

**CORE LITERATURE AND WRITING SEMINAR  
CLAWS  
ENGLISH 1975**

*Course Descriptions  
Spring 2020*

**1975-001**

**MWF 8:30 AM - 9:20 AM**

Robert Duggan

**Apocalyptic Moments**

Say “apocalypse” and people think of the end of the world, but the ancient Greeks knew it as meaning a “revelation” or “uncovering.” From Kate Chopin’s short gem “The Story of an Hour” to Alan Moore’s musings on time and eternity in the graphic novel *Watchmen*, we’ll uncover great “a-ha!” moments of knowledge—both good and bad—and reveal their impact on both characters and readers. We’ll time travel to experience the Greeks’ original tale of (not) seeing and (not) believing, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. Together, we’ll drift down the Congo River towards “The horror! The horror!” in Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* and watch how Francis Ford Coppola reinterprets that tale in the film *Apocalypse Now*. From these literary experiences, we’ll discuss not just the works themselves, but also the intertwined nature of reading and writing to generate both informal and formal essays incorporating the writing process from thesis to draft to final (not necessarily finished) product.

**1975-002**

**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.

**1975-003****MWF 9:30 AM - 10:20 AM**

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**1975-004****MWF 9:30 AM – 10:20 AM**

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*.

**1975-005****MWF 11:30 AM – 12:20 PM**

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.

**1975-006****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 narrative *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.

**1975-007****MWF 10:30 AM – 11:20 AM**

Jody Ross

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**1975-008****MWF 12:30 PM - 1:20 PM**

Kate Neilsen

**Environmental Catastrophe 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 H.G. Well's *The Time Machine* and Robert Barr's *The Doom of London*, as well as more contemporary fictions including Helena Maria Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*.

**1975-009****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.



**1975-010****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.

**1975-011****MW 3:00 PM – 4:15 PM**

Ellen Bonds

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**1975-013****MW 4:30 PM - 5:45 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. Among the texts we will read is LeFanu's novella, *Carmilla* a nineteenth-century English text that reveal anxieties about the dangerous monstrosity of female sexuality. We will move to nineteenth-century American culture to examine a variety of texts that express particularly American anxieties regarding the horrors of slavery: a story by Poe and a selection from the slave narrative of Frederick Douglass. We will read texts – including 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?

**1975-014****TR 8:30 AM – 9:45 AM**

Jill Karn

**The Marriage Plot Undone**

In this course, we will read a series of novels, poems, 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. 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 and poems, 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, John Donne, Emily Dickinson, and William Shakespeare, as well as work by contemporary poets.

**ENG 1975-015****TR 10:00 AM – 11:15 AM**

Yumi Lee

**American Narratives of War**

War has been fundamental to the American way of life, from the seemingly endless wars of the present and the rise of the U.S. as a global superpower in the 20th century to the violent establishment of the United States as a nation. This course investigates American narratives of war in two ways. First, we will read and engage with American literary and cultural wartime texts 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, veterans, 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, 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, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Colson Whitehead, Kevin Powers, and others.

**1975-016****TR 11:30 AM – 12:45 PM**

Ellen Bonds

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**1975-017****TR 1:00 PM – 2:15 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 Melatu Uche Okorie, George Moore, James Joyce, Anne Enright, and Anna Burns; poetry by Eavan Boland, Seamus Heaney and W. B. Yeats, and personal essays/memoirs by Kate O'Brien, Emilie Pine, Sinead Gleeson, Emma Dabari and others. 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*

**ENG 1975-018****TR 2:30 PM – 3:45 PM**

Yumi Lee

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**1975-019****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.

**1975-020****TR 4:00 PM – 5:15 PM**

Jennifer Joyce

**Narratives of Belonging in Contemporary Irish Literature**

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 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 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 toward the minor/concentration in Irish Studies*

**1975-100**

**MW 6:00 PM - 7:15 PM**

Michael Berthold

**American Gothic**

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