

ENGLISH 1975

Course Descriptions *Spring 2026*

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

Cathy Velez

An Existential Journey

The concepts of man's struggle to find justice in a world of injustice and his need to search for self are addressed in *The Stranger*, the 20th century work of Albert Camus. In Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, the conception of an afterlife is explored, questioning the existence of hell and its impact on the human mind. In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the relationship of man to a superior being is addressed while underscoring the need to believe. The course is interdisciplinary and while focusing on the literary experience will delve into the areas of philosophy, theology, sociology, and psychology. It is a writing intensive course. In this course you'll improve your writing and critical thinking skills by reading, discussing, and writing about literature. You will also gain confidence and pleasure in your reactions to literature and related arts. You'll give close readings to selections of fiction, poetry, drama, and memoir and respond to them in class discussions, formal papers, and informal writing. To enhance the coherence and interdisciplinary nature of the course, we will focus on the explosion of literature created by American, Irish, British, and French writers living in Paris between WWI and the Great Depression: the so-called Lost Generation. We will examine how the artistic, financial, and social freedoms of this milieu led to creative surges not only in literature but also in art and music. We will visit the art museum to see literary innovations mirrored in art. To widen our perspective of literary modernism, we may also read works from contrasting historical periods.

1975-003**MWF 8:30 AM - 9:20 AM**

Karen Graziano

Law and Modern Lit*“In front of the law there is a doorkeeper.” – Franz Kafka, *The Trial***“We all have a responsibility to create a just society.” – Bryan Stevenson**“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, how it prompts its readers to question the purpose, application, and impact of the law, and how it can inspire or galvanize individuals to work with the law in order to shape or change it.

*This course counts toward the minor in Legal Studies.***1975-004****MWF 8:30 AM - 9:20 AM**

Molly Young

Seeking the Sacred

This course will focus on writers who put the search for sacred meaning at the center of their writing. How do they use the medium of writing to locate new sources of truth and beauty, unconditional love and morality? Put simply: what does it mean to seek the sacred? Literary history is full of such seekers, and in this course, we’ll be reading some of the most fascinating ones, from the poet Gwendolyn Brooks to the fiction writer Claire Keegan.

1975-005**MWF 9:35 AM - 10:25 AM**

Robert Duggan

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1975-006**MWF 9:35 AM - 10:25 AM**

Cathy Velez

An Existential Journey

The concepts of man's struggle to find justice in a world of injustice and his need to search for self are addressed in *The Stranger*, the 20th century work of Albert Camus. In Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, the conception of an afterlife is explored, questioning the existence of hell and its impact on the human mind. In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the relationship of man to a superior being is addressed while underscoring the need to believe. The course is interdisciplinary and while focusing on the literary experience will delve into the areas of philosophy, theology, sociology, and psychology. It is a writing intensive course. In this course you'll improve your writing and critical thinking skills by reading, discussing, and writing about literature. You will also gain confidence and pleasure in your reactions to literature and related arts. You'll give close readings to selections of fiction, poetry, drama, and memoir and respond to them in class discussions, formal papers, and informal writing. To enhance the coherence and interdisciplinary nature of the course, we will focus on the explosion of literature created by American, Irish, British, and French writers living in Paris between WWI and the Great Depression: the so-called Lost Generation. We will examine how the artistic, financial, and social freedoms of this milieu led to creative surges not only in literature but also in art and music. We will visit the art museum to see literary innovations mirrored in art. To widen our perspective of literary modernism, we may also read works from contrasting historical periods.

1975-007**MWF 9:35 AM - 10:25 AM**

Karen Graziano

Law and Modern Lit

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

“We all have a responsibility to create a just society.” – Bryan Stevenson

***“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, how it prompts its readers to question the purpose, application, and impact of the law, and how it can inspire or galvanize individuals to work with the law in order to shape or change it.

This course counts toward the minor in Legal Studies.

1975-008**MWF 10:40 AM - 11:30 AM**

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. Wells' *The Time Machine*, as well as more contemporary fictions such as M.T. Anderson's *Feed* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

This course counts toward the minor in Sustainability

1975-009**MWF 10:40 AM - 11:30 AM**

Molly Young

Seeking the Sacred

This course will focus on writers who put the search for sacred meaning at the center of their writing. How do they use the medium of writing to locate new sources of truth and beauty, unconditional love and morality? Put simply: what does it mean to seek the sacred? Literary history is full of such seekers, and in this course, we'll be reading some of the most fascinating ones, from the poet Gwendolyn Brooks to the fiction writer Claire Keegan.

1975-010**MWF 11:45 AM - 12:35 PM**

Lara Rutherford-Morrison

Alien Encounters: Science Fiction and the Other

Science fiction is full of strange "others": aliens, robots, artificial intelligence, clones, and other non-humans and not-quite-humans. In this course, we will delve into key questions these constructions raise: What can aliens reveal about what it means to be human? What can robots tell us about our own relationship to technology and artificial intelligence? How can humans remade by technology, like cyborgs and clones, show us the borders of humanity? What do depictions of the future have to say about reality in the present?

Throughout the course, we will explore how writers use science fiction "others" to think through issues related to gender, sexuality, race, social class, and other axes of identity. Readings may include poetry, two novels (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*), and short stories by Octavia Butler, Philip K. Dick, Ted Chiang, Isaac Asimov, Ursula K. Le Guin, James Tiptree Jr., Nnedi Okorafor, and others. We will also explore this subject in film, in works including *Alien*, *Ex Machina*, and *Gattaca*.

This course counts toward the Gender & Women Studies major/minor

1975-011**MWF 11:45 AM - 12:35 PM**

Robert O'Neil

Never Forget: Stories of 9/11

This course will utilize a variety of genres to explore the many lives impacted, changed, and lost to the terrorist attacks on 9/11. We will read *102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers* by Dwyer and Flynn, *The Only Plane in the Sky: An Oral History of 9/11* by Graff, *Fall and Rise: The Story of 9/11* by Zuckoff, and the novel *Falling Man* by DeLillo. In addition to these readings, we will also utilize film, poetry, art, and excerpts from novels. The events of 9/11 shaped a generation. In anticipation of the 25th anniversary of 9/11, this course ensures their stories are never forgotten.

1975-012**MWF 11:45 AM - 12:35 PM**

Kate Neilsen

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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. Wells' *The Time Machine*, as well as more contemporary fictions such as M.T. Anderson's *Feed* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

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1975-013**MWF 12:50 PM - 1:40 PM**

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1975-014**MWF 12:50 PM - 1:40 PM**

Lara Rutherford-Morrison

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Science fiction is full of strange “others”: aliens, robots, artificial intelligence, clones, and other non-humans and not-quite-humans. In this course, we will delve into key questions these constructions raise: What can aliens reveal about what it means to be human? What can robots tell us about our own relationship to technology and

artificial intelligence? How can humans remade by technology, like cyborgs and clones, show us the borders of humanity? What do depictions of the future have to say about reality in the present?

Throughout the course, we will explore how writers use science fiction “others” to think through issues related to gender, sexuality, race, social class, and other axes of identity. Readings may include poetry, two novels (Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*), and short stories by Octavia Butler, Philip K. Dick, Ted Chiang, Isaac Asimov, Ursula K. Le Guin, James Tiptree Jr., Nnedi Okorafor, and others. We will also explore this subject in film, in works including *Alien*, *Ex Machina*, and *Gattaca*.

This course counts toward the Gender & Women Studies major/minor

1975-015

MW 1:55 PM - 3:10 PM

Lora Novak

Saints & Sinners

The world conspires to convince us that everything and everyone is either good or bad, right or wrong, innocent or guilty, saintly or sinful. Of course, living shows us otherwise: it is not that simple. We can turn to good literature for a more accurate representation of gray areas and complexity. In this class, we will read works that explore how authors represent bad and good and then complicate it. We will also consider related matters. For example, when is it okay for a writer to use ugly language or to write in the voice of a culpable character? How might books make us aware of our own selves as innocent or complicit? This is primarily a discussion class in which students will write both creative and critical responses to what we read and receive peer and instructor feedback on their writing.

1975-016

MW 1:55 PM - 3:10 PM

Kimberly Takahata

Race and Ethnicity in American Literature

This class asks: how does American literature give voice to various experiences of race and ethnicity, and conversely, how can literature shape our understanding of what race and ethnicity can mean in America? We will explore how authors undertake different choices and possibilities by examining different writing forms, with each text representing an individual experience rather than a collective view. By the end of the semester, we will investigate how authors use poetry, a novel, and a memoir to present their own understandings of race and ethnicity in American literature. Consequently, while this course does not present a comprehensive survey, it asks us to critique systems of racism, colonization, and oppression while exploring how writers create community, find joy, and imagine otherwise.

This course counts toward the Peace & Justice major/minor

1975-017

MW 3:20 PM - 4:35 PM

Lora Novak

Saints & Sinners

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might books make us aware of our own selves as innocent or complicit? This is primarily a discussion class in which students will write both creative and critical responses to what we read and receive peer and instructor feedback on their writing.

1975-018**MW 3:20 PM - 4:35 PM**

Mary Ellen Fattori

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.

1975-019**MW 4:45 PM - 6:00 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**MW 4:45 PM - 6:00 PM**

Mary Ellen Fattori

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.

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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.

1975-021**TR 8:30 AM - 9:45 AM**

Von Wise

Genre & Hybrid Forms

What is genre? At a distance, it's easy to recognize familiar categories and the texts that belong to them, but the closer we look, the fuzzier the boundaries become. We will examine texts that both exist within those blurred lines and challenge familiar categories all together. Students will read a mixture of poetry, drama, fiction, non-fiction, and, of course, everything in between. By considering works that work against easy categorization, we will see texts anew and reconsider the boundless possibilities that exist for creative expression in order to better understand creativity and even to find comfort in uncertainty.

1975-022**TR 8:30 AM - 9:45 AM**

Katherine Karlin

The Immigrant Experience

This course will explore fiction, poetry and nonfiction that describes various immigrant experiences in the United States. We will also pay special attention to how immigration shaped the contours of metropolitan Philadelphia.

1975-023**TR 11:30 AM - 12:45 PM**

Michael Dowdy

Work and Play in Latinx Literature

This writing-intensive, discussion-based seminar studies Latinx literature and culture through the lenses of the U.S.'s obsessions with working and playing. How have Latina/o/x poets, writers, and artists been seduced and repelled by the “American Dream,” where sweat equity is understood as the means to achieve the so-called “good life”? We will pay special attention to how sports make haunting cameo appearances in Latinx texts, where the oppositions between work and play break down and alienating terms like “illegal” are transformed into clapbacks against injustice. Requirements include participation and formal and informal writings.

1975-024**TR 10:00 AM - 11:15 AM**

Von Wise

Genre & Hybrid Forms

What is genre? At a distance, it's easy to recognize familiar categories and the texts that belong to them, but the closer we look, the fuzzier the boundaries become. We will examine texts that both exist within those blurred lines and challenge familiar categories all together. Students will read a mixture of poetry, drama, fiction, non-fiction, and, of course, everything in between. By considering works that work against easy categorization, we will see texts anew and reconsider the boundless possibilities that exist for creative expression in order to better understand creativity and even to find comfort in uncertainty.

1975-025**TR 10:00 AM - 11:15 AM**

Katherine Karlin

The Immigrant Experience

This course will explore fiction, poetry and nonfiction that describes various immigrant experiences in the United States. We will also pay special attention to how immigration shaped the contours of metropolitan Philadelphia.

1975-026**TR 1:00 PM - 2:15 PM**

Michelle Filling-Brown

Bodies of Literature

In this course we will examine literature that contributes to the ethos of the field of Women's Studies. We will use feminist theory as a lens to understand critical problems facing women throughout American history. This course will survey many women's studies issues including work, sexuality, violence, social and political activism, the media, beauty culture, and gender roles. We will focus on how race, class, and gender form what Patricia Hill Collins terms "a matrix of domination," and take an intersectional feminist approach to analyzing literary texts. We will explore literature and texts from the media to see how this matrix of domination manifests throughout history. This course both studies the body of women's literature and the recurrent images and imaginings of women's bodies and roles.

By examining the tradition of women's writing, deconstructing the pervasive, controlling images of women in the media, and analyzing how women define their experiences through language, we will develop an understanding of how a tradition of women's writing has evolved and how it both reflects and impacts the place of women in society. The course involves critically analyzing diverse texts such as *For Colored Girls*, *The Women of Brewster Place*, and *The Good Body*.

This course counts toward the Gender & Women Studies major/minor

1975-027**TR 1:00 PM - 2:15 PM**

Brooke Hunter

Magical Saints and Sinners

This writing-intensive course will teach you to craft an argumentative essay as we explore how literary and cinematic depictions of magic construct and understand goodness and evil. Notions of sin and sanctity are often

tied to questions of free will. Writings about magic can explore these questions by imagining the supernatural extension of the human will in fantastical ways. Our readings will take us through a variety of different historical understandings of magic from an occult force of nature, to the work of demons, to a topic for high school study. You'll read short stories, novels, plays, and poems as you develop your critical reading and analytical writing skills

1975-028

TR 2:30 PM - 3:45 PM

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 genres, forms, and media? 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.

1975-029

TR 2:30 PM - 3:45 PM

Mary Mullen

Ghostly Matters

This class takes up the sociologist Avery Gordon's claim that haunting produces a "something-to-be-done" by unsettling ordinary life, making the invisible become visible, introducing trouble. We will read ghost stories in order to think about what haunting teaches us about history, culture, social structures, politics, performance, memory, literature. We'll focus on what kinds of knowledge ghosts provide as we think about slavery and its afterlives as well as colonialism in Ireland. And, in the process, we'll think about our own stories of haunting—what we haunt and are haunted by. We'll read Toni Morrison, Dorothy Macardle, Marina Carr and many others. This class is a writing intensive course, and will teach strategies for making interesting, convincing, and unified arguments about literary texts and experiment with forms of creative writing.

This course carries the Irish Studies attribute

1975-030

TR 4:00 PM - 5:15 PM

Rena Potok

Women in Irish Literature & Film

This course will explore the particular experience of being an Irish woman in political, domestic, religious, and social spheres by taking a deep dive into works of 20th and 21st-century Irish literature and film. Our sustained examination of these texts will unpack the many roles that women occupy (and resist) in Irish literature and film: symbol of Ireland; queens, hags, and fairies; incarcerated bodies; bearers of trauma and memory; rebels, migrants, Travelers, and more. The course prioritizes teaching students to become more perceptive readers of literature and to hone critical thinking and writing skills, by crafting a variety of analytical essays and informal reflections.

Our readings will include literary works generated from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland – the two political and geographic spaces that constitute the island of Ireland. Materials will include short stories, poems, and plays by Eavan Boland, Rosaleen McDonagh, Claire Keegan, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, and Melatu Uche Okorie

(among others); and films such as *Float Like a Butterfly*, *The Magdalene Sisters*, *Silent Grace*, and *Wildfire*. These works of literature and film will guide us in a discovery of key topics in the history, memory, and lived experience of Irish women: mythic female figures and modern fairy tales; trauma and memory under colonial and religious authority; incarceration and resistance; family and friendship; migration, exile, and return; Traveler culture; and stories of contemporary Ireland. Woven through these stories are their historic and cultural contexts: British colonialism, the Great Irish Famine, the Troubles, post-conflict Ireland and Northern Ireland, and the Celtic Tiger boom and bust.

In the course of our reading, viewing, discussion, and writing, we will look closely at the relationship between nationalism, feminism, gender, and Irish culture. And we will consider how these works might create new intersections between the fields of Irish studies and gender studies.

This course carries the Irish Studies attribute

This course carries the GWS attribute

1975-H01

TR 4:00 PM - 5:15 PM

Mary Mullen

Ghostly Matters

This class takes up the sociologist Avery Gordon's claim that haunting produces a "something-to-be-done" by unsettling ordinary life, making the invisible become visible, introducing trouble. We will read ghost stories in order to think about what haunting teaches us about history, culture, social structures, politics, performance, memory, literature. We'll focus on what kinds of knowledge ghosts provide as we think about slavery and its afterlives as well as colonialism in Ireland. And, in the process, we'll think about our own stories of haunting—what we haunt and are haunted by. We'll read Toni Morrison, Dorothy Macardle, Marina Carr and many others. This class is a writing intensive course, and will teach strategies for making interesting, convincing, and unified arguments about literary texts and experiment with forms of creative writing.

This course carries the Irish Studies attribute

This is an Honors course