

Eng331: Selected Topics in English Literature / Culture
Correspondence: The Literary Lives of Letters

Course Description:

As the basic signifying unit of alphabetic written language, letters make up literature in the most elementary way. They also constitute literature in very complex and ambiguous—but no less fundamental—ways: in its narrowest sense the English word *letter* denotes a missive communication in writing, addressed to a person or body of persons; an epistle. Sometimes, these letters take the form of an article, report, or the like. In a wider sense, the word denotes any written document, text, or record; Literature in general, or even learning, study and erudition itself.

This course will investigate the intricate art of letter writing as a discrete genre of writing in English, and explore the ways in which letters constitute other genres, like the novel or the verse epistle, and other hybrid forms. We will consider the purposes of literary correspondence with a special interest in the functions of self-interrogation, audience and muse, posterity and literary myth-making. In addition to considering letters as a genre in their own right, we will think about their importance as secondary material in biographical, critical and contextual ways, and from other theoretical perspectives (these readings will be announced in the first week of class). The course will constrain itself to British authors, although its scope and methodologies will suggest broad application to each individual student's own literary studies.

Primary Texts:

Auden, W. H., and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*. London: Faber, 2002.
Beckett, Samuel. *Krapp's Last Tape and Other Shorter Plays*. London: Faber, 2009.
Benn, Aphra. *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*. Available via Project Gutenberg at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8409/8409-h/8409-h.htm>
Keats, John. *Selected Letters*. Ed. Robert Gittings. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2009.
Mitchell, David. *Cloud Atlas*. London: Sceptre, 2014.
Pope, Alexander. 'Epistle to a Lady,' 'Eloisa to Abelard,' 'Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot'.
Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Horror*. Ed. Robert Mighall. London: Penguin, 2003.
Wilde, Oscar. *De Profundis* from *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, Ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis. London: Fourth Estate, 2000. Available at Literature Kiosk.

Secondary Texts:

Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1982. Available at:
<https://ohiostatepress.org/books/Complete%20PDFs/Altman%20Epistolarity/Altman%20Epistolarity.htm>

Other material will be provided via Mitt UiB

Reading Schedule:

Eng331 meets in JVB31 in each of the following weeks: 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44.

Readings are allocated as follows:

Week 36

Aphra Behn, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*. Parts 1 & 2 only.

Altman, Janet Gurkin. 'Introduction' and Chapter 1: 'Epistolary Mediation,' *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, pp. 3-46.

Week 37

Pope, Alexander. 'Epistle to a Lady,' 'Eloisa to Abelard,' 'Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot'.
[@Mitt Uib]

Fabricant, Carole. 'Defining Self and Others: Pope and Eighteenth-Century Gender Ideology' *Criticism* 39:4 (1997): 503-529. [@Mitt Uib]

Week 38

Keats, John. *Selected Letters*.

Bernard, John. 'Keats's Letters: "Remembrancing and Enchainning,"' *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, Ed Susan Wolfson. New Jersey: Princeton U.P. [@Mitt Uib].

Week 39

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*.

Altman, Janet Gurkin. Chapter 2: 'Of Confidence and Confidants,' *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, pp. 47-86.

Week 40

Wilde, Oscar. *De Profundis*. [@Literature Kiosk]

Altman, Janet Gurkin. Chapter 3: 'The Weight of the Reader,' *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, pp. 87-116.

Week 41

READING WEEK

Week 42

Auden, W. H., and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*.

Altman, Janet Gurkin. Chapter 6: 'The Epistolary Mosaic,' *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, pp. 167-84.

Week 43

Beckett, Samuel. *Krapp's Last Tape*.

Altman, Janet Gurkin. Chapter 4: 'Epistolary Discourse,' *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, pp. 117-42.

Week 44

Mitchell, David. *Cloud Atlas*.

Altman, Janet Gurkin. Conclusion: 'The Parameters and Paradoxes of Epistolarity,' *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, pp. 185-216.