

MFA in Creative Writing and Literary Translation

Student Handbook 2008-9

Queens College, City University of New York

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Queens College MFA Program! You are here because the creative writing faculty was impressed by the strength of your writing and your potential to grow and thrive as a writer in our new program. All of us on the faculty are excited to work with you.

What follows is a tool for planning your course of study and a summary of useful information about our program, but not a substitute for regular conversations with the MFA Director, Nicole Cooley, and the rest of the creative writing faculty. We are all available to talk with you about your course selection and your progress through our program.

The Queens College MFA has two tracks, one in creative writing (poetry, fiction, playwriting) and one in literary translation.

For both tracks you will:

- *Complete a total of 36 credits, which include workshops, craft classes and literature electives
- *Produce a final writing project or thesis in your genre of focus
- *Present your thesis and an accompanying thesis-essay and take an oral exam

A. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND COURSE LOAD

The MFA requires 36 credits. Each of our courses is three credits. Our program emphasizes classes on literary craft and requires you to take at least one workshop outside your genre of focus. You are also required to take English 636, a course on the history of literary criticism.

The chart below explains the basic requirements for each track:

Creative Writing Track	Translation Track
4 Creative Writing Workshops: English 751, 753, 755, or 757—i.e., three in your genre of focus, one in another genre	4 Creative Writing Workshops: 2 Translation Workshops, English 757; and 2 CW Workshops: English 751, 753 or 755
1 Literary Theory class, English 636	1 Literary Theory class, English 636
2 Craft/Form Classes: English 760, 761, 762 and 781 (when it is offered as Theory of Translation) NOTE: both craft classes can be in your genre or one in your genre and one in another genre	2 Craft/Form Classes: English 760, 761, 762 and 781 (when it is offered as Theory of Translation) NOTE: both craft classes can be in your genre or one in your genre and one in another genre
Thesis Sequence: English 795 - Thesis Workshop, and English 759 - Advanced Writing Project	Thesis Sequence: English 795 - Thesis Workshop, and English 759 - Advanced Writing Project
3 Electives: 600 or 700 level courses, either from the English Literature M.A. program, or from participating departments with departmental approval. NOTE: for those not on the translation track, one elective may be replaced with a translation workshop or translation craft class	3 Electives: 600 or 700 level courses, either from the English Literature M.A. program, or from participating departments with departmental approval.

Ideally, the program will take two years to complete, with students taking three courses per semester. Taking less than three courses requires permission from the MFA Director. Also, note that summer MFA courses are not always offered, so you should plan to complete your course work, especially your workshops and craft classes, during the academic year.

Our department offers a wide array of wonderful literature electives, from classes in British, American and Global Literatures to a variety of special topics courses (English 781) such as, most recently a class in “Feminist Fairy Tales” and a course titled “History, Memory and the Caribbean Literary Imagination.”

Our courses are offered in the late afternoons and evenings (primarily at 6:30 pm with occasional electives at 4:30), and it is possible to work in the daytime and

take classes at night.

Only students in the MFA program take our MFA classes. Non-matriculated students may not take these classes.

Pre-registration

Each semester, the MFA Director will announce pre-registration and help you to register for courses. While we do hold spaces in our MFA classes so that all students can register for the courses they want, literature electives—especially English 636—are also taken by MA students and may fill up quickly.

Transfer Credits

The MFA program allows you to transfer credits for literature electives only, not for workshops or craft classes, provided you have taken graduate level courses at another university within the past 8 years.

Both the MFA Director and Graduate Admissions must approve transfer credits. If you wish to transfer credits, please consult with the MFA Director and bring a copy of your official transcript listing the course(s) you wish to transfer as well as a course description. You will need to fill out an Advanced Standing Form, which is available at Graduate Admissions.

Filing for Graduation

In your final semester of the MFA program, you must fill out a Graduate Application, which you can get at the Registrar's Office. Be sure to fill this out by March 1 if you plan on May/June graduation.

B. FINAL WRITING PROJECT/THESIS

Your thesis represents the culmination of your graduate work and is completed over your last two semesters of the program.

In the fall, you will take the thesis workshop (English 795), a multi-genre course in which everyone presents a portion of his or her thesis to the workshop. Students also meet in conference with the instructor of the thesis workshop. In the spring, you will sign up for English 759 and work directly with your thesis advisor.

Thesis Parameters and Advising

For poetry, your thesis will be 25-30 pages. Prose should be 65-75 pages. For drama, you will write one full-length play or two one-act plays. In addition, you will write an essay that serves as an introduction to the thesis, in which you draw upon your study of literary texts and issues of craft over the preceding semester. The essay (4-5 pages) will serve to situate your project in relation to literature and literary traditions.

The MFA Director can help you choose both the advisor and a second reader who will also comment and grade your final project. It is possible for a literature faculty member to be a second reader on your thesis, but if so, you should choose someone with whom you have taken a literature course.

Oral Exam

In your final semester of the program, you will also take your MFA oral exam. This combination presentation, question-and-answer, and thesis-defense (about an hour) is an opportunity to talk about your manuscript with your advisor and a second reader, situate your project in a literary tradition and discuss the texts that have been influential to you. Questions will be based on the MFA reading list and the categories you have chosen from that list. Both your advisor and your second reader will be in charge of the exam.

Submitting Your Thesis

After your exam, you will have the chance to make any revisions to your thesis and then prepare it for submission to the college.

The title page of the thesis must bear your signature, your advisor's signature and the following statement:

“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of English in the Graduate Division of Queens College of the City University of New York, (date).”

After your committee has approved your thesis, your thesis director will submit two copies of a Thesis Approval Form to the Office of Graduate Studies. Then the thesis must be bound. To arrange for binding, you must pay a \$25 binding fee at

the Bursar's Office, for which a receipt will be issued. The receipt and two copies of the thesis manuscript must be taken to the Catalog Department of Rosenthal Library (Room 201). One bound copy is retained by the library and becomes part of its collection. A second bound copy is sent to the English department. If desired, a third copy may be submitted for binding, with no extra fee; the third copy will be given to you.

C. MFA Reading List

One of our commitments as an MFA program in Creative Writing and Translation is to immerse ourselves in various literary traditions and to encourage students to see themselves as members of a community of writers practicing a range of different styles, techniques, and writerly strategies. In the interest of placing student work in dialogue with the work of – in particular – 20th century writers, mostly working in English, mostly in the U.S., we have compiled a list of texts, which we expect our students to read in time for their oral exam at the end of their four semesters of course work.

The reading list is separated into four genres, Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Non-Fiction (Translation is currently under construction). Students are expected to be familiar with all the texts in the genre of their Thesis Project, and to be familiar with ten texts in a second genre of their choosing.

These reading lists are meant to be an integral part of your writing process, not simply an exam list of required texts. We hope you will find, among them, a handful of texts that speak directly to your creative project. Finally, we post these lists in the interest of developing an area of common knowledge that will help generate a shared sense of intellectual and creative community in discussion in and outside the classroom.

The reading list is available on the MFA website or you may obtain a copy from the MFA Director.

D. THE ACTORS COMPANY THEATER

Beginning in fall, 2008 our program will have a working relationship with the highly regarded Actor's Company Theatre based in Manhattan. The Actor's Company Theatre (TACT) was founded in 1992 by a group of experienced New York actors dedicated to presenting readings and productions of plays in which the focus is, in their words, "away from spectacle and production and back to words and the actor—creating theatre is its purest form." Each semester, several of our playwriting students will have their classroom work augmented by sessions with TACT actors at their Manhattan studio. As a culmination of thesis work, playwriting students will have rehearsed, professionally staged readings of their plays performed by TACT. There will be opportunities for you to have internships at TACT during the course of the program as well as an informal discussion series about making a career in the theatre.

For more information about TACT, see their website: www.tactnyc.org.

E. THE MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN CREATIVE WRITING WITH AN ADVANCED CERTIFICATE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Queens College is located in one of the most linguistically diverse places on the planet. Our MFA program is one of the rare programs to offer *both* a degree in Creative Writing and Literary Translation. With our new partnership, students now have the option of a earning an Advanced Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language.

In an increasingly competitive job market, where an MFA alone is often not sufficient to teach on the college-level, this Advanced Certificate in English Language Teaching will enhance the degree and give graduates other options. (Note: This minor does *not* fulfill the State Education requirements for certification in elementary or secondary schools.)

Full information about this program is available on the MFA website.

F. MFA READINGS AND EVENTS

On the Same Page Series

Held on several evenings during the fall semester, this series of informal discussions of literary texts is designed for the whole MFA community, both faculty and students. Two or three texts are assigned during the summer for everyone to read. (For instance, most recently, we assigned *The Atlantic Monthly Fiction Issue*, Tory Dent's book of poetry *HIV Mon Amour* and *The Best American Essays*.) Led by MFA faculty members, the discussions are designed to engage everyone, and to explore matters of craft, form and language in the texts.

Trends in Translation Series

Each year we invite several esteemed literary translators to campus to speak about the theory and practice of translation. This year, we will offer a Trends in Translation Conference in the spring, with a daylong series of talks, readings and meetings.

Emerging Writers Series

This series is one of our most special events. Each semester, on a series of evenings, emerging writers come to read and talk about their most recent book with our students. Books by readers will be assigned and/or made available to students as everyone is expected to read the books. Some of our most fascinating and still on-going discussions have been generated during these conversations. We have had readings by poets and fiction writers and look forward next year to presentations by playwrights and children's book authors as well.

Queens College Evening Reading Series

Sponsored by Queens College and directed by English Department faculty member Joseph Cuomo, this renowned series brings many notable writers to campus, including, in the past, Arthur Miller, Jamaica Kincaid and Robert Pinsky. Readings are held at 7pm on Tuesday nights during the academic year. Leonard Lopate writer as well as host of *The Leonard Lopate Show*, conducts interviews with many of the writers. Further information is available at: www.qc.edu/readings

Bulletin Blog

One of the ways we keep in contact is through postings on this website. Check it out: <http://queenscollegemfa.blogspot.com/>

G. OZONE PARK: LITERARY JOURNAL

In the first year of our program, the MFA students launched a national journal in which all MFA students are welcome to participate.

Ozone Park is a biannual online journal of new writing publishing Fiction, Poetry, Creative Nonfiction, Plays and Translation from emerging and established writers. Ozone Park is edited and designed by graduate students in the Queens College MFA program in Creative Writing and Translation.

For further information, see www.ozoneparkjournal.org

H. LITERARY PARTNERS

An extraordinary aspect of our program, for both the faculty and students, is our location: New York City, the capital of culture and publishing. Writers the world over vie for access to the resources that we have at hand. Beyond the Queens College campus events, there are a multitude of readings, panels, discussions, and employment possibilities.

As part of a larger university system, The City University of New York, our students are part of a network of graduate programs: three other MFA programs and the Graduate Center. Although we are discrete academic programs, in the interest of community building *across* the system, the CUNY faculty is in the process of planning a number of joint events. We saw how effective this could be at a Marathon Reading last May 2007; along with our own faculty members, other writers included Billy Collins, Michael Cunningham, Elizabeth Nunez, Meena Alexander, Tom Sleigh, and Grace Schulman.

Our partnering continued at the Associated Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) 2008 Conference in New York. As major sponsors, our faculty and students enjoyed participating at a national conference in their own hometown.

The CUNY faculty members are continuing this relationship and will partner with national literary organizations, such as The Poetry Society of America and the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses.

For updates, see Creative Writing at CUNY:

<http://www1.cuny.edu/academics/academic-programs/programs-of-note/creative-writing-at-CUNY.html>

I. MFA FACULTY

All of our MFA faculty are full-time, tenured or tenure track members of the English Department. Each year, we also invite a visiting professor to teach in our MFA program. In our first two years, we were fortunate to have Rigoberto Gonzales assist us in building our community of writers. This academic year, Aracelis Girmay, is our visiting professor. All our faculty members are all working writers and committed teachers.

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J. OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION FOR MFA STUDENTS

The English Department Office, 718-997-4600

Dean of Graduate Studies, Kiely Hall, Room 139A, (718) 997-519

The Registrar, Jefferson Hall, Room 100 (718) 997-4400

The Bursar, Jefferson Hall, Room 200 (718) 997-4500

Graduate Admissions, Jefferson Hall, Room 105 (718) 997-520

Financial Aid Office, Jefferson Hall, Room 202 (718) 997-5100