

CORE LITERATURE AND WRITING SEMINAR

CLAWS

ENGLISH 1975

*Course Descriptions*

*Spring 2018*

**1975-001**

MWF 8:30 AM – 9:20 AM

Karen Graziano, JD

**Law & Modern Literature**

*“In front of the law there is a doorkeeper.” – Franz Kafka, The Trial*

*“Literature is as old as speech. It grew out of human need for it, and it has not changed except to become more needed.” – John Steinbeck*

While Aristotle described “The Law” as “reason, free from passion,” both the discussion and evaluation of laws by society are passionately undertaken. “The Law” – its intended and unintended impact – is fiercely evaluated, aggressively commented on, and intensely critiqued by fiction and nonfiction writers, as well as by lawyers and judges themselves. Law in literature captures something that the dispassionate law itself cannot: its nuances. Characters in legal fiction and real life players in legal nonfiction experience the struggles presented by the application of the law or by its absence. For this reason, studying law and literature provides a unique opportunity to understand our legal system through literary devices that describe, emphasize, and explain both forcefully and feebly.

The significance of literature for understanding and even supporting law has been debated. “Literature is important for understanding law because it teaches a certain way of thinking -- one that is synthetic, creative, and comfortable with ambiguity and ambivalence,” states attorney and Law Professor Daniel Solove. As literature has been used to more fully understand law, “the use of literary references by courts to support substantive legal positions” has been used to provide a “rhetorical shortcut for negotiating the complexities of human existence,” explains John M. DeStefano III, in *On Literature as Legal Authority*. He argues that while Richard Posner in *Law and Literature* argued that “the substance of literature cannot help judges judge,” it has been shown to do so. By reading fiction, nonfiction, and legal journal articles, this course will cover the following themes in literature: depiction of the legal system, lawyers, and the rule of law; power and influence; interpretation and application; crime, punishment, retribution, and redemption; ethics and equity; and satire. We will explore how literary devices are used to convey ideas about the legal system, the law, and lawyers, and how these ideas impact the practice of law itself.

**1975-002**

MWF 9:30 AM - 10:20 AM

Jody Ross

**Lit and Medicine**

This seminar is designed for (but not limited to) students with an interest in science, health, and medicine. Some of the texts were written by physicians, and others deal with the life-and-death subjects of physical well-being and illness. Students will analyze a wide range of genres including fiction, drama, poetry, and memoir. The works selected for the course encourage students to look into the minds and hearts of others and into their own, as they encounter both fictional characters (such as a woman dying of cancer) and real surgeons confronting their own errors in the operating room. The works, which span more than a century and a multitude of attitudes, will spark discussions about ethics, history, aesthetics, psychology, and literary traditions. Most important, these works of fiction and non-fiction confront the uncertainty and complexity of life as it is experienced by people who most value certainty: scientists.

**1975-003**

MWF 11:30 AM - 12:20 PM

Jill Karn

**The Marriage Plot Undone**

In this course, we will read a series of novels, short stories, and plays that fall within the pattern of the marriage plot, as well as those that show ways in which that “plot” comes undone. Beginning with Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, we will consider how the marriage plot becomes a vehicle for a heroine’s growth, and trace changes and expansions to the marriage plot that allow for an expansion of consciousness for the female characters. We will study both the novels and various film adaptations of these marriage plot stories. Some questions we’ll address: To what extent does a marriage plot “trap” a heroine? Is she sometimes “plotted against”? What happens when the female character resists the marriage plot? Must the heroine or the hero be “won over” to this plot? How does romance become suspect in these stories, must it be rewritten or reimagined? If all comedy ends in marriage, what do we do with a heroine who emerges at the end of the story unmarried, and yet still very much alive? Is this a new form of tragedy, or is the heroine afforded some measure of freedom having “escaped” the marriage plot? Authors will most likely include Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and William Shakespeare, among others.

**1975-004**

TR 8:30 AM - 9:45 AM

Alice Dailey

**Aliens, Freaks, Norms and Others**

This course is organized around the concepts of alienation, freakishness, otherness, and normalcy. How do social groups establish and police the boundaries of the normal, and what do particular constructions of the freakish convey about what we fear and, perhaps, desire? Where does the human end and the alien begin, and why does the difference matter to us? How do we constitute distinctions between self and other, us and them? When do those distinctions fail? The literature studied in this course will consider these questions in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, belief systems, social behavior, sanity, sexuality, and physical disability. We will study two novels (Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*); a play (William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*); a collection of poems (Gabrielle Calvocoressi's *The Last Time I Saw Amelia Earhart*); a wordless graphic novella (Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*); a memoir (Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*); and two musical compositions for instruments and electronics (Paul Leary's *Perfume* and *I Have a Past Life Memory of the War that Blew the Fifth Planet into the Asteroid Belt and Other Stories from AM Radio*). The course is writing intensive and will focus on developing the skill and vocabulary necessary to produce confident literary analysis.

**1975-005**

MWF 10:30 AM - 11:20 AM

Jody Ross

**Lit and Medicine**

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**1975-006**

TR 10:00 AM – 11:15 AM

Gail Ciociola

**Rebels and Outsiders in American Literature**

In an era of both public protest and private uncertainty, it perhaps becomes a civic or moral imperative to understand what we mean by words like "outsider" and "rebel." While the contexts of this course have no political framework, the readings and activities serve to expand insight into how we define these ideas and, in particular, the realms of destructive vs. constructive rebels and of voluntary vs. involuntary outsiders. To that end, students will explore character and situational content in various genres of literature as well as the creative impulses of their authors, who include Allen Ginsberg, Kurt Vonnegut, Patti Smith, Quiara Alegria Hudes, Edward Albee, and Suzan Lori-Parks. Course requirements: a short, critical paper; one piece of creative writing; a five-minute presentation; and two open-book assessments.

**1975-007**

TR 10:00 AM – 11:15 AM

Ellen Bonds

**“Identity and Difference”** will explore the ways that gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality shape how authors write as well as how we read texts. By reading, discussing, and writing about diverse literature from both women and men authors, students will learn how literary expression can enhance our understanding as well as expand our perspectives of who we are and how we relate to others.

Reading works of fiction, poetry, and drama by diverse authors such as Toni Morrison, Amy Tan, August Wilson, and Sandra Cisneros, for example, students will consider some of the following questions: What perspectives do we gain by considering how men write about male experience, how they write about female experience; conversely how women authors write about female and male experience? Is form and content influenced by race and gender and how so? How do authors explore the intersections of race and gender/ethnicity and history to reveal the forces that factor into the development of individual identity? In what ways do certain works challenge or affirm conventional attitudes toward others of different gender, race, orientation, and beliefs?

**1975-008**

MWF 11:30 AM - 12:20 PM

Evan Radcliffe

**Family Matters**

Our views of our families, present or absent, are central to how we define ourselves but also endlessly shifting—and so also are the literary uses of families. In this course, we will look at some literary portrayals of families and the relationships they contain. While most of these portrayals feature family love, they also include rivalries, tensions, and betrayals, as family members struggle with their roles, find their roles transforming with time, construct myths or discover truths about themselves and their siblings or parents or children, or look back at all of these with varying emotions and degrees of understanding. Our texts will include fiction (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*), plays (Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and August Wilson's *Fences*), poems (by Seamus Heaney, Langston Hughes, Adrienne Rich, Robert Hayden, Theodore Roethke, Seamus Heaney, Alicia Ostriker, and others), and Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Fun Home*. Becoming more perceptive readers and more skilled writers (with particular attention to the ways in which writing is a crucial form of thinking) are fundamental goals of the course. The course includes frequent writing, informal as well as formal.

**1975-009**

MWF 11:30 AM - 12:20 PM

Kate Nielsen

**Environmental Catastrophes in Fiction**

Contemporary culture is filled with depictions of environmental catastrophe – films like *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Wall-E* portray global disasters as obstacles for humanity to overcome on a path towards greater enlightenment, justice, and of course, survival. But who is the villain in such stories? Humanity? Or a natural world that is portrayed as threatening our very existence? In this class, we will examine how narratives of eco-disaster ask us to imagine the relationship between humans and their environment, and we will also investigate how historical disaster fictions have shaped contemporary depictions of environmental catastrophe. What role do concerns of race, class, and gender play in the rhetoric of natural disasters? We will consider both historical disaster narratives like Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* and Robert Barr's *The Doom of London*, as well as more contemporary fictions including Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*.

**1975-011**

TR 11:30 AM – 12:45 PM

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**1975-012**

TR 11:30 AM – 12:45 PM

Rena Potok

**Borders, Migrations and Identities**

How do borders, migrations, and exile affect the formation of individual and collective national identity? What does being “English,” or “American” mean to an Anglo-Indian novelist, an Irish poet, an Iraqi- or Mexican-American playwright? As writers migrate (both literally and figuratively) across national borders from one culture and nationality to another, and put down increasingly tenuous roots in exile, they explore the nature of identity and, indeed, of borders themselves. Borders may be configured as a physical barrier between two countries, the no-man’s land between two national territories, even the literal boundaries of the human body. They may also show up as imagined borders, such as psychological boundaries between individuals, or the constructed boundaries of national identity. This course will explore the complexities of borders, migration and exile, and the realities of dwelling in the space between nations and identities. We will read and discuss novels, short stories, plays, and poems by Irish, Indian, Pakistani, Afgan, and Chicano/Chicana writers who explore these and other matters. Among these are: Mohsin Hamid, Gloria Anzaldúa, Arundhati Roy, Edna O’Brien, and Salman Rushdie. The course includes frequent writing, both formal and informal.

**1975-013**

MWF 12:30 PM - 1:20 PM

Jill Karn

**Epiphany in Literature**

Epiphany, self-awakening, self-awareness, coming to consciousness—all of these terms apply to moments of insight in literature and in life, where we come to understand ourselves and the world more deeply, when we dwell on the inner workings of our minds. In this course we will read stories, novels, essays and poems all of which center on moments of intense revelation. We will consider how these experiences define characters, how they challenge and sometimes restore love, family, faith, understanding, or self-identity. Likewise, we will ask what price characters must sometimes pay for consciousness, and for a deeper and more profound relationship to others and to the world. Some authors may include: William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Frederick Douglass, Edith Wharton, James Joyce, Colm Toibin, and short selections or poems from: John Donne, Phillis Wheatley, Emily Dickinson, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Langston Hughes, Robert Frost, Lucille Clifton, Louise Gluck, Robert Hayden, Natasha Trethewey, Derek Walcott, Jennifer Chang.

**1975-014**

MWF 12:30 PM - 1:20 PM

Jody Ross

**Lit and Medicine**

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**1975-015**

TR 1:00 PM – 2:15 PM

Ruth Anolik

**The Cultural Uses of Horror and Terror**

Horror and terror entertainments are often dismissed as irrelevant escapism. Yet, a careful examination of horror and terror fiction reveals that it actually hides and projects the deepest fears – social and psychological – of the culture that generates it. In this course, we will examine moments of horror and terror in literature from the time of the Renaissance. We will read the most horrifying play of William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, which presents the twin figures of the monstrous woman and the innocent victim of violent rape, as well as the evil, inhuman African. Turning to a high moment of horror and terror, the eighteenth-century Gothic (which was openly influenced by Shakespeare) we will read Ann Radcliffe's terrifying *Sicilian Romance* – a meditation on the dangers of the patriarchy for women. We will read LeFanu's novella, *Carmilla* a nineteenth-century English text that reveal anxieties about the dangerous monstrosity of female sexuality. We will then move to nineteenth-century American culture to examine a variety of texts that express particularly American anxieties regarding the horrors of slavery: two Poe stories and a selection from the slave narrative of Frederick Douglass. Moving to the twentieth-century, we will read two texts – a short story by Edith Wharton and a novel by Shirley Jackson – that use the genre of horror to explore the situation of women. We will end the semester with Colson Whitehead's zombie novel, *Zone One*, and try to account for the cultural explosion of zombies. Throughout the semester, we will consider what these texts reveal about the social and political concerns of their time, including sexual and racial anxieties, the declining power of religion, the changing dynamics of the family, the cold war, and twenty-first century political anxieties. We will also have the opportunity to apply our strategies and conclusions to contemporary popular cultural artifacts – television, film, video games, anything else – to be determined by the students. At each moment we will ask: what real social anxieties lurk within the fantastic text? What are the cultural, social and psychological uses of such expressions? And why is our present cultural moment witnessing such an explosion of apocalyptic horror?

**1975-016**

MW 1:30 PM – 2:45 PM

Mary Mullen

**Coming of Age in Ireland**

This class will consider what it means to come of age—to grow up—in Ireland. As we track how characters mature and fail to mature, how readers are treated like innocent children and all-knowing adults, how Irish settings and histories shape characters' trajectory of growth, we will ask big questions about constructions of childhood and adulthood, literature and place, gender, and development as a social, historical and economic process. We will read short stories and novels by Maria Edgeworth, Kate O'Brien, James Joyce, Edna O'Brien; poetry by Eavan Boland and Seamus Heaney, and Brian Friel's play, *Translations*. This class is a writing intensive course, and will teach strategies for making interesting, convincing, and unified arguments about literary texts.



*This course counts toward the minor/concentration in Irish Studies*

**1975-017**

TR 2:30 PM – 3:45 PM

Travis Foster

**Lies, Damn Lies, and Unreliable Narratives**

In this course you'll learn to make compelling arguments about literature and meaning. Along the way, you'll acquire skills to communicate these arguments effectively and to draw careful connections between literary texts and the world "outside" those texts. To accomplish this, we'll read, reread, and view a range of materials—poetry, fiction, drama, and film—that are, in various ways, unreliable. We'll study classic unreliable narrators, of course, but we'll also examine ambiguous stories where the narrator may or may not be describing events as they actually unfolded, narratives where the protagonist fundamentally misunderstands the events she or he is experiencing, and narratives where the protagonist's grasp on the past has been shaken loose. Unreliability, as we'll see, stems from multiple different sources, so our themes will vary widely, including guilt, self-deception, ignorance, bigotry, mental illness, trauma, and memory.

**ENG 1975-018**

MW 3:00 PM – 4:15 PM

Ellen Bonds

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**1975-019**

TR 2:30 PM – 3:45 PM

Joe Drury

### **The Gothic**

Why do we read stories that scare us, that make our skin crawl and our stomachs turn? Why in a modern, disenchanted world do we take so much pleasure in stories of ghosts and monsters, demons and vampires? Why have Gothic tropes—gloomy castles, howling winds, dark passageways—proved so successful and durable in so many different kinds of writing and performance? In this course students will learn the history of Gothic writing, how it emerged out of British anti-Catholic feeling around the time of the French Revolution, and how it evolved into a sophisticated form for addressing the unspoken fears and unconscious desires of readers in periods of social upheaval and unrest. Readings may include Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.

**1975-020**

TR 4:00 PM – 5:15 PM

Hugh Ormsby-Lennon

**Senses of an Ending: Finishes and Starts in Lit and Life**

"In my beginning is my end," declared T. S. Eliot, Nobel Prize-winning poet and dramatist: "In my end is my beginning." In this seminar we shall explore how openings and closings--in literature, film, music, and life--interact with each other. We shall read Irish short stories by James Joyce, William Trevor, and Bridget Keegan; English poems by Philip Larkin and American poems by authors whom Camille Paglia includes in her anthology *Break, Blow, Burn*; as well as Alan Moore/Dave Gibbons' Anglo-American graphic novel *Watchmen* (from which we shall also view short movie sequences).

Students will keep a journal recording their responses to weekly readings (and to essays by Paglia on assigned poems). Students will also write three 3-5 page papers (to be revised) in which they focus upon a close reading of short works, and a 5-8 page term paper in which they integrate broader themes from our classroom discussions. Lively classroom discussion is essential; it will be factored into final grades based otherwise upon student essays and journals.

**1975-021**

TR 4:00 PM - 5:15 PM

Ruth Anolik

**The Cultural Uses of Horror and Terror**

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**1975-022**

TR 4:00 PM – 5:15 PM

Kamran Javadizadeh

**Privacy and Literature**

Privacy, we are told, is disappearing. That sense of crisis has been fueled by a wave of revelations about our surveillance state and by the constant broadcasting of our daily lives in the form of digital newsfeeds. This course will give you the chance to step back from our current moment and to look instead at the intersection of literature and the concept of privacy over (roughly) the last century. The very idea of privacy, we will see, has been bound up with the long history of our technologies of textual production and circulation (ranging, for instance, from the postal service to the internet), and literary texts provide us with especially fertile ground for investigating the shifting contours of what it means to have a private life. We will read stories, novels, poems, and plays in which the category of privacy is worried over, violated, guarded, and freely given up. We will investigate a series of literary figures who include the hermetic poet, the private eye, the willing confessor, and the unseen voyeur. Assignments will include several short papers and informal oral presentations. Readings may include works by Emily Dickinson, Raymond Chandler, Vladimir Nabokov, Elizabeth Bishop, James Baldwin, J.D. Salinger, Anne Sexton, Philip Roth, and others.

**ENG 1975-023**

MW 4:30 PM – 5:45 PM

Yumi Lee

**American Narratives of War**

War has been fundamental to the American way of life, from the multiple crises of the present moment and the 20th-century rise of the U.S. as a global superpower to the violent establishment of both the first American colonies and the United States as a republic. This course investigates American narratives of war in two ways. First, we will read and engage with American literary narratives of war from the past 50 years. Second, building from our readings of these texts, we will critically examine the cultural and social narratives that America produces about its wars. How have participants of war – soldiers, survivors, refugees, civilians – represented their experiences in literary and cultural forms? How have authors used literature to process the violence and trauma of war? In what ways do we as a nation choose to recognize, remember, and memorialize different wars? How does war continue to draw the boundaries of national belonging and exclusion? And how do race, nationality, gender, sexuality, class, and ability shape our experiences of wartime?

This course will focus on wartime texts from the past several decades, but we will analyze war in relation to the legacies of foundational systems of settler colonialism, slavery, imperialism, and capitalism. We will read, interpret, and discuss a range of literary texts about war, including fiction in realist and speculative modes, memoirs, graphic novels, essays, and poetry. This class is a writing-intensive seminar in which you will develop your writing and revision skills through regular writing assignments and workshops, both formal and informal, that will culminate in a final thesis-driven critical essay. Readings may include works by Leslie Marmon Silko, Toni Morrison, Miné Okubo, Art Spiegelman, Mohsin Hamid, Sherman Alexie, Tim O'Brien, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Colson Whitehead, Moustafa Bayoumi, and others.