

LITERATURE SUBJECTS

COURSE 21L SUPPLEMENT TO THE BULLETIN



“It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end.” — Ursula Le Guin

FALL 2021

Jacob Lawrence, *The Library*, 1960, tempera on fiberboard.
Source: Smithsonian American Art Museum



LITERATURE SECTION

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21L FALL 2021 Literature Curriculum
21L Literature Subject Descriptions - Fall 2021

21L	UNITS	GETS CREDIT FOR	SUBJECT TITLE	INSTRUCTOR	DAYS	TIMES	ROOMS
INTRODUCTORY							
21L.000J	3-0-9	H	CI-HW - Same subject as 21W.734J	Writing About Literature	Lutz, M	MW	2:30-4p 14N-325
21L.001	3-0-9	H	CI-H	Foundations of Western Literature: Homer to Dante	Buzard, J.	TR	2:30-4p 14N-112
21L.003	3-0-9	H	CI-H	Voyages [Reading Fiction]	Kelley, W.	MW	9:30-11a 4-253
21L.004 L1	3-0-9	H	CI-H	Reading Poetry	Jackson, N.	MW	11-12:30p 2-103
21L.004 L2	3-0-9	H	CI-H	Reading Poetry	Fuller, M.	TR	7-8:30p 2-103
21L.005	3-0-9	A	CI-H	Introduction to Drama	Alexandre, S.	TR	11-12:30p 56-167
21L.006	3-0-9	H	CI-H	American Literature	Finch, L.	TR	1-2:30p 56-154
21L.007	3-0-9	H	CI-H	East Asian Literature as World Literature [World Literatures]	Denecke, W.	MW	9:30-11a 2-103
21L.010J	3-0-9	H	CI-HW - Same subject as 21W.042J	Writing with Shakespeare	Henderson, D.	TR	3:30-5p 14E 310
21L.011	3-3-6	A	CI-H	Introduction to Film Studies (Lecture)	Brinkema, E.	T	3:30-5p 3-270
21L.011	3-3-6	A	CI-H	Intro to Film Studies (Screening)		M	7-10p 3-270
21L.011	3-3-6	A	CI-H	Intro to Film Studies (Recitation 1)		R	3-4p 1-277
21L.011	3-3-6	A	CI-H	Intro to Film Studies (Recitation 2)		R	4-5p 1-277
21L.014J	3-0-9	H	CI-H - Same subject as 21H.007J	Empire: Introduction to Ancient and Medieval Studies	Frampton, S.	TR	9:30-11a E51-390
21L.015	3-0-9	H	CI-H	Imagining Alternative Worlds [Children's Literature]	Gubar, M.	MW	1-2:30p 4-257
21L.019	3-0-9	H	CI-H	Liars, Cheater, and Thieves [Introduction to European and Latin American Fiction]	Terrones, J.	MW	3:30-5p 2-103
21L.020J	3-0-9	H	CI-H - Same subject as WGS.145J	Globalization: The Good, the Bad, & the In-Between	Resnick, M.	TR	3:00-4:30p 4-257
SAMPLINGS 6-UNITS							
21L.320	2-0-4			DFW@MIT: <i>Infinite Jest</i> [Big Books] (Ends Oct. 15)	Jackson, N.	MW	1-2:30p 66-156
21L.350	2-0-4			The <i>Frankenstein</i> Project [Science and Literature] (Begins Oct. 25)	Jackson, N.	MW	1-2:30p 66-156
INTERMEDIATE							
21L.431	3-0-9	H		Shakespeare on Film & Media	Habinek, L.	TR	1-2:30p 4-253
21L.435	3-3-6	H	Meets with CMS.840	End of the World: Apocalypse in Film and Literature [Literature and Film]	Doyle, C.	MW	3:30-5p 56-191
21L.449	3-0-9	H		American Landscapes, American Selves: Studies in the Ecological Imagination [The Wilds of Literature]	Tapscott, S.	M	7-10p 2-103
21L.456	3-0-9	H		The Hebrew Bible [The Bible: Old Testament]	Lipkowitz, I.	TR	9:30-11a 4-146
21L.460	3-0-9	H		Arthurian Literature	Bahr, A.	MW	11-12:30p 4-253
21L.481J	3-0-9	H	Same subject as WGS.250	Black Lives and Queer Bodies [HIV/AIDS in American Culture]	Terrones, J.	MW	9:30-11a 2-147
21L.489J	3-0-9	H	Same subject as CMS.845	Interactive Narrative	Paradis, J.	W	2-5p 14N-325
21L.501	3-0-9	H		We're All In This Together? [The American Novel]	Alexandre, S.	TR	2:30-4p 4-144
INTERNATIONAL LITERATURES							
21L.607	3-0-3			Greek I (Ends Oct. 15)	Forte, A.	MW	2:30-4p 1-134
21L.608	3-0-3			Greek II (Begins Oct. 25)			1-134
21L.613	2-0-4			Cicero, Life and Letters [Latin Readings] (Ends Oct. 15)	Frampton, S.	TR	1-2:30p 14N-112
21L.614	2-0-4						
21L.636J	3-0-9	H	Same subject as 21G.716	Introduction to Contemporary Hispanic Literature and Film	Terrones, J.	MW	1-2:30p 1-242
SEMINAR							
21L.702	3-0-9	H	CI-M	The Neuro-Novel [Studies in Fiction]	Habinek, L.	TR	9:30-11a 2-103
21L.704	3-0-9	H	CI-M	Walt Whitman Goes Global [Studies in Poetry]	Tapscott, S.	T	7-10p 14N-112
21L.705	3-0-9	H	CI-M	<i>Middlemarch</i> and After (Great Novels by George Eliot and Henry James) [Major Authors]	Buzard, J.	TR	11-12:30p 14N-112
21L.706	3-3-6	H	CI-M/meets with CMS.830 HASS	Genre Unsettled: The Politics of Popular Indigenous Films [Studies in Film]	Doyle, C.	MW	11-12:30p 4-257
21L.707	3-0-9	H	CI-M	Writing American Nature [Problems in Cultural Interpretation]	Kelley, W.	MW	1-2:30p 56-162

Note: Rooms and times subject to change

TIME	Monday/Wednesday					
9:30 AM	21L.003 WK 9:30-11a	21L.007 WD 9:30-11a	21L.481J JT 9:30-11a			
10:00 AM						
10:30 AM						
11:00 AM	21L.004 L1 NJ 11-12:30p	21L.706 CD 11-12:30p				
11:30 AM						
12:00 PM						
12:30 PM						
1:00 PM	21L.015 MG 1-2:30p	21L.320 NJ 1-2:30p Ends Oct. 15	21L.350 NJ 1-2:30p Begins Oct. 25	21L.636J JT 1-2:30p	21L.706 WK 1-2:30p	
1:30 PM						
2:00 PM						
2:30 PM			21L.000 ML 2:30-4p			
3:00 PM						
3:30 PM						
4:00 PM	21L.019 JT 3:30-5p					
4:30 PM						
5:00 PM						
7:00 PM	21L.607 AF 7-8:30p Ends Oct. 15	21L.608 AF 7-8:30p Begins Oct. 25	21L.449 ST M 7-10p	21L.004 L2 MF 7-8:30p	21L.011 EB M 7-10p Screening	21L.433 EB W 7-10p
7:30 PM						
8:00 PM						
8:30 PM						
9:00 PM						
9:30 PM						
TIME	Tuesday/Thursday					
9:30 AM	21L.014J SF 9:30-11a	21L.456 IL 9:30-11a			21L.702 LH 9:30-11a	
10:00 AM						
10:30 AM						
11:00 AM	21L.005 SA 11-12:30p			21L.460 AB 11-12:30p	21L.705 JB 11-12:30p	
11:30 AM						
12:00 PM						
12:30 PM						
1:00 PM	21L.006 LF 1-2:30p			21L.613/614 SF 1-2:30p Ends Oct. 15		
1:30 PM						
2:00 PM						
2:30 PM	21L.001 JB 2:30-4p			21L.501 SA 2:30-4p	21L.489 JP T 2-5p	
3:00 PM						
3:30 PM						
4:00 PM			21L.435 CD 3:30-5p	21L.020 MR 3-4:30p	21L.010 DH 3:30-5p	21L.011 EB R 3-4p Recitation 1 21L.011 EB R 4-5p Recitation 2
4:30 PM						
5:00 PM						
7:00 PM						
7:30 PM						
8:00 PM	21L.704 ST T 7-10p					
8:30 PM						
9:00 PM						
9:30 PM						

INTRODUCTORY

Writing About Literature

21L.000J (H, CI-H)

Same
subject as
21W.734J

MW 2:30-
4:00p

Michael Lutz

14N-325

The word ‘monster’ derives from the Latin verb *monere*, “to show or admonish.” In other words, monsters begin as meaningful creatures--as signs to be read, as warnings. Through intensive weekly reading and writing assignments, this course will look at literature centered on monstrous figures to think about two things; the first: how do monsters like devilish magicians and mad scientists show (or de-monstrate) the fears, anxieties, and problems of specific cultural moments throughout history? The second: what are we to make of the fact that, while monsters are often objects of terror, they are also frequently sympathetic figures, vibrant fictional characters whose complexity seems to protest the fear they are (supposedly) meant to inspire? Indeed, many of the monsters we will cover are, to some readers, the heroes of their stories. By reading literature in genres ranging from 16th century English drama to the 19th century Gothic novel to contemporary American horror fiction, this course will help you to understand literature’s rich, ongoing, and ambivalent tradition of making monsters.

Foundations of Western Literature: Homer to Dante

21L.001 (CI-H)

TR 2:30-
4:00p

James Buzard

14N-112

This course examines foundational literary works from the Ancient Greeks and Romans to Medieval Europe. We’ll consider these works as sources of some very long-lasting traditions in the representation of love, desire, conflict, justice, the quest for knowledge, the scope or limits of human action, and human relations with the divine and animal realms. Works to be considered will most likely include: Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*; Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*; Euripides’s *The Bacchae*; Virgil’s *Aeneid*; and Dante’s *Inferno*.

Reading Fiction

Voyages

21L.003
(H, CI-H)

MW 9:30-
11:00a

Wyn Kelley

4-253

Voyages inspire literary works; fiction often relies upon metaphors of travel and discovery. This class examines the voyage as a mythic idea that shapes literary forms and fantasies, tests social, racial, geographical, and historical boundaries, and reckons with migration and navigating a dangerous world. Readings will consider structural themes of literary voyages and their consequences: for example, the uses of shipwreck (Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*); monsters (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*); journeys out (Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*); and ambiguous return (Stephanie Powell Watts's *No One is Coming to Save Us*, Tommy Orange's *There There*). While attending to broad thematic outlines, we will also observe details, the texture of literary engagement with the world—in the play of language, the liberation of narrative voice, and the remaking of experience in words.

Reading Poetry

21L.004
(H, CI-H)

L1

MW 11:00-
12:30p

Noel
Jackson

2-103

An introduction to poetry in English, chiefly by British and American poets, spanning more than 400 years of literary history. The aim is to demystify “great” poetry and to analyze it collaboratively for insight and pleasure. We will explore Renaissance, eighteenth-century, Romantic, and modernist poetry in some detail. Though the organization of the subject is mostly chronological, our focus will be less on names and dates. We will cultivate skills in careful reading and effective writing. Poets to be read may include William Shakespeare, Sir Philip Sidney, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, and Elizabeth Bishop.

Reading Poetry

21L.004 (H, CI-H)

L2

TR 7:00-
8:30p

Mary Fuller

2-103

How do you read a poem? Many people find poetry “difficult” – sometimes pleasurable and sometimes less so. But within that category of the difficult resides much that is of use and of value to us as readers and human beings. Among the goals of the class we will be developing and practicing some of the skills, habits, and knowledge to approach poetic texts – difficult or otherwise – so that you can judge for yourselves what they mean for you. We’ll take a close look at the nature of evidence that can be used for thinking and talking about poetry: the formal properties of poetic language as well as the use of context. We’ll read a wide variety of poetry from 1900 through the present, with some glances further back, and we will explore a variety of tools and approaches, from the old (memorization, listening, and reading out loud) to the new (digitally enabled visualization and annotation). Most of our reading will be in modern English, so that we can focus on how poets work with its particular properties and affordances, but any knowledge of other languages can be a valuable resource to contribute to our discussion. The last two weeks of the semester will focus on readings chosen and presented by the class.

Introduction to Drama

21L.005 (A, CI-H)

TR 11:00-
12:30p

Sandy
Alexandre

56-167

In her autobiographical play, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (1969), the playwright Lorraine Hansberry wrote: “I think that virtually every human being is dramatically interesting.” In our own lives—through our own verbal and body language—we alternate between deprecating and eagerly embracing what it means to be dramatic: “Oh gosh, he is so dramatic,” we accuse! “Yes, honey! I’m absolutely a drama queen,” we might hear someone proudly profess. “D-rahmuh!” we drawl to diagnose a scandalous story. Drama is everywhere around us asserting itself: provoking us, amusing us, challenging us, prompting us, inspiring us, catching the conscience of Kings even—effectively acting on us in some way or another. By reading plays and watching video recordings of some of them (as well as attending at least one theatrical performance), we will attempt to understand what drama does best and uniquely as a literary genre. Toward the end of the semester, we will also consider the various forms drama can take. Where, for example, do we situate a historical reenactment, a staged protest, a walk down the runway of an underground ballroom, or a flash mob in an Introduction to Drama course? Our encounters may include, but are not limited to, plays by Tennessee Williams, Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, David Henry Hwang, Quiara Alegria Hudes, and Jackie Sibblies Drury.

American Literature

21L.006
(H, CI-H)

TR 1:00-
2:30pm

Laura Finch

56-154

Climate crisis and COVID-19 are a forceful reminder of the entangled lives of everyone and everything on the planet. This class turns to contemporary literature to think through ways of living together that exceed the imagination of Capitalism, an economic system that will only ever put profit before life.

We will think about issues of social justice, such as environmental racism and the use of Indigenous lands for nuclear mining, waste, or weapons testing. We will also think about stories that place non-human characters at their centre (some examples include: mushrooms, a piece of plastic waste at sea, the planet itself). And we will read a range of novels, poems, and short stories that use the imaginative potential of fiction to try and envision mutually sustaining modes of togetherness.

World Literature

East Asian Literature as World Literature

21L.007
(H, CI-H)

MW 9:30-
11:00a

Wiebke
Denecke

2-103

Today we have the luxury of reading more literatures in more languages than ever before in world history. In this course we ask: what can we learn from the great diversity of literatures? In what ways does “literature” look different when viewed through a different lens (such as through the literary heritage of China, Japan, or Korea)? What does poetry written in Chinese characters accomplish that alphabetic poetry cannot? How does Buddhist reincarnation change the way you tell stories and devise novels? Why is Japan the world’s only major literature where female authors dominated certain literary genres as early as the 11th century?

Our selective journey through world literature will take us through some of Asia’s most seminal and thought-provoking texts, including philosophical masters such as Confucius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi; Tang poetry; China’s classical novels *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Journey to the West*; Japan’s female-authored tales and diaries, such as *The Tale of Genji* and *The Pillow Book*; Korea’s classical novel *The Nine Cloud Dream*, and the pansori play *Song of Ch’unhyang*. To enhance your ability to appreciate these rich texts and to speak and write about how they matter to us today, we will also draw in films, venture into creative exercises, and work on a translation project.

Writing with Shakespeare

21L.010[J]
(H, CI-HW)

Same subject as
21W.042J

TR 3:30-5:00p

Diana Henderson

14E-310

William Shakespeare didn't go to college. If he could time-travel like Dr. Who, he would be stunned to find his words on a university syllabus. But he would not be surprised at the way we will be using those words in this class, because the study of rhetoric was essential to all education in his day. We too will focus on communication using words, with Shakespeare as a capacious model and inspiration for dialogue, self-presentation, and writing. By writing 'with' Shakespeare—critically, creatively, in groups, and in a variety of media—you will have ample opportunity to explore the elements and occasions that shape effective, meaningful communication. In addition to famous speeches and sonnets, we will analyze film versions of the comedy *Much Ado About Nothing* and the tragedy *Othello*, and perform dramatic scenes from what is now a 'problem play', *The Merchant of Venice*. We will look at how Shakespeare revises his stories and style, including in the late 'romance,' *A Winter's Tale*, and at how his plays have in turn been reinterpreted across the globe. In the process, we will debate the reasons for Shakespeare's enduring power. Nevertheless, our aim is less to appreciate his works as an end in themselves than to draw on his remarkable drama (including its vocabulary, variety, verve, and verbal command) in order to help you improve your own writing, speaking, analytic thinking, use of resources, and understanding of media today.

Introduction to Film Studies

21L.011
(A, CI-H)

Same subject as
21H.106, 21W.741,
24.912, CMS.150,
WGS.190

Lecture

T 3:30-5:00p
3-270

Screening

M 7:00-10:00p
3-270

Recitation 1

R 3:00-4:00p
1-277

Recitation 2

R 4:00-5:00p
1-277

Films are familiar to you; this course should make them strange again. Introduction to film studies will concentrate on close analysis and criticism. Students will learn the technical vocabulary for analyzing the cinematic narrative, frame, and editing; develop the critical means for turning close analysis into interpretations and comparative readings of films; and explore theoretical issues. We will look beyond the surface pleasures of cinema to ask how films are put together; what choices are made formally, narratively, and politically in the constructions of different types of films; and how films have changed historically and in different production and national contexts. We will study a wide range of works made between 1895 and 2020, including films from the early silent period, documentary and avant-garde films, European art cinema, and contemporary Hollywood fare.

Eugenie Brinkema

Empire: Introduction to Ancient and Medieval Studies

21L.014[J] (H, CI-H)

Same subject as
21H.007J

TR 9:30-
11:00a

Stephanie
Frampton

E51-390

Explores the fascinating history, culture, and society of the ancient and medieval worlds and the different methodologies scholars use to interpret them. Wrestles with big questions about the diversity of life and thought in pre-modern societies, the best ways to study the distant past, and the nature (and limitations) of knowledge about long-ago eras. Considers a wide range of scholarly subjects such as the rise and fall of the Roman empire, the triumph of Christianity and Islam, barbarian invasions and holy wars, courts and castles, philosophy and religion, and the diversity of art, literature, and politics. Ponders different types of evidence, reads across a variety of disciplines, and develops skills to identify continuities and changes in ancient and medieval societies.

Children's Literature Imagining Alternative Worlds

21L.015 (H, CI-H)

MW 1:00-
2:30p

Marah Gubar

4-257

In this course, we will study fantastic fictions that invite readers to immerse themselves in enchanted alternative worlds. Revisiting familiar fantasylands such as Narnia and Middle-Earth, we will also journey through less well-known magical realms created by more contemporary writers such as Ursula Le Guin, Daniel José Older, and Tae Keller. How do authors employ the tools of fiction to craft such convincing alternative worlds? Are these fantasies an escapist solution to the problem of modern disenchantment, or can we tell some other, more complicated story about their emergence and function? And finally, what difference does it make (if any) that these narratives were written for young people?

Since creative writers are themselves astute critics of fantasy, we will take inspiration from Ursula Le Guin, Philip Pullman, Zetta Elliot, and other artists for whom criticism itself constitutes a creative act. Engaging with the form as well as the content of these essays will enable us to discuss how we ourselves can employ metaphorical language, rhythmic prose, and other artistic techniques to enliven our analytical writing.

Introduction to European & Latin American Fiction Liars, Cheaters, & Thieves

21L.019
(CI-H)

MW 3:30-
5:00p

Joaquín
Terrones

2-103

Fiction writers are masters of the art of deception. They lie all the time. It should come as no surprise, then, that some of their most enduring (and sometimes endearing) characters are themselves liars, swindlers, rogues, and criminals. This course will introduce you to European and Latin American fiction through a selection of its most memorable lowlifes. We will examine how novels, short stories, graphic novels, and films use these outsiders and their transgressions to challenge societal norms and structures, particularly economic inequality, patriarchy, colonialism, and racism. Some of the works we will analyze and discuss are the Lazarillo de Tormes, Voltaire's *Candide*, Machado de Assis's *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, Jorge Luis Borges's *A Universal History of Infamy*, Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, and Clarice Lispector's *The Hour of the Star*. Class projects will include the opportunity for students to create—using various media—their own lowlife characters.

Globalization: The Good, the Bad, & the In-Between

21L.020[J]
(H, CI-H)

Same subject as
WGS.145J

TR 3:00-4:30p

Margery
Resnick

4-257

This subject examines the cultural, artistic, social, and political impact of globalization across international borders in an historical context. Novels and short stories as well as case studies on global health, human trafficking, and labor migration illuminate the shaping influence of contemporary globalization on gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Guest lecturers visit class as we examine the impact of globalization on cultural identity, the arts, the politics of language, and the media. How has migration changed notions of cultural and racial hybridity? What can we learn from specific examples of global media and expressive culture including popular music and film? In what ways has globalization affected human rights? Students develop sensitivity to other cultures and the ability to read broadly across national boundaries. Furthermore, the emphasis on the historical context gives students a foundation to continue work in literature, history, and the arts from a global perspective.

SAMPLINGS

Big Books

DFW@MIT: *Infinite Jest*

21L.320
(Ends
Oct. 15th)

MW 1:00-2:30p

Noel
Jackson

66-156

David Foster Wallace's 1996 novel *Infinite Jest* is a "Big Book" in a number of senses. One of the masterpieces of postmodern American fiction, the novel is regularly found on best-of lists for the last quarter or half century. It is a novel of colossal proportions and equally massive ambitions, with a large cast of characters and frequently shifting perspectives and times. *Infinite Jest* is a novel whose maximalism, overwhelming at times, reflects the enormity and chaos of the world it describes. Both clear-eyed and fabulist, probing and problematic, the novel addresses geopolitical conflict, ecological crisis, information overload, postirony, addiction and recovery, and more.

Infinite Jest is placed in a number of settings, but much of its action takes place in the greater Boston area. Some of the local sites DFW describes are now gone, some are imaginary or partly imagined, and many are still around, including some landmarks on the MIT campus. Students will have the opportunity to generate site-specific readings through exploratory trips into the community and/or virtual mapping of the novel.

Science and Literature

The *Frankenstein* Project

21L.350
(Begins
Oct. 25th)

MW 1:00-2:30p

Noel
Jackson

66-156

Mary Shelley's classic tale *Frankenstein* is often called the first science fiction novel. The *Frankenstein* Project will explore from a number of angles one of English literature's best-known and most culturally generative pieces of fiction, the tale of a brilliant scientist with overweening ambition and his misbegotten creation. The daughter of famous literary parents, both renowned philosophers and novelists, Mary Shelley was highly conversant with the intellectual debates of the day. This subject will examine some of the familial, literary, scientific and political contexts of Shelley's novel. Reading *Frankenstein* in its editions of 1818 and 1831, we will also examine some of the many afterlives, adaptations, and remixes of the novel in fiction, film, and digital media, including H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, and Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*.

INTERMEDIATE

Shakespeare on Film & Media

21L.431 (H)

TR 1:00-
2:30p

Lianne
Habinek

4-253

Film and other media adaptations present a powerful artistic, philosophical, political, interpretative tool, to broaden or to focus our experience of a given text. In this course, we will examine adaptations of Shakespeare plays on a global, multicultural, and broad historical scale, emphasizing problems of representations of race, sexuality, and power, both in terms of “authoritative” and experimental adaptations.

Taking into account a rich history of performance, we will explore Shakespeare plays across film and other media forms, both old and new, with an emphasis on cultural and political context. In addition to film adaptations of plays such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, *Coriolanus*, and *Othello*, we will also turn to online hypertext and interactive projects to pose the question of how far a viewer may be implicated in the reception of a given adaptation.

Literature and Film

End of the World: Apocalypse in Film and Literature

21L.435 (H)

Meets with
CMS.840

MW 3:30-
5:00p

Caitlyn Doyle

56-191

The world is ending, or has it already ended? This course examines films and novels that grapple with apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios threatening humankind—scenarios that appear particularly prescient in the wake of a global pandemic and in the midst of an ongoing climate crisis. Comparing the different capacities of film and literature in representing such cataclysms, we will further consider the extent to which artworks can challenge our understanding of our own historical moment and the future it promises. Whether the end of the world takes the form of nuclear disaster, climate crisis, plague, or invasion, these works offer insight into the social, commercial, environmental, and civic structures of society as well as the forces that threaten them. Closely examining films such as *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), *Melancholia* (2011), and *Blood Quantum* (2019) and novels such as *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), *Parable of the Sower* (1993), and *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), we will examine the apocalypse from different cultural and historical perspectives, focusing on the dystopic and utopic possibilities in a world that is suddenly forced to change dramatically.

The Wilds of Literature: American Landscapes, American Selves: Studies in the Ecological Imagination

21L.455 (H)

M 7:00-10:00p

Stephen
Tapscott

2-103

For most North Americans, “Nature” is a place. And a system, interlocking in a space. And a “trace”: we need an historical sense to clarify what is “natural” to us. Nature is a material reality and a field of questioning. It is what our senses register-- and also a body of invented forms, --and a process of making metaphors and futures. It is both an autobiographical condition [where we come from] and an “end” outside ourselves. In American traditions, “nature” is a grounding-place and a promise: a frontier, map, battleground, home, an Emerald Necklace, an Oversoul, and a back-yard.

In this intermediate subject, we consider texts in which the physical environment is a participating element in our histories and social formations and in our individual selves. We read “creation-myths” [from Hopi and Wampanoag and Hebrew traditions], works by 19th century writers [Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Alcott, Douglass, Black Hawk], by writers of the early 20th century [Zora Neale Hurston, Sara Orne Jewett, Robert Frost, Robinson Jeffers] and of the later 20th century [Lauren Savoy, Heid Erdrich, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sherman Alexie, Lucille Clifton, Louise Glück, Camille Dungy]. We’ll consider several patterns of an “American ecological” aesthetic, in cultural theory [F. J. Turner, Leo Marx, Laurence Buell, Annette Kolodny], in painting and photos [Bierstadt, Eakins,]. We’ll wonder whether “Nature” is a Eurocentric or anthropocentric formulation—and consider the continuities [and discontinuities] among “Nature poetry,” “ecopoetics,” and a “Ecological Justice” formulation.

The Bible: The Old Testament The Hebrew Bible

21L456 (H)

TR 9:30-11:00a

Ina Lipkowitz

4-146

Whether you call it the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, or the First Testament, there’s no denying that it’s a complex and fascinating text, written by many people over a vast period of time, yet still displaying an overarching unity. Our purpose in this course is to consider it as both a collection of disparate books and as a unified whole. We will study its three major divisions—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—drawing upon a range of methodologies and the interpretive practices of different traditions. We will pay attention to the Bible’s historical and cultural settings and consider issues resulting from translation. In the final weeks of the course, we will consider the differences between the “Hebrew Bible” and the “Old Testament.” Students will come away from this class with a greater appreciation of the many ways these ancient writings have been both understood and misunderstood.

Arthurian Literature

21L.487(H)

MW 11:00-
12:30p

Arthur Bahr

4-253

As a quasi-historical, quasi-legendary figure of consistently great popularity, King Arthur has been subject to an extraordinary amount of reinvention and rewriting: as a Christian hero and war-leader; as an ineffective king and pathetic cuckold; and as a tragic figure of noble but doomed intentions. As we trace Arthur's evolution and that of principal knights, we will ask what underlies the appeal of this figure whose popularity through the centuries has performed the medieval prophecy that he would be rex quondam et futurus: the once and future king.

HIV/AIDS in American Culture Black Lives and Queer Bodies

21L.481[J] (H)

Same subjects
as WGS.250

MW 9:30-
11:00a

Joaquín
Terrones

2-147

During the first years of the HIV/AIDS crisis, in the eighties and early nineties, activists protested across major cities demanding government action, some of them still hooked up to IV drips and oxygen tanks; alongside them, writers, visual artists, and filmmakers continued creating, many up until their last breath. This course examines the relationship between different forms of cultural expression—from art to activism—during those first fifteen years of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, prior to the advent of highly active antiretroviral therapy. In particular, we will analyze the way in which mainstream narratives about the disease associated it with Blackness and queerness. With a focus on the work of Black queer and trans creators and activists, we will also study how literature, film, and visual art were mobilized against these mainstream narratives in order to effect changes in public consciousness and even policy. Finally, we will discuss the legacy of these cultural responses, particularly as it pertains to communities of color. Some of the works we will analyze include: Samuel Delany's *The Tale of Plagues and Carnival*; Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*; Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*; Sapphire's *Push* and its screen adaptation *Precious*; the films of Marlon Riggs; and the latest season of the television series *Pose*.

The American Novel

We're All In This Together?

21L.501(H)

TR 2:30-4:00p

Sandy
Alexandre

4-144

In this course we will read novels that try to think about storytelling in terms of collective as opposed to individual striving. What do novels that try to veer away from creating or focusing on a singular hero have to suggest about possibilities for building solidarity? How does a writer craft a novel that depends on the characters' interdependence with one another? Do we learn anything (new, different, interesting, or useful) from a novel's attempt to encourage us to unlearn relying solely on one protagonist for readerly pleasure and understanding? What particular novels explore the ways in which this very attempt—while laudable—can fail miserably or even comically? These are just some of the questions we will attempt to answer in reading the following texts: William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930), George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), Edward Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997), Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* (2014), and Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018).

INTERNATIONAL LITERATURES

Greek I

21L.607
(Ends
Oct. 15th)

Introduces rudiments of ancient Greek - the language of Plato, Sophocles, Thucydides, and Euclid, and the basis for that of the New Testament - to students with little or no prior knowledge of the subject. Aimed at laying a foundation to begin reading ancient and/or medieval texts. Greek I and Greek II may be combined (after completion of both) to count as a single HASS-H.

MW 2:30-
4:00p

Alexander
Forte

1-134

Greek II

21L.608
(Begins
Oct. 25th)

Introductory Greek subject for students with some prior knowledge of basic grammar and vocabulary. Intended to refresh and enrich ability to read ancient and/or medieval literary and historical texts. May be taken independently of Greek I with permission of instructor. Greek I and Greek II may be combined (after completion of both) to count as a single HASS-H.

MW 2:30-
4:00p

Alexander
Forte

1-134

Latin Readings & Advanced Latin Readings Cicero, Life and Letters

21L.613
21L.614
(Ends
Oct. 15th)

TR 1:00-
2:30p

Stephanie
Frampton

14N-112

Read Latin literature in the original language! 21L.613 serves as a bridge for students with at least one semester or more of formal Latin training (Latin I/II, high school Latin, or equivalent) between the study of Latin grammar and vocabulary and the reading of Latin authors. 21L.614 offers more of a challenge for advanced readers. They run simultaneously and each may be repeated once for credit. The topic for Fall 2021 will be selections from Cicero's philosophical writings and letters.

Introduction to Contemporary Hispanic Literature and Film

21L.636
(H)

MW 1:00-
2:30p

Joaquín
Terrones

1-242

This course introduces students to the literature and cinema of contemporary Spain and Latin America. By becoming familiar with the historical, political, and cultural settings that shaped these texts and films, we will consider what, if anything, makes them uniquely Hispanic. What links the Old World with the New? How has Spain envisioned its place within Western Europe? How has Latin America defined itself in relationship to its northern neighbor? Some of the authors and filmmakers we will discuss include Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Roberto Bolaño, Luis Buñuel, and Pedro Almodovar. The course is conducted in Spanish, and all reading and writing will be in Spanish.

SEMINAR

Studies in Fiction The Neuro-Novel

21L.702
(H, CI-M)

TR 9:30-
11:00a

Lianne
Habinek

2-103

A literary genre has materialized in the past fifteen years that, as Marco Roth (with some notoriety) puts it, is marked by “the novel of consciousness or the psychological or confessional novel — the novel, at any rate, about the workings of a mind.” This category of narrative documents the workings and misfirings of the mind alongside emerging ideas of a new means of accessing and dramatizing interiority. Works marked as neuro-novels include novels by Ian McEwan, Jonathan Lethem, Mark Haddon, Richard Powers, Rivka Galchen, Haruki Murakami, and John Wray. We will also consider the picture of a currently unmapped but potentially fully knowable brain; what would such a model of the mind do to ideas of agency, selfhood, and even free will? This course will use the aforementioned texts and others alongside films such as *Je T’aime, Je T’aime*; *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*; and *Inside Out*, to explore how fiction considers what is problematic about a direct identification between mind and brain.

Studies in Poetry Walt Whitman Goes Global

21L.704
(H, CI-M)

T 7:00-10:00p

Stephen
Tapscott

14N-112

Late in his middle age, unmarried and childless, Walt Whitman was dismayed to hear that rumors were circulating about his sexuality. In response, he encouraged his friends to spread a counter-rumor: the reason he wasn’t interested in women was that he was still grieving for a lost love from decades earlier. She had been mulatto; they had met in New Orleans, where during the 1840s he had lived for six months. During that time they had had six children together before, tragically, they had been forced to separate. He’d never returned to New Orleans...

In this seminar we won’t spend a lot of time discussing the plausibility of this story of Whitman’s “children.” [Even though it is an interesting exercise in literary reputation-formation in “influence” and in the limitations of biographical-criticism...] The irony is, though, that Whitman did, ultimately, have a lot of progeny: writers and theorists and artists who define themselves as overtly in the “line of Whitman.” [Some eagerly claim continuity, some consciously act out Oedipal or cultural or poetic resistance. Some ideologically reflect on what it means to be influenced by 19th century America’s most famous poet.] Throughout the term, we’ll read through the major works of Whitman’s own long career, stage by stage [his idealistic poems before the Civil War; his compensatory work while he served as a nurse during the War; his conflicted love poems; his later celebrations of 19th-century American expansionism and industrialization.] At each stage we’ll also read work by writers, across several continents and centuries, who admired [or resisted] his model.

Major Authors *Middlemarch* and After (Great Novels by George Eliot and Henry James)

21L.705
(H, CI-M)

This class studies three major works by two classic novelists of the English language. It focuses on a critical decade in the history of the novel: 1870-1880.

TR 11:00-
12:30p

James
Buzard

14N-112

We'll begin with one of the greatest novels of them all: George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72), a masterpiece of fictional realism depicting the intricate webs of connection binding people together in community and history. Next we'll examine Eliot's subsequent (and last) novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1874-76), which pushes the boundaries of realism, exploring territory hitherto uncharted by this type of fiction. Last we'll take up Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880), a novel that rewrites the basic plot of *Deronda* in attempt to set the novel genre on a different course – toward Modernism, with its explorations in psychology (“stream of consciousness”) and formal experimentation.

Student work will involve frequent short response papers on readings, a brief oral report or two, and a creative project at the semester's end.

Studies in Film Genre Unsettled: The Politics of Popular Indigenous Films

21L.706
(H, CI-M)

Meets with
CMS.830

MW 11:00-
12:30p

Caitlyn
Doyle

4-257

This course explores the internationally popular musicals, Westerns, police procedurals, horror and comedy films being produced by a new generation of Indigenous filmmakers. These directors have shifted away from the activist-based documentaries and politically committed narrative films for which Indigenous cinemas have become globally recognized, but their films are far from a-political. From Turtle Island (Canada & the United States) to Aotearoa (New Zealand), Indigenous directors have begun to unsettle the conventions of genres and the expectations regarding Indigenous aesthetic and political commitments alike. From reconciliation to indebtedness, from migration to climate change, these films grapple with pressing issues of our time, but decline to propose solutions from within the institutional, discursive, and political contexts to which they directly respond. Films examined will include: *Bran Nue Dae*, by Rachel Perkins (Arrernte and Kalkadoon), *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, by Taika Waititi (Māori), *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, by Jeff Barnaby (Mi'kmaq), and *Maliglutit*, by Zacharias Kunuk (Inuk).

Problems in Cultural Interpretation

Writing American Nature

21L.707
(H, CI-M)

MW 1:00-
2:30pm

Wyn Kelley

56-162

The image of early “America” as a pastoral garden in the wilderness has proven durable yet, given developments in environmental science, history, and ecocriticism - complicated and difficult to sustain. This class examines the history and literature of early US attempts at managing, even comprehending, its natural resources. Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* frames our study of the long history of Native American and African land use that was labeled witchcraft by authors like Mary Rowlandson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and, more obliquely, Frederick Douglass. Ideas growing out of European natural history and based in observation, collecting, and taxonomy pitted Louis Agassiz against Charles Darwin and inspired Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville. Scientific methods drawing on botany and herbalism underwrote radical thinking in Harriet Beecher Stowe, Emily Dickinson, and Sarah Orne Jewett. As understanding of the deep historical roots of human impact on global environments emerges in the twenty-first century, these authors’ attempts to grapple with environmental challenges for which they were poorly prepared become newly relevant. Readings in a wide range of literary, historical, and scientific texts will allow students to assemble a critical archive of resources for rethinking US nature writing in the Anthropocene.

LIT TEA

WHETHER IT'S
DIGITAL LIT TEA
ON ZOOM OR IN
14N/14E WITH
THE BEST
SNACKS & TEAS,
JOIN LIT@MIT
FOR LIT TEA ON
MONDAYS!



Literature

L I T @ M I T

CONCENTRATION

Students come to Literature to fulfill their Concentrations for many reasons. Some love to read great books, plays, or poems, or want to explore film and media studies. Some wish to hone their skills in thinking and writing about literary questions. Others enjoy participating in lively discussion in small classes. Many have favorite authors or periods they want to know better.

Concentrations may be organized by genre (poetry, drama, fiction, film), historical period and/or national literature (Renaissance, nineteenth-century British and American literatures, modern American literature), subject of study (popular culture, media studies, literature and aesthetic theory), or theme (race and imperialism, literature and the city, etc.).

MINOR

A Literature Minor lays the foundation for advanced study by enhancing the student's appreciation of major narrative, poetic and dramatic texts in relation to the cultures that produced them. In addition, it allows the student to develop a familiarity with interdisciplinary approaches, and encourages engagement with film and newer media.

The Literature Minor is designed to allow a student to make a smooth transition from a prior Concentration in Literature, as well as to progress smoothly towards a Major in Literature (should the student so desire).

MAJOR

Majoring in Literature at MIT combines a broad coverage of a range of different literary and cultural fields with the in-depth exploration of particular domains. To ensure coverage, students organize their restricted electives in Literature according to one of two rubrics: Historical Periods or Thematic Complexes. More sustained exploration of specific domains is achieved by taking Seminars in areas of interest. In addition, students contemplating graduate work in Literature or a related field are encouraged to consider completing a Literature Thesis.

Students considering majoring in Literature should first see our Undergraduate Academic Administrator to declare interest and to arrange a Major Advisor.