

# COMPARATIVE LITERATURE COURSES, FALL 2023

Undergraduate Program | Rutgers University, New Brunswick

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## INTRODUCTION TO WORLD LITERATURE

01:195:101

**instructors vary**

Study of outstanding works of fiction, plays, and poems from European, North and South American, African, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Middle-Eastern literature through a chosen theme. Focus on questions of culture, class, gender, colonialism, and on the role of translation. [Fulfills Core requirement AHp.](#)

## INTRODUCTION TO SHORT FICTION

01:195:135

**instructors vary**

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. [Fulfills Core requirement AHp.](#)

## BEING HUMAN

01:195:140

**Professor Janet A. Walker**

How do literature and film define what it means to be human? In this course we will explore the representation of human being in European, Asian, and American literary works and films. We will begin by focusing on the relation between human beings and animals, from prehistoric European cave paintings to Chinese and Japanese medieval tales and Kafka's "A Report to an Academy." Then we will analyze how Mary Shelley in her 1818 science fiction novel Frankenstein and Alex Garland in his 2015 film on humans and AIs, Ex Machina, redefine the relationship between creator and creature handed down in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In the third part of the course we will examine Europeans' definition of the human in their encounter with New World peoples from the sixteenth century in works by Las Casas, Montaigne, and Shakespeare—and then the self-definition of the New World Native Americans and African Americans in the twentieth century. Finally we will consider being human in three modern and contemporary situations: translation, disability, and forced labor, reading stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Raymond Carver, and Dostoevsky. By the end of the course students will have developed their skills in close reading and analytical writing as well as honed their sensitivity to the many possible versions of the human as depicted in world literature. [The course satisfies SAS Core requirements Arts and Humanities AHp.](#)

## WORLD MYTHOLOGY

01:195:150

**instructors vary**

Story, structure, and meaning in myths of many cultures. Myth as a primary literary phenomenon, with some attention to anthropological and psychological perspectives.

## LITERATURE ACROSS BORDERS

01:195:201

**Professor Richard Serrano**

This course is an introduction to the field of Comparative Literature, and is **required of all majors and minors**. "Literature Across Borders" illustrates the concept and practice of comparative literature across historical periods, cultures, and genres, and introduces students to the wider CompLit faculty. The theme in Fall 2023 will be **LONGING**. [Course fulfills Core requirements AHp and AHo.](#)

## **MASTERWORKS OF WORLD LITERATURE**

**01:195:204**

**Professor Janet A. Walker**

This course will study major works of world literature from European, Asian, and African traditions from ancient to modern times. Special emphasis will be placed on developing methods of studying literary texts comparatively in their historical and philosophical contexts. Possible reading combinations include Euripides's *Bacchae* and the Confucian *Analects*; classical Sanskrit love poetry, Renaissance Italian love poetry, and classical Urdu love poetry; the road trip in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Matsuo Bashō's *The Narrow Road Through the Back Country*; heroines in Molière's play *The School for Wives*, Dostoevsky's *The Meek One*, and Tagore's *The Broken Nest*; and postcolonial gender issues in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*. Students will develop their skills in close reading and analytical writing as well as hone their sensitivity to the many possible modes of literary expression and what those might teach us about being human. [The course satisfies SAS Core requirements Arts and Humanities AHp and Writing and Communication WCR.](#)

## **TALES OF HORROR**

**Professor Nicola Behrmann**

**01:195:227**

Examination of historical and political context, and psychoanalytical underpinnings, of horror tales in literature and film of the Western tradition from Brothers Grimm to Alfred Hitchcock. Focus on some of the most spellbinding creatures from this tradition: Frankenstein and Dracula, vampires and zombies, Doppelgängers, ghosts, artificial humans, and other figures that continue to haunt the cultural imagination. [Fulfills Core requirements AHp and AHo.](#)

## **UNDERSTANDING FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT**

**01:195:233 | 01:420:230**

**Professor James Swenson**

The French Enlightenment continues to represent a crucial moment in European literary and intellectual history, characterized by systematic rational examination of inherited traditions, the linking of advances in scientific knowledge to social progress, and the formulation of universal (or universalizable) concepts of human rights. "Understanding French Enlightenment" will introduce students to major philosophical and literary works of the period, including Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality*, and Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopedia*. Class discussions will focus on the relevance of Enlightenment ideas in past and present debates about civil society, political institutions, nature, morality, artistic creation, scientific progress, religion, and changing notions of selfhood. Students will have the opportunity to pursue research topics of their own choice by delving into a variety of sources across the semester. All readings will be available in English translation. No knowledge of French is required. [Core Curriculum Learning Goals met by Understanding French Enlightenment are AHp and WCD.](#)

## **ANIMALS & HUMANS**

**01:195:240**

**instructor TBD**

Story, structure, and meaning in myths of many cultures. Myth as a primary literary phenomenon, with some attention to anthropological and psychological perspectives. [Fulfills Core requirement AHp.](#)

## **INTRODUCTION TO MYTHOLOGY**

**01:195:244**

**various instructors**

Myths of various cultures; their structures and functions in social and especially literary contexts. [Fulfills Core requirement AHp.](#)

## **KEEPING IT REAL: LIFE WRITING IN FRANCE FROM 1975 TO THE PRESENT**

**01:195:262 | 01:429:261**

**Professor Carole Allamand**

Social networks have naturalized a practice—talking about oneself—that in fact has a complex history, filled with moral and philosophical debates: Should one do it? And, more recently, can one do it? This doubt has been haunting French autobiography since the mid-1970s, as a strong current in the Humanities questioned the reliability of memory, the immutability of the 'I' who tells of his or her life, and the distinction of fact and fiction. The course will examine how major writers (Georges Perec, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Annie Ernaux), as well as best-selling contemporary authors (Delphine de Vigan, Edouard Louis) have dealt with these issues, and succeeded in renewing a genre once considered either impossible or dead. The texts will be read in translation and discussion will be in English. [Fulfills Core requirement AHp and WCd.](#)

## **A CULTURAL HISTORY OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

**Professor E. Efe**

**01:195:296**

A cultural-critical analysis of the notion of artificial intelligence, particularly as it relates to race, gender, and agency in multicultural and non-Western contexts. The course will critically explore the intellectual history within which our contemporary perceptions of artificial intelligence evolved. The syllabus is organized around the first AI sensation in modern history, namely Wolfgang von Kempelen's chess playing automaton ("The Turk"). We will survey the history of computing and representations of artificial intelligence in fiction, cultural criticism, and film, concluding the course with an analysis of Amazon's Mechanical Turk ("MTurk").

## **INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY THEORY**

**01:195:301**

**Professor Ben Sifuentes-Jauregui**

An examination of theoretical concepts and contexts that constitute and frame contemporary views of literature. Critical analysis of formalist, psychoanalytic, structuralist, poststructuralist, Marxist, and feminist approaches to theory and literature. Structured to familiarize students with recent debates in critical and cultural theory. [Required by CompLit majors and minors.](#) [Fulfills Core requirement AHo.](#)

## **TRAUMA IN LITERATURE**

**Professor Elisabeth Weber (Visiting Professor from UC Santa Barbara)**

**01:195:314 | 01:470:304**

## **STORIES OF RUSSIAN LIFE: MEMORY, INVENTION, EXPERIENCE**

**Professor Emily Van Buskirk**

**01:195:348 | 01:860:348**

In this course we read stories that reflect experiences of life in Russia, ranging from happy childhood on an aristocratic estate (Lev Tolstoy) to the suffering of a Soviet labor camp (Varlam Shalamov, Evgeniia Ginzburg). When writing about their lives in autobiographies, memoirs, essays, diaries, or documentary prose, writers construct a self in the process of producing a text. How do they fashion a text that reflects the self, selecting certain experiences to represent, and omitting others? Where are the boundaries between fact and fiction, and how do they matter? In readings that include a medieval monk's life and memoirs of the camps, as well as texts by some of Russia's best known authors (Fyodor Dostoevsky, Vladimir Nabokov, and others), we study the relationship between the individual and community, personal life and dramatic historical events, memory and invention; we explore the themes of childhood, first love, emigration, confinement, terror. We compare Russian non-fictions to fictional stories, in order to better understand methods of artistic construction and interpretation. All readings and discussions are in English. There are no prerequisites. [Fulfills Core requirements AHo,p, WCD.](#)

## LITERATURES OF THE AMERICAS

01:195:351

**Professor Jeffrey Lawrence**

This course offers a survey of contemporary literature from the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean, including several works originally published in Spanish. Our readings will concentrate on recent novels and short stories from the Americas whose imagined geographies traverse the boundaries of nation and region. Authors studied may include Roberto Bolaño, Edwidge Danticat, Cormac McCarthy, Sara Uribe, and Samantha Schweblin.

## MARX, NIETZSCHE, FREUD

01:195:374 | 01:470:371 | 01:730:344

**Professor Nicholas Rennie**

Exploration of the work of three German-language 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. Along with these we'll examine a sampling of texts that were important for their work, and writings that later both reflected their influence and drew their ideas in new directions. In English. No prerequisites. **Fulfills Core requirements AHo and HST.**

**Required Texts:** Freud, *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*; Marx and Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*; Nietzsche, *The Nietzsche Reader*.

### \*1-credit module "The Language of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud" 01:991:121:E1

Students who are currently enrolled in or have already successfully completed "Marx, Nietzsche, Freud" and who have completed Introductory German 101 or the equivalent, or who have Prof. Rennie's permission, are encouraged to enroll in the 1-credit companion module "The Language of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud" 01:991:121:E1, which will focus on the original German-language concepts and formulations in select passages relevant to the principal themes of the main course "Marx, Nietzsche, Freud." Attention will be given to issues of translation as these influence — and historically have influenced — the understanding of these writers and their thought. Students who are unsure of their language placement or eligibility should e-mail Prof. Rennie at [nicholas.rennie@rutgers.edu](mailto:nicholas.rennie@rutgers.edu) (please include your 9-digit Rutgers ID). The classes themselves are taught in English, but students must have elementary ability to navigate texts in German – with help, of course, from their dictionary and their instructor.

## NABOKOV

01:195:397 | 01:860:340 | 01:358:363

**Professor Pavel Khazanov**

Moralism and perversion. Games with truth. Measpirited narrators, unreliable victims, titillated readers. And perhaps the most impressive trick— to become a famous author writing in two different languages, in two separate literary traditions. Our course will examine the works of the Russian and American writer Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), starting with his greatest, most scandalous success, the novel *Lolita*, and then working backwards and forwards, first to groundbreaking Russian short stories and novels like *The Defense*, and then to American creations, such as *Pnin* and *Pale Fire*, among others. Through this circular motion, we will try to make sense of the transnational, epochal forces that shaped this author and his works—such as aesthetic modernism and postmodernism, revolution and emigration, intellectual precarity and controversial mass-market notoriety. And in the midst of all of these forces, we will encounter again and again a central hero—the lyrical, unheroic and very often not entirely benign uprooted intellectual, a peculiar symbol of the twentieth century, its grand truths, and its catastrophic fictions. No prerequisites; all readings and discussions in English.

## YUKIO MISHIMA: HIS FICTIONS AND GLOBAL LITERARY LEGACY

**Professor Jerry Piven**

01:195:471

Yukio Mishima is one of Japan's most infamous, shocking, enigmatic authors. An elegant literary stylist, Mishima wrote graceful prose while disturbing readers with bizarre scenes of homoerotic fantasy and murder. He wrote of

sexual obsession, arson, slaughter, and suicide. His work is suffused with ruminations on death, violence, misogyny, and the eroticization of violation. Mishima's later work becomes hypernationalistic, asking readers who would hurl themselves into death for the Emperor. Mishima glorified an erotic death, and finally ended his life in an act of seppuku. His writing still unnerves and perplexes us. This course will thus explore these themes in his fiction and essays, finally delving into the global legacy of an astoundingly radical artist.

**Required Texts:** *Confessions of a Mask*; *Death in Midsummer*; *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*; *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*; *Beautiful Star*; *Sun and Steel*; わが友ヒットラー.

## **DOSTOEVSKY AND THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV**

**Professor Chloë Kitzinger**

**01:195:480 | 01:860:488**

The Brothers Karamazov (1879-80), Fyodor Dostoevsky's final novel, is a classic of world literature. It also crystallized a set of ideas about Russian national identity that continue to shape the propaganda surrounding Russia's brutal war of aggression in Ukraine. In this course, we will read *The Brothers Karamazov* with close attention to its narrative and thematic structure, exploring both the hard philosophical, religious, and aesthetic questions the novel asks and the intractable political problems with which it presents us as readers now. We will place the novel in context by reading selections from Dostoevsky's earlier fiction and journalism as well as selections from his lifelong "bookshelf," including the Book of Job, excerpts from saints' lives, and works of Friedrich Schiller, Honoré de Balzac, Alexander Pushkin, and Nikolai Gogol. Finally, we will discuss echoes of *The Brothers Karamazov* into the 20th-21st centuries: dialogues with Dostoevsky from writers like Virginia Woolf, Sigmund Freud, Albert Camus, Ralph Ellison, Octavia Butler, and Ursula K. Le Guin, as well as contemporary responses to the novel in light of the ongoing war. All readings and discussion in English; no previous knowledge of Russian literature required. Satisfies learning goals for the Russian and Comparative Literature majors and minors and the Russian Major requirement of a 400-level course.

Sample readings: Dostoevsky, *The Double*, selections from *Notes from a Dead House* and *The Diary of a Writer*, *The Brothers Karamazov*; the Book of Job and the Gospel According to John; Schiller, *The Robbers*; Balzac, excerpts from *Père Goriot*; Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman"; Gogol, "The Portrait"; Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide"; Camus, from *The Rebel*; Ellison, from *The Invisible Man*; Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"; Butler, "The Book of Martha"; Zabuzhko, "No Guilty People in the World?: Reading Russian Literature after Bucha." Major assignments: close reading essay (2-3 pages) and oral presentation of argument, secondary source essay (2-3 pages) and oral presentation of argument, final paper (8-10 pages), and engaged participation.

## **SENIOR CAPSTONE SEMINAR**

**Professor Ben Sifuentes**

**01:195:497**

Open only to seniors in Comparative Literature.

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questions?

please reach out to Undergraduate Program Director, Karen Bishop at [kebishop@rutgers.edu](mailto:kebishop@rutgers.edu)