

CORE LITERATURE AND WRITING SEMINAR

CLAWS

ENGLISH 1975

Course Descriptions

Fall 2016

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 9:30 AM - 10:20 AM

Jody Ross

Literature 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 10:30 AM - 11:20 AM****Jody Ross****Literature and Medicine**

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1975-004**MWF 10:30 AM - 11:20 AM****Jill Karn****The Marriage Plot Undone**

In this course, we will read a series of novels, short stories, 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, 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**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. Starting with a Harry Potter novel (probably *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*), 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, plays (Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and August Wilson's *Fences*), poems (by 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.

1975-006**MWF 11:30 AM - 12:20 PM****Jill Gonzalez****Contemporary Latin American Literature**

This course examines the work of contemporary Latin American authors who critically rewrite the discovery, conquest and colonization of the Americas in the sixteenth century. The authors question the notion of historical truth by narrating events from multiple perspectives, recounting events from the perspective of the marginalized and demythologizing the past through exaggeration and parody. Many of the works examined in this course also employ anachronisms and make implicit and explicit references to twentieth-century politics.

1975-007**MWF 12:30 PM - 1:20 PM****Mary Anne Schofield****War Literature of the 20th Century**

We will read literature (fiction, poetry, drama) of the First and Second World Wars: texts of Modernism, Intermodernism, Postmodernism, and Realism that explore the use, for example, of encrypted language in espionage fiction, of a projected post-war worldview written in the science fiction texts before the actual events of the war, of the semiotics and experiments with the language of telling a story that cannot be told. War literature, as Hannah Arendt observes, “compresses the greatest opportunities into the smallest space and the shortest time, [and] that is its fascination.” It is literature of both conscience and consciousness; it is literature oftentimes written from the extreme edge of being, which will enable students, using their active reading of

the texts, to examine and challenge their own understanding of the uncertainty and complexity of life.

1975-009

MW 3:00 PM – 4:15 PM

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?

1975-010

MW 3:00 PM – 4:15 PM

Karyn Hollis

International Literature

The World Now: International Perspectives on Life and Love Through 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: For example, does the ubiquitous presence of US popular culture in texts throughout the world indicate that people in other countries are leading lives ever more similar to ours, or are most narratives resisting US consumerist culture on some level? To answer these and many more questions, we'll read short fiction, poetry and critical essays by internationally acclaimed authors from Asia, South America, the Middle East, and Africa. The readings for the course will be accessed for the most part from the prizewinning website, Words Without Borders. Several critical approaches will guide our exploration of contemporary literature: postcolonialism, postmodernism, 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.

1975-011**MW 4:30 PM – 5:45 PM****Ellen Bonds**

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1975-013**TR 8:30 AM – 9:45 AM****August TARRIER****After the Apocalypse**

Do you have Post-Apocalyptic Syndrome Disorder? Given the glut of novels about the apocalypse, the plethora of movies and TV shows about pandemics, the walking dead, thunderdome, and hunger games, are we still invested in the end of the world?

What does our fascination with these stories tell us about our current times and how we see ourselves, our relationships, and our future?

1975-014**TR 10:00 AM – 11:15 AM****Gail Ciociola****The Rebel-Outsider in Literature**

Against an alleged norm of what constitutes good social standing and personal success, American literature evinces a startling number of “outsiders” to those ideals through iconoclastic authors whose literary style or personal philosophy challenges the norms, and/or through fictional and dramatic characters whose “difference” defines textual content. In this course, students will examine writers like Edward Albee, Allen Ginsberg, and Patti Smith for their artistic and private “otherness,” and consider works across multiple genres that feature rebels or outsiders like those, for instance, in *THE LARAMIE PROJECT* (Moises Kaufman), *TOPDOG/UNDERDOG* (Suzan Lori Parks), and *MOTHER NIGHT* (Kurt Vonnegut). As the course also supports the development of thesis-driven writing, students will work toward improving ideas, organization, and edit for college-level essays. Two short papers, one longer one, and two tests are tentatively planned for grade assessment.

1975-015**TR 11:30 – 12:45****Megan Quigley****Journals, Diaries, and Blogs: or Why Am I Writing This?**

“The journal,” the young Susan Sontag wrote, “does not simply record my actual, daily life but rather—in many cases—offers an alternative to it.” This course examines why and how we keep diaries and journals, asking: what is the purpose of journaling? We will read both diaries themselves and works that contextualize and (often) satirize journal-keeping. Readings will include: Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Virginia Woolf’s *A Writer’s Diary*, *Selected Poems* by W. H. Auden, Helen Oyeyemi’s “if a book is locked there’s a good reason for that don’t you think,” “Why I Blog,” by Andrew Sullivan, and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. The course posits that keeping a diary promotes writing and reading even as it explodes the notion of coherent subjectivity. We will read a variety of genres—a play, a diary, poetry, a novel, a short story, and an essay—while we also learn the fundamentals of literary criticism.

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. And, of course, you will keep a journal where “you” will document your responses to it all.

1975-017

TR 1:00 PM – 2:15 PM

Mary Mullen

Coming of Age 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 the 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, William Carleton, Edith Somerville and Martin Ross, James Joyce, and Edna O’Brien; poetry by Seamus Heaney, Eavan Boland, and W. B. Yeats, and the 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 towards the minor/concentration in Irish Studies.

1975-018

TR 2:30 – 3:45

Joseph 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 Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and short stories by Edgar Allan Poe.

1975-019

TR 2:30 AM – 3:45 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.

1975-020

TR 4:00 – 5:15

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1975-100

MW 6:00 – 7:15

Charles Cherry

Confronting Satan in American Literature: From Hawthorne to Hellboy

This seminar is interdisciplinary. We will spend the semester exploring the origins and evolution of the concept of Satan as reflected in a variety of sources. What are some of the myths created to explain evil? To what extent are conceptions of human nature embedded in economic, political, and psychological theories related to Satan? How have some important writers grappled with this problem in their lives and in their works? What does the study of this theme teach us about ourselves?

You will be asked to engage, discuss, and write about a variety of works (fiction and nonfiction) that directly or indirectly deal with the concept of Satan. While drawing on works from other cultures, the particular emphasis will be on America and its changing sense of Satan and evil from the 18th to 21st centuries.

Possible Texts*

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. CoursePack

Melville, Herman. CoursePack

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*

New Testament Gospel of Mark
O'Connor, Flannery. CoursePack
Poe, Edgar Allan. CoursePack
Schindler's List (film)
Silence of the Lambs (film)
Twain, Mark. Mysterious Stranger

1975-HO3**TR 11:30 – 12:45****Catherine Staples****The Wide Sky and the Long Green: Versions of Pastoral**

What do modern day organic farming, bee-keeping, and bird-banding have to do with country life and the concept of the pastoral as seen in poetry, prose, drama, and fiction, ranging from Virgil, Wordsworth, and Thoreau to Frost, Heaney, and Frazier? Is the desire to live and work deliberately and simply in the natural world an idealized notion or is it full of harsh realities and rural truths? Is it both? What is the nature of contentment? The course relies on primary texts and invites close reading of these texts through a variety of writing forms. Our field trips to Rushton Farm will be occasions for writing, for deepening the semester-long inquiry into pastoral traditions. As we tour Rushton farm, we might begin to see the practical applications of Virgil's two-thousand-year-old advice about planting, harvesting, and animal husbandry in the *Georgics*. With a warbler or saw-whet owl banding session, we'll get a glimpse of something Frost so often explores: the intimacy between the human and the wild. The works we will read include Virgil's *The Georgics*, poetry by Wordsworth, Heaney, Frost, Fallon, Kumin, and Shipley; Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, and essays by Thoreau, Dillard, Berry, and Beston.