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:**

Pope, Alexander. ‘Epistle to a Lady,’ ‘Eloisa to Abelard,’ ‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot’.  

**Secondary Texts:**


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.

Week 37
Pope, Alexander. ‘Epistle to a Lady,’ ‘Eloisa to Abelard,’ ‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot’.

Week 38
Keats, John. *Selected Letters*.

Week 39
Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*.
Altman, Janet Gurkin. Chapter 2: ‘Of Confidence and Confidents,’ *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, pp. 47-86.

Week 40
Wilde, Oscar. *De Profundis*. [@Literature Kiosk]

Week 41
READING WEEK

Week 42

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