COURSE SYNOPSIS—Fall 2020

195:101:01, 90
Introduction to World Literature—Study of outstanding works of fiction, plays, and poems from European, North and South American, African, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Middle-Eastern parts of the world through a different theme every semester. Focus on questions of culture, class, gender, colonialism, and on the role of translation.

195:120:01,02,03
Global Science Fiction—Intended mainly for 1st- and 2nd-year students, the course presents a selection of novels, short stories, and films from around the globe in the genre of science fiction. We will approach these works as experiments in the narrative imagination of world-making and —unmaking, and for the light they shed on the relation between science and fiction in different global contexts over the past two centuries.

195:135:01,02,03, 90 & 91
Short Fiction—Study of various genres of short fiction, in English translation, by some of the most important writers in world literature. Course themes focus on the city, the nation, migration and exile, colonialism, science fiction, the fantastic, magical realism, horror, mystery, among others.

195:150:90
World Mythology—Story, structure, and meaning in myths of many cultures. Myth as a primary literary phenomenon, with some attention to anthropological and psychological perspectives.

195:203:01
Masterworks of Western Literature—Masterworks of Western Literature presents a chronological series of major works of European literature in a variety of genres. In following the historical evolution of the European tradition, we will pay particular attention to a linked series of fundamental questions: What sort of story does literature tell? What sort of character can be the hero of such a story? What sort of language is needed to tell that story properly?

195:221:01
Introduction to the Literatures of the Middle East—This is a survey course designed to introduce students to the literatures of the region known as the Middle East, from ancient to modern times. The main literary genres we will cover are epic, scripture, belles-lettres, chronicle, essay, the modern novel and short story, the ode and lyric poetry. Documentary films will also be shown during class.

195:232:01
Women Writers of South Asia—This course introduces students to women’s writing in South Asia in the colonial and postcolonial periods, focusing on how South Asian women writers explore issues of identity, violence, labor, and belonging in predominantly male literary traditions. In particular, it considers how poetry, short stories, novels, autobiographies, graphic narratives and films by South Asian women offer unique insight into new meanings of gender, work, and family.

195:244, 90, 91
Introduction to Mythology—Myths of various cultures; their structures and functions in social and especially literary contexts.
Modern Literature of South Asia – Postcolonial Identity and Indian Literature: This class on South Asian literature seeks to explore texts that grapple with diverse forces of colonialism, tradition and modernity over the course of various historical and social movements of the last one hundred years in India. The readings are a combination of Anglophone texts and texts in English translation from regional languages and all the texts highlight different ways in which the society and literature of India has grappled with the question of national identity.

Major French Writers in Translation – Enlightenment Love Letters – The course treats the 18th-century French epistolary novels whose plots employed the circulation of love letters: licit and illicit, romantic and scandalous. We will be reading some of the best known authors of the century, including Diderot, Rousseau, and Laclos, who used the epistolary novel form to further their critiques of cultural insularity, religious hypocrisy, and traditional domesticity.

Major French Writers in Translation – Surrealism: The Twentieth-Century Movement that Changed Everything – This course deals with an aesthetic movement that exerts an international influence even today, in cyberculture and music videos, the visual arts, and literature. We will study surrealist experiments in film, poetry, theater, the novel, and painting.

Italy, City by City – Venice – Taught in English, this course explores the culture of Venice, from its origins to modern days, starting with its geographical configuration, the demographic composition, the foreign communities, the government, the economy, the spice trade, diplomacy and more. We will use literary texts, images of art, and musical pieces. We will read various types of theatrical genres produced over the centuries and view many excerpts of movies involving Venice.

Russia Between Empire and Nation – Over the course of several centuries some idea of imperial dominance has been used to define how Russia has related to its many borderlands and its external neighbors. Our course will try to understand why Russia’s vast territory has inspired pride, confusion, and resentment—sometimes all at once, in the very same people. It will do this by examining how Russian and Russophone literature and art have engaged with Russia’s complicated territorial identity, focusing especially on the last two hundred years.

Latino and Caribbean Studies: Comparative study of Latino and Caribbean cultures by reviewing key definitions of culture, paying attention to the historical and disciplinary development of the term, as well as the key debates on cultural studies in the Humanities.

Introduction to Literary Theory – Designed especially for students of Comparative Literature, the course has two related aims: 1) to examine critically seminal texts which have helped to shape contemporary views of literature, culture and art; 2) to engage in a sustained, interdisciplinary exploration of the question: what is theory? Topics include: formalism, poetics and narrative theory, psychoanalysis, structuralism, poststructuralism, speech act theory, Marxism, sexuality and gender, race, postcolonial studies.

Journey to Hell and Beyond: Dante and Medieval Culture – Dante’s Divine Comedy incorporates philosophy, theology, history, art, mythology, spirituality, mysticism, and theatrics—while giving the account of a journey through the afterworld. The poem reaches out to numerous other cultures in the Mediterranean area and beyond, to create a diverse, rich story, something we might call an “international” epic. Judaism, Islam, Provençal poetry, Scholastic philosophy from Paris, and constant reference to Roman and Greek culture are some of the topics it presents. Students will be required to translate the moral issues raised by the work into contemporary issues.

Stories of Russian Life – In this course we read stories that reflect experiences of Russian life, ranging from a happy childhood on an aristocratic estate to the suffering of a Soviet labor camp. In readings that include a medieval monk’s life and memoirs of the camps, as well as writings by some of Russia’s best known authors, we study the relationship between the individual and the community, between personal life and dramatic historical
events; and between memory and invention. We explores the themes of childhood, first love, emigration, and confinement.

**Big Bang: Literature of Chaos & Order** – Considering how the world began has always also meant speculating how it might end. In recent centuries, increasingly, it has also involved thinking about the position of human beings in a physical and moral universe whose structures can no longer be taken for granted. This course examines the ways a selection of writers and philosophers from the Renaissance to the present have represented dramatic upheavals in the physical universe as analogies for crisis in the realms of history, politics, psychology, science, gender, and the arts.

**Marx, Nietzsche, Freud** – Exploration of the work of three German writers who revolutionized modern philosophy, theology, psychology, aesthetics, social and political science, gender studies, historiography, literature and the arts. We will be reading and discussing a selection of key writings by Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud.

**Issues in Comparative Literature: Holocaust Literature in Translation** - This course examines different ways that people caught up in the Holocaust have told their life stories, or have had their stories told by others, in diaries, memoirs, works of visual art, poetry, graphic novels, documentary and feature films, and video interviews from the immediate postwar years to the early 21st century.

**Issues in Comparative Literature: Japanese Literature in Translation** – The course consists of reading and discussion of Japanese literature from the 7th to the 19th centuries. Our focus will be to develop an understanding of literary texts—including poetry, prose, and illustrated genres—in relation to the social, political, and cultural contexts from which they emerged: the imperial court, Buddhist temples, warrior society, and the urban merchant-class.

**Issues in Comparative Literature: Bollywood** - India is the second most populous country in the world and has a cultural tradition that has evolved over 5,000 years. It is also the world’s largest film-producing nation, releasing over 900 films every year. This course will explore the following questions: What makes Hindi cinema different? How are such a staggering number of films made in India? How do these ‘song and dance’ movies challenge our perceptions of narrative forms? How do Bombay films negotiate the polarities of tradition and modernity? How do they bear the burden of postcoloniality?

**Issues in Comparative Literature: Film Noir** – The course will consider the film noir—the hard-boiled detective thriller. Whether it is seen as a genre (with a specific set of conventions regarding iconography, character types, plot motifs, and narrative organization) or a cycle of films (marked by a distinctive nocturnal visual style and a thematics of chaos and cynicism), the single defining constant in the film noir is the female character, the femme fatale. The noir woman is encoded as threatening, dangerous and even deadly to the hero, no matter what specific action is developed in the narrative. We will view such classic film noirs as *Double Indemnity*, *Gilda*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Mildred Pierce*, and *Lady from Shanghai* (among others) from the triple perspective of relations of gender, power, and sexuality.

**Issues in Comparative Literature: Dream Factories: Cinema and the Oneiric Imagination** – Almost since its inception, Hollywood has been considered a “Dream Factory,” a striking concept that wed the intangible with the industrial. In this course we will explore the historical, political, economic, and cultural inflections of this phrase. Beginning with the understanding of the “dream” by thinkers such as Freud and Bergson, we trace how the notion of dreaming informed a diverse set of cultural practices, from the “automatic writing” that
inspired the Surrealists to the creation of an industrialized form of collective dreaming in Hollywood.

**Capstone Workshop**—This course is a workshop required of all senior Comparative Literature majors, including those writing honors theses in the program. Its purpose is two-fold: 1) to help Comparative Literature majors reflect on and consolidate their knowledge of the field; and 2) to afford advanced students the opportunity to research, write, and present a 15-page paper that will be the culmination of the work they have completed in the major.