

Department of English

About the department

The Department of English at Royal Holloway is one of the leading schools of English in the world, in the top 150 internationally according to the QS University Rankings 2017/18.

Our courses cover the span of English literature. Your journey could take you from Old English riddles, Middle English romances, and the rich poetry and theatre of the Renaissance to the wit and politics of the eighteenth century; from Romantic verse to the radical novels of the Victorians; from the complexities of modernism to world literatures, American literature, and the latest contemporary writing.

Entry requirements

The courses listed below are open to all Study Abroad, International and Erasmus students, subject to any required previous knowledge or qualifications, as stated in the course outlines below.

Each course is either ½ or 1 unit and starts in either the Autumn Term (September) or the Spring Term (January).

The information contained in the course outlines on the following pages is correct at the time of publication but may be subject to change as part of our policy of continuous improvement and development.



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Course options for visiting students

Course code	Course name	½ or 1 unit	Start date	Course description/pre-requisites
EN1106	Shakespeare	1 Unit	September 2018	<i>This innovative lecture-led course opens with the Elizabethan Shakespeare of the comedies and histories. The latter half of term is then devoted to the tragedies and late plays of the Jacobean Shakespeare.</i> PLEASE NOTE THIS IS A 1 CREDIT UNIT BUT TAKES PLACE ENTIRELY IN TERM 1.
EN1107	Reorienting the Novel	0.5 or 1 Unit	September 2018 (full unit, or 0.5 in Autumn Term) or January 2019 (0.5 in Spring Term)	<i>The aim of this course is introduce students to the history and theory of the novel and to ways of reading this popular genre critically as well as for pleasure. The course combines: i. close critical reading of key texts, with ii. thematic study, iii. historical analysis of the origins and development of the novel, and iv. introductory study of key terms and concepts in narrative theory and criticism.</i> PLEASE NOTE THIS COURSE IS AVAILABLE EITHER AS A FULL UNIT, SPANNING BOTH TERMS, OR AS A HALF UNIT IN EITHER AUTUMN OR SPRING.
EN1011	Thinking as a Critic	0.5 Unit	September 2018	<i>The aim of this course is to help you make the transition into university level work by introducing you to reading, writing and thinking as a critic.</i> <i>The course will focus on developing the abilities and skills of the literary criticism and introducing the concepts, ideas and histories that are central to the 'disciplinary consciousness' of English. The skills include close reading, using criticism, coming to judgements about interpretations, writing essays and using resources. The concepts include questions about interpretation, periodization, form, genre, canon, value, intention, narrative, voice, framing and identity.</i>
EN1112	Introduction to Poetry	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>This course is designed to introduce students to a variety of major poems in English. The course ranges widely from the Renaissance to the present day, involving practice in close reading while also engaging with issues of historical understanding and critical judgement.</i> <i>Throughout the term, we hope you will develop the confidence to engage with a range of stylistic elements in relation to poetry, and that you will seek to develop a critical awareness of the complex ways in which poetry relates to social and political events.</i>



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EN1001	<i>Introduction to Middle English</i>	1 Unit	January 2019	<i>The purpose of this course is to provide students with elementary knowledge of the cultural, linguistic and literary contexts of Old and Middle English literature, and to examine representative works from the rich variety of verse, prose and drama of the period. Texts change from year to year, but they often include: The Battle of Brunanburh, The Wanderer, The Dream of the Rood, Beowulf, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Malory's Morte d'Arthur, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.</i> PLEASE NOTE THIS IS A 1 CREDIT UNIT BUT TAKES PLACE ENTIRELY IN TERM 2.
EN1401	<i>Introducing America: 1600-1900</i>	1 Unit	January 2019	<i>The aim of this course is to introduce you to American Literature to 1900, and to issues, concepts and key contexts for the study of American Literature more broadly.</i>
EN2010	<i>Renaissance Literature</i>	1 Unit	September 2018	<i>This course is designed as an introduction to the literature of the English Renaissance, beginning in the 1590s with erotic narrative poems by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, and concluding with John Milton's drama, Samson Agonistes, first published in 1671. Marlowe and Thomas Middleton represent the extraordinarily rich drama of the period, while John Donne and Andrew Marvell are the most famous of the so-called metaphysical poets. A feature of the course is the attention given to situating these works in their historical and cultural contexts.</i>
EN2120	<i>The Age of Oppositions: Literature 1660-1780</i>	1 Unit	September 2018	<i>Between the English Revolution and the French Revolution, British literature was pulled by opposing cultural forces and experienced an extraordinary degree of experimentation. The eighteenth century is sometime called The Age of Reason, but it is also called The Age of Sensibility. It was dominated by male writers, but also facilitated the rise of the woman novelist and the emergence of coterie of intellectual women. It continued to be an essentially rural nation, but London grew to be the biggest city in the world and industrialisation was beginning to herd workers into towns. This whole unit explores some of the tensions and oppositions which were played out in the literature of this period.</i>
EN2213	<i>Romanticisms</i>	1 Unit	September 2018	<i>This course aims to introduce the student to a broad range of literatures in the period 1780-1830. It aims to problematise and scrutinise the idea of Romanticism as a homogenous literary movement and to raise awareness of the range of competing literary identities present in the period.</i>



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EN2212	Victorian Literature	1 Unit	September 2018	<i>This survey course on Victorian literature is framed by the personal: it begins with Queen Victoria's private diaries of her happiest days in Scotland, and ends just beyond the Victorian period, with one troubled man's intensely-felt account of his Victorian childhood. We will study great examples of the novelistic form, including sensation, Romantic, domestic realist and sentimental novels. Some works on the course are well-known and truly canonical, while others will be excitingly unfamiliar; all however will contribute to a sense of the variety and contradictions inherent in being Victorian.</i>
EN2325	Modernist Literature	1 Unit	September 2018	<i>The aim of this course is to provide an introduction to the study of literary modernism, a period of intense experimentation in diverse sets of cultural forms. It will deal with such issues such as modernist aesthetics; genre; gender and sexuality; the fragment; time and narration; stream-of-consciousness; history, politics and colonialism; technology, and the status of language and the real.</i>
EN2218	Literary Adaptations: Shakespeare	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>This course aims to introduce you to a range of historical adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in order to illustrate the creative dialogue that these works have inspired over time. The analysis of the texts of these adaptations will be combined with an exploration of their contexts in order to articulate the connection between creative work and social environment raising the questions of why adapt Shakespeare and what constitutes adaptation.</i>
EN2001	Middle English Poetry	0.5 Unit	September 2018	<i>This course will develop your skills in the close reading and critical analysis of Middle English poetry, focusing on set passages from three important fourteenth century texts: Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, Langland's Piers Plowman, and the anonymous Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The course invites you to think about how poets understood the status of Middle English as a literary language, in comparison with Latin and French.</i>
EN2005	Strange Fictions: Romance in the Middle Ages	0.5 Unit	September 2018	<i>Romance was one of the most popular genres of secular literature in late medieval England. We begin by looking at the Arthurian romances of Chretien de Troyes, then go on to consider works by Chaucer, the Gawain-poet and Sir Thomas Malory. We will encounter romances set in the mythical British past, in the classical cities of Troy, Thebes and Athens, and in the more recognisable landscapes of medieval England and France. Attention will be paid throughout to the often inventive and unpredictable ways in which medieval romance works to articulate specific historical and cultural anxieties.</i>



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EN2004	<i>Medieval Dream and Vision</i>	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>This half-unit explores a major literary genre which attracted all the great poets of late medieval England: the dream vision. It considers the use of the genre in the works of Chaucer, Langland and the Gawain-poet, as well as examining the visions in mystical writing. These authors' treatments of the genre repeatedly ask us to reflect on the relationship of literature to experience, poetic authority and identity, and the development of English as a literary language.</i>
EN2016	<i>Literature after the Conquest</i>	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>This course provides an introduction to English literature from the Norman conquest to the birth of Chaucer. This period has been described both as a period of political crisis and also as a period of cultural renaissance. It saw the conquest and colonization of England, the rise of new forms of scholarship and spirituality, and, according to some accounts, the development of new ways of thinking about national and individual identity.</i>
EN2014	<i>Early Modern Bodies</i>	0.5 Unit	September 2018	<i>Charting a progression from Galenic humoral theory to Cartesian dualism, this course considers the representation and significance of corporeality in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts. Reading Renaissance plays and poetry alongside anatomical textbooks, manuals of health, erotica, and philosophical essays, the module seeks to contextualise the period's literary treatment of the body; authors and works studied will range from familiar names such as Marlowe, Donne, and Sidney, to the comparatively less canonical (for example, the plague tracts of Thomas Lodge; Jacques Ferrand's cure for love-sickness, Erotomania; or Helkiah Crooke's anatomical treatise, Microcosmographia).</i>
EN2012	<i>Drama and Witchcraft</i>	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>The texts covered span virtually the whole period in which early modern English drama flourished: from Marlowe in c.1593 to 1634. The texts range from famous plays like Macbeth and The Tempest to little-known comedies like The Wise-woman of Hogsden. Two central texts will be The Witch of Edmonton and The Late Lancashire Witches, plays which deal with historically documented witchcraft accusations and scares. Non-dramatic texts about witchcraft are also included for study in the course. These will include news pamphlets, works by learned contemporaries expressing their opinions about witchcraft, popular ballads and other archival texts.</i>



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EN2217	<i>Queer Histories</i>	0.5 Unit	September 2018	<i>This course will examine a range of novels by gay and lesbian writers in Britain and Ireland which have emerged in the wake of the AIDS catastrophe and queer theory. We will focus on interesting though rather peculiar trends in the post-queer novel: queer historical and biographical fictions, and explore the reasons behind the dominance of these approaches in recent gay and lesbian literature.</i>
EN2220	<i>Four National Poets</i>	0.5 Unit	September 2018	<i>With the appointment of Carol Ann Duffy as the first woman Poet Laureate for the United Kingdom in 2009, poetry by women became publicly validated as never before. Setting fresh horizons for women's poetry, Duffy joined Gillian Clarke who has served as National Poet of Wales since 2008; Liz Lochhead was appointed Scots Makar in 2011, and Paula Meehan was appointed in 2013 to the Ireland Chair of Poetry. By careful reading of two collections by each poet, this course will enable students to assess how each poet has moved from a position of rebellion, liminality or minority into the very heart of cultural institution.</i>
EN2321	<i>Dark Reform</i>	0.5 Unit	September 2018	<i>This course aims to provide an introduction to American literature via the tradition which David Reynolds labels 'dark reform'; a satirical and often populist mode which seek out the abuses which lie beneath the optimistic surface of American life, often through grotesque, scatological, sexualized and carnivalesque imagery. It explores the contention that because of America's history, with its notions of national consensus and fear of class conflict, political critique in America has often had to find indirect expression.</i>
EN2309	<i>Literature of the Fin de Siècle</i>	0.5 Unit	September 2018	<i>The aim of this course is to examine the 'dark' topics of late-Victorian and Edwardian literature. Perhaps the most important cultural influence on these texts is the negative possibility inherent in Darwinism: that of 'degeneration', of racial or cultural reversal, explored in texts like Wells's <i>The Time Machine</i>, and often related to the Decadent literature of Wilde and others.</i>



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ENXXXX	<i>Queering World Literature</i>	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>World-literature critics worry that queer theorists foist a Western, elitist approach to LGBTQ+ identities on to the rest of the world, that is, a Western homonormativity performs a similar role as the unequal distribution of power in a globalised world. Queer theorists, on the other hand, are anxious that queer perspectives get lost in world-literature theory and texts, which tend to, they argue, either privilege a masculine nationalist agenda or not pay enough attention to the effects of globalisation on local articulations of race, gender and sexuality. The principal aim of this course is to explore this productive tension by paying close attention to variety of texts from around the world.</i>
EN2312	<i>British Drama from Shaw to Priestley</i>	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>This course explores British Drama staged during the first half of the twentieth century against a backdrop of two world wars. The plays studied place the values of their age under scrutiny, to raise questions about social justice, spiritual choices, class and gender inequalities. Theatrical genres were under just as much pressure as the cultural values they sought to convey; the ten plays studied during the course reflect a range of evolving genres, from the well-made play, the play of ideas, social comedy, to poetic drama.</i>
EN2011	<i>Intensive Shakespeare</i>	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>This half-unit explores in depth three supreme examples of Shakespearean comedy, tragedy and historical drama: Richard III (1592-3), A Midsummer Night's Dream (1595-6), and Macbeth (1606).</i>
EN2209	<i>Fictions of Sensation</i>	0.5 Unit	January 2019	<i>The course aims to explore the Victorian concept of the 'sensational' across a range of novels dating from the height of the sensation period in the 1850s and 60s. We will explore together some of the magazines in which these novels were originally serialized. Issues such as the role of public spectacle, the first detectives, advertising, domestic crime and the demonic woman will be explored in relation to the cultural and social context of this novelistic genre.</i>

