that you are approaching it in an analytical, argumentative way.

In the second half of the course, you will be required to participate in a peer self-assessment (feedback) exercise, which will involve teaming up with another classmate and offering (constructive) feedback on a draft of each other's essays, which you will be required to upload to Ufora along with brief comments about how

you intend to respond to the feedback. More details about this will follow during the seminars.

Important note: the research proposal and peer feedback exercise are compulsory. If you do not submit these, you will not pass the assignment.

Calculation of the examination mark

- **30%** of the grade: reflection report (in a format of your choice)
- **70%** of the grade: written paper (essay), including mandatory **research proposal & peer feedback exercises**

Facilities for Working Students

1. Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance.
2. Possible rescheduling of the examination to a different time in the same academic year
3. Feedback can be given during an appointment during or after office hours