

Literature in English: Transhistorical Approaches (A006661)

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

Credits 5.0 Study time 150 h

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 1) English Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

McCausland, Elly LW07 lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

	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.

In the Master programme in English, students are expected to develop from an initial CEFR C1 level into a first-stage C2 level ("Mastery").

IMPORTANT: Exchange students are welcome in this course provided that (1) they are MA students (general requirement: exchange students can only take courses corresponding to their own study level), and (2) they have a **foundation in literary theory, analysis of English, and essay writing**, all of which will be assumed as a starting point for this course.

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. 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 texts from 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 Translate course insights and competences into both academic and creative forms of expression.

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.

Study material

Type: Syllabus

Name: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Indicative price: € 16

Optional: no

Language : English

Available on Ufora : No
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : Yes
Available through Student Association : No
Additional information: Students should purchase the Norton Critical Edition

Type: Syllabus

Name: Simon Armitage, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
Indicative price: € 16
Optional: no
Language : English
Available on Ufora : No
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : Yes
Available through Student Association : No
Additional information: Students should purchase the Faber edition

Type: Syllabus

Name: Margaret Atwood, Hag Seed
Indicative price: € 10
Optional: no
Language : English
Available on Ufora : No
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : Yes
Available through Student Association : No

Type: Syllabus

Name: Charlotte Bronte, Villette
Indicative price: € 13
Optional: no
Language : English
Available on Ufora : No
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : Yes
Available through Student Association : No

Type: Syllabus

Name: Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility
Indicative price: € 15
Optional: no
Language : English
Available on Ufora : No
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : Yes
Available through Student Association : No
Additional information: Students must purchase the Norton Critical 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

end-of-term and continuous assessment

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

Oral assessment

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

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent 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:

- **50%** of the grade: **reflection report + creative project** (in a format of your choice – see below)
- **50%** of the grade: **oral examination** (see below)

Reflection report: A personal essay (ca. 1500 words) in which students reflect on their intellectual development and learnings over the course of the semester. Students are encouraged to focus on specific works, concepts, or class discussions that shaped their thinking and to emphasise their own point of view and response to the course. The tone may be more personal than that of a typical academic essay, but the essay should still be properly formatted (full sentences, not notes or bullet points; citations where relevant, etc.).

Creative project: This 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.

Oral examination: will test both detailed knowledge of the syllabus texts and the ability to synthesize theoretical insights, via a series of open questions. The oral exam is “closed book,” but you will be given prep time, and sample questions will be available in advance to help you prepare.

A passing grade for the entire course is only possible if **both** evaluation components are passed. If this is not the case or if the student fails to complete all assignments, the student will receive the highest non-deliberable grade (7/20).

Calculation of the examination mark

- **50%** of the grade: **reflection report + creative project**
- **50%** of the grade: **oral examination**

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