

Queen Mary Summer School 2023

SUM505D: Taylor Swift and Literature

School of English and Drama

Course outline

Date: 3 July – 21 July 2023

Level: 5

Credits: 15 (Queen Mary credits)

Course Leader: Dr Clio Doyle

Assessment: **Essay**, 2500 words (80%) and a **class presentation**, 10 minutes (20%)

Course description:

Is the work of Taylor Swift literature?

You may have seen articles, in publications ranging from the Wall Street Journal to Teen Vogue, about seminars on Taylor Swift that were recently offered at some American universities. These university-level classes on Swift's work and its form, context, and implications raise all kinds of questions about what should be taught, read, and studied. Is Swift's work literature, and is it worth studying in the same way that one would study Shakespeare or Dickens? In this module, we will grapple with ideas of canonicity and literary value and think about what it means to read something as literature.

This module suggests that the lyrics of Taylor Swift can and should be read as literature. In doing so, we will pay close attention to formal elements such as rhyme and word choice. We will also analyse her songs with the help of key texts in critical theory and discuss the political, national, and historical contexts of her work. Queen Mary's London setting will encourage us to pay particular attention to the way in which the UK, and London in particular, figures in Swift's lyrics.

Swift's songs reflect on literary history; for example, "the lakes" makes references to Romantic poets and "Love Story" revises Shakespeare. In this module, we will build an understanding of Swift as an artist who is deeply interested in the relationship between her lyrics and the literature of the past.

Learning outcomes:

On completion of the module, students can expect to have acquired:

- A knowledge of the basics of literary study and critical theory
- A critical and practical understanding of imagery, structure, and form in relation to poetry and song lyrics
- An understanding of the contexts of Taylor Swift's work in relation to literary history and contemporary popular culture
- The ability to respond constructively and critically to popular culture
- The development of a sophisticated critical understanding of narrative and poetic technique

Approximate cost:

The tuition fees for the **Taylor Swift and Literature** course are **£2,100**. There may be additional costs for field trips, such as entry to exhibitions, which will be in the region of **£30-£50**.

All reading material is provided digitally so you are not required to purchase any books.

Assessments:

The course assessments are not compulsory, however, if you wish to transfer credit for this course to your home university it is essential to complete the assignments.

Essay, 2500 words (80%) and a **class presentation**, 10 minutes (20%)

Preparation:

Before you arrive on campus, it is advised that you familiarise yourself with the course content before it begins. You will be given instructions for accessing our Virtual Learning Environment (QMplus) before you arrive on campus.

Teaching:

The course is taught in two two-hour sessions per day (10.00 - 12.00 and 13.00 - 15.00), held Monday to Thursday each week.

Indicative Additional Reading:

- Taylor Swift's lyrics
- Christopher Ricks, Dylan's Vision of Sin
- Zadie Smith, "Meet Justin Bieber!"
- Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"
- Leah Dajches, "Queer folklore: Examining the influence of fandom on sexual identity development and fluidity acceptance among Taylor Swift fans."
- Rachel Dubrofsky, "A Vernacular of Surveillance: Taylor Swift and Miley Cyrus Perform White Authenticity."