

CORE LITERATURE AND WRITING SEMINAR

CLAWS

ENGLISH 1975

Course Descriptions

Spring 2019

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,” society undertakes both the discussion and evaluation of law passionately. Fiction and nonfiction writers fiercely evaluate, intensely critique, and subtly comment on the intended and unintended impact of “the law”. Law as a theme in literature captures something that the dispassionate law itself cannot: its nuances. Individuals and fictional characters’ legal challenges and struggles provide compelling points to examine. In the readings, we will explore how the authors present the role of law and lawyers in society and how they define justice, equality, and ethics. We will consider how literature plays a significant role in educating society on the law’s impact, and how it prompts its readers to question the purpose, application, and impact of the law.

1975-002

MWF 8:30 AM - 9:20 AM

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, a Chicana poet, or an Afghan-American memoirist? 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, memoirs, and poems by Irish, Indian, Afghan, Palestinian, and Chicano/Chicana writers who explore these and other matters. Among these are: Mohsin Hamid, Gloria Anzaldúa, Anton Shammas, Eavan Boland, and Salman Rushdie. The course includes frequent writing, both formal and informal.

1975-003

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.

1975-004

TR 8:30 AM - 9:45 AM

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.

1975-005

TR 8:30 AM - 9:45 AM

Robert O’Neil

The American Dream

In this course we will survey different genres of literature including short stories, novels, journalism, documentaries, and Hollywood films in order to further understand the dynamic relationship between American culture and American war making. The course will open with readings from *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories*. This collection of stories will serve as the base for our understanding of the dominant themes that permeate American culture, including social class, race, gender, and identity. We will, for example, read stories by Joyce Carol Oates, Tobias Wolff, Russell Banks, Kate Braverman, Anne Beattie, and Richard Ford. These themes will be further stressed in our first novel of the semester *The Corrections* by Jonathan Franzen. What are the underlying components of the American Dream and have these

principles been changed or altered by class and gender? How do these themes affect American war making? We will then transition into books that explore how American citizens and soldiers experienced the War on Terror. A veteran of the war in Iraq, Phil Klay, won the National Book Award for his collection of short stories entitled *Redeployment*. Both Klay and Evan Wright's work of journalism entitled *Generation Kill* will provide us a firsthand account of the war in Iraq. At the end of the course, students will be expected to argue their own conclusions about the relationship between culture and war, and the responsibility citizens should bear for both fighting and returning American soldiers.

1975-006

MWF 10:30 AM - 11:20 AM

Jody Ross

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1975-007

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, some of whom include Allen Ginsberg, Kurt Vonnegut, Patti Smith, Edward Albee, and Lynn Nottage. Course requirements: a short, critical paper; one piece of creative writing; a five-minute presentation; and two open-book assessments.

1975-008

TR 10:00 AM - 11:15 AM

Ellen Bonds

“Identity and Difference”

In this reading and writing intensive course, we will examine how our sense of self—in terms of culture, ethnicity, and gender—influences how we read a text and how a text can influence our perspective. Focusing on American literature written by a diverse group of authors, from writers such as Walt Whitman to August Wilson, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou, we will consider the questions “How do American authors explore the tension between the dynamics of identity and difference?” “What factors comprise literary identity—the

reader's, writer's, and characters'?" and "How does a literary work affect/effect individual and group identity?" Students will work to improve their writing by following a writing process of drafting, workshopping, conferencing, and rewriting four essays. Class participation will include both small group discussions and formal group presentations.

1975-009

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.

1975-010

MWF 11:30 AM - 12:20 PM

Kate Neilsen

Environmental Catastrophes in Narrative

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. Though we often imagine the natural world as a place of refuge and beauty, disaster narratives depict the environment in different terms – as a monster, a villain, or a victim of human excesses. 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 Robert Jefferies' *After London* 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

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Wilson, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou, we will consider the questions “How do American authors explore the tension between the dynamics of identity and difference?” “What factors comprise literary identity—the reader’s, writer’s, and characters’?” and “How does a literary work affect/effect individual and group identity?” Students will work to improve their writing by following a writing process of drafting, workshopping, conferencing, and rewriting four essays. Class participation will include both small group discussions and formal group presentations.

1975-012

TR 11:30 AM - 12:45 PM

Megan Quigley

Feminist Fictions

In this course we are going to read 20th- and 21st-century fiction by feminists and the fictions that surround the term feminism. We will begin by reading works by writers such as Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys, and move on to contemporary writers such as Maggie Nelson and Claudia Rankine. We will read a variety of genres—a play, a short story, poetry, novels and an essay—and learn the fundamentals of literary analysis. We will also read feminist and queer theory to continue to analyze why the term “feminism” gives so many people in our culture anxiety.

At the same time, this writing intensive course aims to transform your writing skills and to demystify the process of the analytical thesis-driven essay. You will learn to think through the writing process and to develop your skills in argument and revision.

1975-013

MWF 12:30 PM - 1:20 PM

Jody Ross

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1975-014

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1975-015

TR 1:00 PM - 2:15 PM

Kamran Javadizadeh

Breakdown and Breakthrough

When one way of life falls apart, what new forms emerge in its wake? How has literature made sense of such crises and their aftermath? In this course we'll study the literary treatment of breakdowns in personal, social, and artistic terms, and we'll learn to think and write critically about the claims authors make for the breakthroughs that these breakdowns enabled. Our authors will include Robert Lowell, James Schuyler, Sylvia Plath, Ralph Ellison, and Claudia Rankine. Course requirements to include three short essays and informal, in-class oral presentations.

1975-016

MW 1:30 PM - 2:45 PM

Michael Berthold

American Gothic

This course will survey American literature's abiding fascination with the horrifying, the mysterious, and the uncanny and will examine a variety of texts from the eighteenth through the twenty-first centuries. We will consider how the Gothic tradition is Americanized, how it has evolved, and how it continues to be pertinent for contemporary American culture. Readings for the course include works by Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, H. P. Lovecraft, Octavia Butler, Richard Matheson, Joyce Carol Oates and Stephen King.



1975-017

MW 1:30 PM - 2:45 PM

Ellen Bonds

“Identity and Difference”

In this reading and writing intensive course, we will examine how our sense of self—in terms of culture, ethnicity, and gender—influences how we read a text and how a text can influence our perspective. Focusing on American literature written by a diverse group of authors, from writers such as Walt Whitman to August Wilson, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou, we will consider the questions “How do American authors explore the tension between the dynamics of identity and difference?” “What factors comprise literary identity—the reader’s, writer’s, and characters’?” and “How does a literary work affect/effect individual and group identity?” Students will work to improve their writing by following a writing process of drafting, workshopping, conferencing, and rewriting four essays. Class participation will include both small group discussions and formal group presentations.

1975-018

MW 3:00 PM - 4:15 PM

Lara Rutherford-Morrison

Monsters in Literature

Monsters haunt literature and art across time periods, cultures, and genres. In works ranging from ancient epics to contemporary apocalypse narratives, monsters function as important vehicles for negotiating cultural and social anxieties and, ultimately, defining what it means to be human.

This course will consider key questions related to literary monsters: What is a monster? What do monsters do? How do monsters in literature and film work to engage issues of gender, sexuality, race, and embodiment? Why do certain literary monsters become powerful icons, resurrected in adaptation after adaptation?

In this course, we will study monstrous figures in poetry, fiction, and film. We will start by exploring the monstrosity of Beowulf’s Grendel, and go on to study mythical monsters in poetry by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, William Blake, and W.B. Yeats. We will consider monstrosity in fairy tales by Christina Rossetti and Angela Carter, and examine some of the great, iconic monsters — Frankenstein’s monster, Mr. Hyde, the vampire — as they evolve over time. We will also consider the intersection of monster narratives with science fiction in short stories by Octavia Butler and the films *Alien* (1979) and *Ex Machina* (2015) and finish with Colson Whitehead’s 2011 zombie novel, *Zone One*.

1975-019

MW 3:00 PM - 4:15 PM

Mary Ellen Fattori

Portraying Disability in Literature

As an art form, literature often creates, reflects, or questions cultural messages about what is “normal” and “abnormal” in our lives. As a result, reading and writing about the experience of disability in literature can help us better understand our responses to situations and events around us that might be different from our own. Through close readings of fiction, drama, and poetry, students will experience how writers have created

literary characters exhibiting various forms of disability throughout the centuries. These depictions include physical, mental, emotional, and social disabilities of all types.

Traditionally, these literary inventions were often used metaphorically as diabolical symbols of evil, or realistically as actual challenges to overcome, or even sentimentally as figures of pity and pathos. Contemporary authors, however, are reconsidering how to utilize disability as literary device, thereby requiring their readers to re-examine their own perception of what it means to be “disabled.” This introspection often leads to the realization that such categorization frequently undermines and marginalizes a vast proportion of society, calling for vast political or social reforms.

One note - because this is a literature course rather than a sociology course, its primary focus will remain on critically reading, interpreting, and writing about these works as literature. In addition, a significant amount of class time will be devoted to the teaching of formal writing, especially the thesis-driven critical essay, and improving presentation skills by delivering an end-of-the semester paper presentation.

1975-020

TR 2:30 PM – 3:45 PM

Karyn Hollis

International Literature

This seminar focuses on ways that writers over the globe represent their fellow citizens’ everyday lives as they encounter work, war, poverty, family, school, leisure--and especially--courtship and marriage. We will try to understand the commonalities and differences that arise among the people portrayed, examining cultural questions along the way. We’ll read short fiction, poetry and critical essays by internationally acclaimed authors from Europe, Asia, South America, the Middle East, and Africa. The readings for the course will be accessed for the most part from prizewinning websites such as *Words Without Borders*. Several critical approaches will guide our exploration of contemporary literature: postcolonialism, New Criticism, Marxism, ecocriticism, queer theory, magical realism, feminism and the like. In addition, the literature will be studied in contexts: cultural, political, historical; and in terms of gender, race and class. You will write three papers for the course which include a narrative as well as expository format.

1975-021

TR 2:30 PM - 3:45 PM

Jennifer Joyce

Narratives of Belonging in Contemporary Irish Literature

Welcome! What does it mean to belong? In what ways is it fundamental to the human experience? How might the act of belonging influence understandings of personal, familial, and national identities? In the 20th and 21st Century, Irish writers continue to explore expressions of belonging, and in contrast, separation and isolation, in narratives throughout multiple genres. This English Core Literature and Writing Seminar will analyze and respond to modern and contemporary Irish short stories, novels, drama, film and poetry in an effort to uncover the inextricable link between the vital experience of belonging and what it means to be Irish. Texts will range from Seamus Heaney, James Joyce, and Colum McCann, to Stacey Gregg and Claire Keegan, among others, which will offer tremendous occasion for critical thinking about the intersections of identity, nationhood, class, gender, and power in Ireland and within the global context.

This course counts for the GIS: Irish Studies major/minor

1975-022

MW 4:30 PM - 5:45 PM

Lara Rutherford-Morrison

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1975-023

MW 4:30 PM – 5:45 PM

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One note - because this is a literature course rather than a sociology course, its primary focus will remain on critically reading, interpreting, and writing about these works as literature. In addition, a significant amount of class time will be devoted to the teaching of formal writing, especially the thesis-driven critical essay, and improving presentation skills by delivering an end-of-the semester paper presentation.

1975-024

TR 4:00 PM - 5:15 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?

1975-100

MW 6:00 PM - 7:15 PM

Michael Berthold

American Gothic

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