

AS.300 (COMPARATIVE THOUGHT AND LITERATURE)

Courses

AS.300.102. Great Minds. 3 Credits.

This course offers an introductory survey of foundational authors of modern philosophy and moral and political thought whose ideas continue to influence contemporary problems and debates. The course is taught in lectures and seminar discussions. Authors studied include Plato, René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Virginia Woolf, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Iris Murdoch, James Baldwin, Cora Diamond, Judith Butler, Kwame A. Appiah and others.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Citizens and Society (FA4), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Engagement with Society (FA4)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.209. Dilemmas. 3 Credits.

In Justine Triet's *Anatomy of a Fall* (2023), a woman is tried for murdering her husband. In the myth of *Antigone*, a young woman is torn between the obligation to obey the law and the necessity to resist. Which way will she embrace? In Yorgos Lanthimos' *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, a heart surgeon must sacrifice a member of his family to compensate for mishandling an operation as he was drunk. Is it just to demand a life for a life? Fiction constitutes an inexhaustible source of alternative worlds and experiences that theoretical reasoning fails to address. That is, fictions often present us with dilemmas for which there are no clear answers. And yet, we are asked to choose. In this class, we will explore and analyze a variety of extreme situations. What is so tantalizing about fictional dilemmas? Do they teach us something that can last? Together, we will experiment with a variety of critical reading practices that bring us to grapple with our own position as readers, judges, interpreters, and ethical agents who are forced to make impossible choices for which we are nevertheless accountable.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Projects and Methods (FA6)

AS.300.211. Collaboration across the arts: Modernism and beyond. 3 Credits.

Using Daniel Albright's *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (2000) and *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (2014) as guides, this class investigates the idea of collaboration and communication across and between the arts from the late nineteenth century to the present. Albright's book includes the famous dictum: "The great Modernist collaborations all survive as fragments." This class examines and, as possible, reassembles and reassesses these fragments. Among other artistic collaborations, topics will include dialogues between Eric Satie, Pablo Picasso, and Jean Cocteau; Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein; and John Cage and Merce Cunningham; as well as Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*—"Total work of art"—and its implications for artistic interrelationships from his time to now, including its impact on Serge Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, among many others.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3)

AS.300.227. Business Fictions. 3 Credits.

When you are working for a company, how do you distinguish your ideas, actions, and responsibilities from the firms'—if that is even possible? What is corporate culture or a corporate person, and how is it similar or different from any other kind of culture or person? These and related questions inspired and fascinated writers from the nineteenth century through the present. By reading and thinking about short stories, novels, film, a television series, and a play, we will explore these issues and potential resolutions to them. The course especially considers how problems of action, agency, and responsibility become an intriguing challenge for writers of a variety of modern and contemporary fictions of the business world. Texts will include short stories by Herman Melville, Alice Munro, Ann Petry, and John Cheever; novels by Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Lydia Millet; films, plays, and television by Charlie Chaplin, David Mamet, and Dan Harmon (*Community*).

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Citizens and Society (FA4)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3), Engagement with Society (FA4)

AS.300.229. Lu Xun: Literary, Comparative, Philosophical. 3 Credits.

Modern China's foremost writer and intellectual Lu Xun (1881–1936) wrote to think, to innovate, to fight, and, ultimately, to transform. What and how did he write as he confronted a radically changing world in early-twentieth-century China, and what can we learn from his works, as we once again face an uncertain world? This course introduces students to fundamental methods of textual analysis by exploring the contemporary significance of Lu Xun's writings—short stories, poems, "miscellaneous essays"—through three distinct approaches: literary, comparative, and philosophical. Our investigation will revolve around questions such as: How did he expand what written language was capable of doing? How did he engage with world literature (from Europe, Russia, and beyond), and how have his works been read and adapted by writers in East Asia? How can his works be understood in a broader context of the global spread of Enlightenment thought and the discontents it caused? This course is open to any student interested in Lu Xun's works and their transnational significance, and satisfies the "text-based" course requirement for the minor in Comparative Thought and Literature. All readings are in English.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Citizens and Society (FA4)

AS.300.300. Honors Seminar. 3 Credits.

The Honors Seminar is a mandatory component of the Honors Program in Humanities, which offers qualified undergraduates the possibility of pursuing an independent research project in their Junior and Senior years in any humanistic discipline or combination of disciplines: intellectual history, comparative literature, philosophy, critical theory, psychoanalysis, religion, film, etc., as well as points of intersection between the arts and the sciences. Sophomores who plan to study abroad in their Junior year should also consider applying to the Program. In the 2021-2022 academic year, the Seminar will focus on a close reading of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and associated texts by Plato, Montaigne, Heidegger, Beauvoir, Levi, Gawande, and others on death and dying.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Projects and Methods (FA6)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.307. The Theory of Everything. 3 Credits.

Most physicists and cosmologists still dream of a final theory for the cosmos, the one-inch mathematical formula that will explain... everything. From atoms to galaxies, from morals to daydreams. Is this possible? Can a single theory account for everything we see? Some physicists, such as Don Lincoln and Steven Weinberg believe so. Others, such as Lisa Randall and Carlo Rovelli are skeptical. In this course we will examine arguments for and against the existence of an all-encompassing theory from the point of view of philosophy and cosmology. We will read from a wide variety of sources, including popular science books, scientific articles, and classical texts in the philosophy of science. We will also trace the intellectual history of the notion of an all-encompassing theory in Western philosophy and in physics.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS.300.313. Myself Through the Years: Women and the Personal Essay. 3 Credits.

Virginia Woolf famously called the lives of women "infinitely obscure" seeing as their everyday, domestic existence had long passed unnoticed, undervalued, and unrecorded. The personal essay, a form which inherently values the ordinariness and even triviality of subjective experience, has helped counteract the burdensome "accumulation of unrecorded life," to use Woolf's phrase, and fill in the gaps of women's collective history. In this course we will read a diverse range of personal essays by Sei Shonagon, Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker, Anne Carson, Audre Lorde, Naomi Shihab Nye, Annie Dillard, Joan Didion, and more, tracing a tradition of women's essayism. We will attend to the essay's unique and flexible modalities for portraying subjectivity, exploring universal themes, and experimenting with form. This is a writing intensive course that will incorporate critical and essayistic modes of writing that will teach us first-hand about experimentation with voice, temporality, rhetorical argument, narrative, and the representation of consciousness on the page.

Distribution Area: Humanities

Writing Intensive

AS.300.316. Art and Thought of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Peripheries. 3 Credits.

his class explores the art, culture, and history of the Soviet and post-Soviet peripheries, meaning the non-Russian republics of the USSR, including, among others, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Ukraine, Belarus, the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), and the diverse countries of Central Asia including Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). We will focus on notable examples from different art forms, including literature (fiction and poetry), music (popular, traditional, and classical), film, and the visual arts, as we investigate questions about identity, power, cultural politics, and coloniality and decoloniality from the early twentieth century up to the present. Representative creators include Oksana Zabuzhko (The Museum of Abandoned Secrets), Dato Turashvili (Flight from the USSR), Chinghiz Aitmatov (The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years), Rashid Nugmanov (The Needle), Sergei Parajanov (The Color of Pomegranates), Kira Muratova (The Piano Tuner), Valentyn Sylvestrov, Viktor Tsoi, the Ganelin Trio, and Sainkho Namchylak. We will consider how different Soviet and post-Soviet thinkers from representative traditions wrestled with local definitions of "Sovietness" as well as with varied interpretations of the "post-Soviet." The discourse of socialist realism and its bureaucratic and aesthetic negotiations will be a central topic, but so too will divergences from Moscow-centered artistic and philosophical demands

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Citizens and Society (FA4)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3), Engagement with Society (FA4)

AS.300.322. Lu Xun And His Times: China's Long 20th Century And Beyond. 3 Credits.

The "founding father of modern Chinese literature," Lu Xun (1881-1936) saw himself as a contemporary of writers like Gogol, Ibsen, and Nietzsche in creating his seminal short stories and essays, and likewise, he has been seen by numerous Chinese and Sinophone writers as their contemporary since his lifetime until today. In this course, we will survey Lu Xun's canonical works and their legacies through a comparative approach. What echoes do Lu Xun's works have with the European and Russian texts he engaged with? Why did his works manage to mark a "new origin" of Chinese literature? How were his works repeated, adapted, and appropriated by Chinese and Sinophone writers from the Republican period through the Maoist era to the post-socialist present, even during the Covid-19 pandemic? Are his times obsolete now that China is on the rise? Or, have his times come yet? We will raise these questions to guide our comparative investigation into Lu Xun's works and their legacies in China's long twentieth century and beyond.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.323. Shakespeare and Ibsen. 3 Credits.

William Shakespeare and Henrik Ibsen are the two most frequently performed playwrights in history, and both have been credited with reinventing drama: Shakespeare for the Elizabethan stage and Ibsen for the modern. In this course we will pair plays by each author – those that stand in an explicit relation of influence as well as those that share a significant set of concerns – in order to investigate how each takes up and transform key problems in Updated description: the literary, political, and philosophical tradition for their own historical moment. Plays to be studied by Shakespeare: Hamlet, King Lear, Coriolanus, The Tempest; by Ibsen: Hedda Gabler, The Wild Duck, An Enemy of the People, The Master Builder. As part of the course, we will try to organize at least one excursion to a Shakespeare or Ibsen performance in the Baltimore-D.C. area. This class counts towards the requirement of text-based courses for the minor in comparative thought and literature.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

AS.300.325. Origins of Postwar Japanese and Japanophone Literatures. 3 Credits.

A survey of post-WWII literatures written in Japanese and/or by writers of Japanese backgrounds from the perspective of their engagement with the memories of war and imperialism. Reading novels, short stories, essays, and poems produced by representative postwar Japanese writers, zainichi Korean writers, and overseas Japanophone writers, we will discuss how their struggles with the contested, politicized, and/or un-historicized memories of suffering from war and imperialism shapes literary forms. These works will be coupled with critical writings on key concepts such as pain, trauma, victimhood, responsibility, nationalism, diaspora, and gender. Readings in Hayashi Fumiko, Abe Kobo, Mishima Yukio, Oe Kenzaburo, Murakami Haruki, Lee Yangji, Yu Miri, John Okada, and Kazuo Ishiguro, among others. This course also serves as an introduction to postwar Japanese literature and culture. All readings are in English.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.328. Contemporary Sinophone Literature and Film. 3 Credits.

A survey of contemporary literature and film from the peripheries of the Chinese-speaking world, with a special focus on Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe. We will not only examine literary and filmic works in the contexts of the multilayered histories and contested politics of these locations, but will also reexamine, in light of those works, critical concepts in literary and cultural studies including, but not limited to, form, ideology, hegemony, identity, history, agency, translation, and (post)colonialism. All readings are in English; all films subtitled in English.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Citizens and Society (FA4)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3), Engagement with Society (FA4)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.330. Modern East Asian Literatures Across Boundaries. 3 Credits.

Modern literature in East Asia is as much defined by creation of national boundaries as by their transgressions, negotiations, and reimaginings. This course examines literature originally written in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean in light of contemporary understandings of political, social, and cultural boundary demarcation and crossings. How do experiences of border-crossing create and/or alter literary forms? How, in turn, does literature inscribe, displace, and/or dismantle boundaries? Our readings will include, but not limited to, writings by intra- and trans-regional travelers, exiles, migrants, and settlers; stories from and on contested borderlands and islands (e.g. Manchuria, Okinawa, Jeju); and works and translations by bilingual authors. All readings are provided in English translation.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.334. From Catharsis to Pathosformel: Forms of Affect in Art and Life. 3 Credits.

Catharsis isn't solipsistic. Its power requires an eccentric stimulus, be it Antigone's tragic fate or a cascade of sounds in a Baroque concerto. Occasionally, the experience of catharsis occurs in everyday life, where it is dimmed, while in art it is fulgurant. The course will analyze catharsis in response to selected literary, visual, and musical representation from Aristotle to the present. We will also consider ironic catharsis, anti-catharsis, and the catharsis of comedy. Selected readings: Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*; Lev Vygotsky, *The Psychology of Art*; Stanislaw Lem, *Tales of Pirx the Pilot*; J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*; Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*; Aby Warburg on Pathosformeln. Theater, film, music, art: Jacques Tati, *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*; Janusz Glowacki, *Antigone in New York*; Albrecht Dürer's *Death of Orpheus*; Gustav Mahler, *Second Symphony*; Iwo Arabiski, selected paintings.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

AS.300.335. Contemporary Opera and Literature: Identity, Society, Politics. 3 Credits.

Composer Matthew Aucoin has recently called opera “the impossible art.” Its impossibility feels particularly acute today, as it is buffeted by competing media, genres, and attention. Yet since 2000, opera has never seemed as vibrant, with composers new and old continuing to engage with its “generative impossibilities,” using a variety of literary genres as their sources. This class considers central opera examples from the past twenty years, looking at compositions by such creators as Thomas Adès, Unsuk Chin, Missy Mazzoli, Terence Blanchard, and György Kurtág, among others. These composers and their performers and critics engage with a variety of literary genres including novels, short stories, memoirs, and plays, as well as different media, chief among them film. They address opera’s tangled history and its possible roles in our contemporary world, asking questions about race, class, ideology, the environment, politics, and identity. This class will do the same, asking what opera today is capable of doing that other genres (musical and otherwise) cannot. How can—and does—opera speak to the present moment? The class will spend time developing a theoretical and practical vocabulary for considering both literary texts and how best to listen to, watch, and analyze opera. No musical background is required.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

AS.300.336. Forms of Moral Community: The Contemporary World Novel. 3 Credits.

Literary and philosophical imaginations of moral community in the post-WWII period. Texts include: Coetzee, *Disgrace*; McEwan, *Atonement*; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*; Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*; Roy, *The God of Small Things*; Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*; Mistry, *A Fine Balance*; Morrison, *Beloved*; and essays by Levi, Strawson, Adorno, Murdoch, and Beauvoir on the deep uncertainty over moral community after the crisis of World War II. Close attention to novelistic style and narrative will inform our study of the philosophical questions that animate these works. What does it mean to acknowledge another person’s humanity? Who are the members of a moral community? Why do we hold one another responsible for our actions? How do fundamental moral emotions such as contempt, humiliation, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, and regret reveal the limits of a moral community?

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.337. The Tragic Tradition. 3 Credits.

This course offers a broad survey of tragic drama in the Western tradition, from its origins in ancient Greece to the twentieth century. In lectures and discussion sections, we will study the specific literary features and historical contexts of a range of different works, and trace the continuities and transformations that shape them into a unified tradition. Key questions and themes throughout the semester will include what counts as tragic, the tragedy of social and political conflict, the bearing of tragedy on the meaning and value of life, the antagonistic relation between world and humans, the promises and dangers of tragedy for contemporary culture. Authors to be studied: Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca, Shakespeare, de la Barca, Racine, Goethe, Strindberg, Lorca, and Beckett.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

AS.300.338. Saharan Imaginations. 3 Credits.

Deserts have always mesmerized and fascinated people from different cultures and backgrounds. These arid lands, which are principally known for the scarcity of water resources, excessive heat, and dusty winds, have attracted romantics, dreamers, mystics, spies, ethnographers, explorers, and fearless adventurers as well as social outcasts and brigands. Students in the course will engage with different literary works that are emplotted in different deserts. Drawing on the tension between Saharanism, which we simply define as a universalizing imaginary of deserts, and ecological care (ecocare), whereby is meant the intimate relationship between people and place, the course will allow students to engage in multifaceted analyses of the representations of the desert in scholarship, literature, and cinema. In addition to subverting all sorts of romantic, colonialist, and adventurist approaches to deserts, the students will emerge from the course understanding that desertic spaces are home to myriad forms of mobility, solidarity, and connectivity. Literature depicts people as they go about their quotidian life, producing artifacts, exchanging material and immaterial goods, and forming relationships, thus debunking Saharanism myths of emptiness, death, and danger that have overtaken the image of deserts in popular imagination. Accordingly, by excluding the false assumption of the desert’s death, the course will allow students to think about the environmental and humanistic ethics of nuclear experiments, policing, and extraction that unfold in deserts across the globe.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Citizens and Society (FA4), Democracy (FA4.1)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3), Engagement with Society (FA4)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.341. Transwar Japanese and Japanophone Literatures. 3 Credits.

A survey of Japanese and Japanese-language literatures produced in Japan and its (former) colonies during the “transwar” period, or the several years before and after the end of WWII. This periodization enables us to take into account the shifting boundaries, sovereignties, and identities amid the intensification of Japanese imperialism and in the aftermath of its eventual demise. We aim to pay particular attention to voices marginalized in this political watershed, such as those of Japanese-language writers from colonial Korea and Taiwan, intra-imperial migrants, and radical critics of Japan’s “postwar” regime. Underlying our investigation is the question of whether literature can be an agent of peace and justice when politics fails to deliver it. We will introduce secondary readings by Adorno, Arendt, Moi, Nancy, and Scarry, among others, to help us interrogate this question. All readings are in English.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.345. Narrative Imagination in Philosophy and Literature. 3 Credits.

We are constantly immersed in narratives or, as Roland Barthes said, narrative "is simply there like life itself. . . international, transhistorical, transcultural." As a bridge between experience and language, narrative informs the way we understand history, gender, politics, emotion, cognition and much more. Through reading a series of philosophical and literary texts, this course will provide a systematic understanding of how narratives are composed, how they are experienced, and eventually, how they evolve. The first part of this course will focus on building a foundation in the formal study of narrative, focusing on elements such as genre, plot, character, narrator and reader. We will start with a brief consideration of ancient approaches to literary narrative in Aristotle's Poetics and Plato's Republic. From there, we will engage with a wide range of readings in narrative theory. The second part of the course will focus on critical approaches to narrative, such as gender and narrative, social and political critique of narrative, narratives in the age of artificial intelligence, and conclude with the evolving concept of narrative in the Anthropocene.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS.300.348. Modern Drama. 3 Credits.

This course offers a survey of modern drama, from the mid nineteenth century to the present. We will sample a broad range of dramatic styles and movements in order to uncover the variety of ways theatre has made sense of the human experience over the past two hundred years.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

AS.300.349. Capitalism and Tragedy: from the 18th Century to Climate Change. 3 Credits.

In contemporary discussions of climate change, it is an increasingly prevalent view that capitalism will lead to the destruction of civilization as we know it. The notion that capitalism is hostile to what makes human life worth living, however, is one that stretches back at least to the early eighteenth century. In this class, we will examine key moments in the history of this idea in works of literature, philosophy, and politics, from the birth of bourgeois tragedy in the 1720s, through topics such as gender, imperialism, and economic exploitation, to the prospects of our ecological future today. Authors to be studied will include: Lillo, Balzac, Marx and Engels, Ibsen, Brecht, Heidegger, Achebe, and current politics, philosophy, theology and film on climate change.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

AS.300.351. The Concept of Time. 3 Credits.

The purpose of this course is to ask the most important questions concerning the concept of time. What is time? Does time exist? Is it a fundamental aspect of the cosmos or just an illusion of human perception? Do different cultures, historical periods, or individuals have unique conceptions of time? Or are there universal aspects of time that transcend our differences? Do animals perceive time or is the perception of time a uniquely human phenomenon? Is time travel possible? The history of philosophy, both Western and Eastern, provides an array of different answers to these and other fundamental questions related to time. Additionally, there is much contemporary research on the concept that is entirely original. In the past four decades, time has been a major interdisciplinary theme, often bringing together humanists and scientists fascinated by its paradoxes. The guiding concern of this course will be to diagnose those aspects of time that are most relevant to us. What can we add to what has been written about time? Does our unique place in time—post COVID-19 pandemic, on the verge of a possible Third World War—prepare us in any specific way to examine the concept? The syllabus for the course will juxtapose canonical philosophical texts by some of the greatest thinkers of time with contemporary writings about time. The readings will support a problem-centered approach, exploring different possibilities for understanding the concept of time and different possible solutions for its many difficulties.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS.300.353. Ibsen, Strindberg, Beckett, Brecht. 3 Credits.

This course examines the revolutions produced by four of the most innovative and influential figures in modern drama: Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Bertolt Brecht, and Samuel Beckett. We will look in detail at specific plays and literary programs in order to trace the transformation drama underwent during this period and to probe the claims and ambitions of modern art.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

AS.300.355. Literature and the Idea of Nature. 3 Credits.

This course traces the changing idea of nature and our relation to it. We will study this topic through the close attention to a variety of exemplary literary texts from a range of different historical situations. These include drama, poetry, novels, and essays, as well as topics such as renaissance pastorals, the dream of dominating our environment through mechanical reason, the idealization of nature in romantic poetry, and contemporary confrontations with our planet's sixth mass extinction, climate change, and problems of environmental justice. We will read texts by Tasso, Shakespeare, Defoe, Hölderlin, Leopardi, Mary Shelley, Thoreau, Hemingway, Carson, Albee, as well as writings in current ecological humanities.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

AS.300.372. Children's Literature and the Self: From Fairy Tales to Science-Fiction. 3 Credits.

It was more or less like this. They said: You know, Hela, you're an anxious human being. She: I'm a human being? - Why, of course. You're not a puppy. - She pondered. After a long pause, surprised: I'm a human being. I'm Hela. I'm a girl. I'm Polish. I'm mommy's little daughter, I'm from Warsaw.... What a lot of things I am! (Janusz Korczak, *Ghetto Diary*) This course isn't what you expect. It is not easy. It is not even fun. We will tackle painful topics: orphanhood, loneliness, jealousy, death. You will learn that "Snow White expresses, more perfectly than any other fairy-tale, the idea of melancholy." (Theodor Adorno) We will also deal with parenthood, childhood, justice, and love. We will not watch any Disney films (but we shall analyze some memes). So who is a child? "Children are not people of tomorrow; they are people today," wrote in 1919 Janusz Korczak, pediatrician, pedagogue, and children's author who proposed the idea of inalienable Children's Rights. We will read folk tales from different cultures, discuss authorial fairy tales (Oscar Wilde), fantasy books (Tove Jansson's *Moomintrolls*) and science-fiction (Stanislaw Lem's *Fables for Robots*). We will also investigate the special connection between children and animals (Juan Ramón Jiménez, Margaret Wise Brown). Many iconic children's literature characters, such as J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan, "a Betwixt-and-Between" with a Thrush's Nest for a home, St.-Exupéry's Little Prince, and Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking, are outsiders. All along we will consider how children's literature reflects and shapes ideas of selfhood, from archetypal to post-humanistic ones.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

AS.300.399. Cinema and Philosophy. 3 Credits.

What do films and philosophy have in common? Do films express, with their own means, philosophical problems that are relevant to our experience of ourselves and the world we live in? This term we will study such issues with a particular focus on questions of justice, truth, revenge, forgiveness, hope, hate, and fear.

Prerequisite(s): Students who are enrolled in or have completed

AS.300.699 are not eligible to take AS.300.399.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Citizens and Society (FA4)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3), Engagement with Society (FA4)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.400. Anti-nostalgia in Literature and Film. 3 Credits.

I looked for home elsewhere, and was confident of finding none which I should relish less than the one which I was leaving. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass Caught between Paradise Lost and the Promised Land*, between a yearning for utopia and the menace of dystopia, humans seem prone to nostalgia. Originally defined as a disease, nostalgia in literature has functioned both in space and in time. If Romanticism codified certain forms of literary nostalgia, it only follows that anti-nostalgia comes later, maturing in modern exilic and science-fiction works. Both notions lose their *raison d'être* without the concept of home, be it a place, a temporal home of childhood, or a future home. In the seminar we will analyze modern expressions of anti-nostalgia, from Stendhal's revulsion towards his hometown of Grenoble, through various accounts of precluded return, to a poisoned, mangled return. Disappointment, disillusionment, even horror accompany anti-nostalgia. Shock and trauma pervert a sense of belonging into disgust and fear. While nostalgia is lyrical, anti-nostalgia can be violent and bitter or passive and indifferent. We will study works of prose (Stendhal, Kafka, Bunin, Lem, Lispector, Márai, Bobowski) and poetry (Szymborska, Grynberg) as well as film (Nadav Lapid, Pawel Lozinski). Our secondary sources will include Jean Starobinski, Vladimir Jankélévitch, Jean Baudrillard, and Jora Vaso.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS.300.401. Comparative Late- and Post-Cold War Cultures in China, the USSR, and Beyond. 3 Credits.

This course invites students to explore culture in the late and post-Cold War world from a broader perspective by surveying literature, thought, cinema, art, and music in Chinese and Soviet societies from the 1980s to the present. How did Chinese and Soviet intellectuals reconfigure, reform, and/or reinvent their cultures as they re-embraced the ideas of freedom, democracy, and globalization? How did they grapple with the legacies of their socialist and even pre-socialist pasts as they entered new eras of reforms? How did reform movements adopt different forms and strategies in different parts of the USSR and in the Sinophone world? What kinds of negotiations took place between various centers and peripheries within and around these regions? What can we learn from their cultural endeavors about the promises, contradictions, and discontents of the post-Cold War world, as we witness the rise of a so-called "new cold war" today? In this co-taught course, specialists in Sinophone and Soviet cultures will guide students to read and discuss representative works from the 1980s onward from a comparative perspective. Readings include Cui Jian, Yu Hua, Can Xue, Mo Yan, Yan Lianke, Guo Songfen, and the film *Hibiscus Town*, as well as Viktor Tsoi, Komar and Melamid, Aka Morchiladze, Oksana Zabuzhko, Serhiy Zhadan, and the film *Repentance*. No prerequisites. All course materials will be provided in English translation or with English subtitles.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Citizens and Society (FA4)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3), Engagement with Society (FA4)

AS.300.402. What is a Person? Humans, Corporations, Robots, Trees. 3 Credits.

Knowing who or what counts as a person seems straightforward, until we consider the many kinds of creatures, objects, and artificial beings that have been granted—or demanded or denied—that status. This course explores recent debates on being a person in culture, law, and philosophy. Questions examined will include: Should trees have standing? Can corporations have religious beliefs? Could a robot sign a contract? Materials examined will be wide-ranging, including essays, philosophy, novels, science fiction, television, film. No special background is required. Distribution Area: Humanities
AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

AS.300.405. Illness across Cultures: The Ethics of Pain in Literature and Film. 3 Credits.

Although fundamentally grounded in human existence, illness, pain, and suffering are also cultural experiences that have been depicted in literature and film. The way different cultures relate to and convey pain is embedded in the cosmogonic ideas each society holds about suffering and its outcomes. Reading through different literary texts from different parts of the world and drawing on movies that portray varied experiences of illness, this course aims to help students think about illness and its ramifications in a more transcultural way in order to understand how illness functions across different geographic, climatic, political, and social conditions. The students will also gain a better understanding of the causes of pain, its symptoms, and the different manners in which the authors and filmmakers whose works we will study mediate it to their readers and viewers. From basic traditional potions to hyper-modern medical technologies, illness also mobilizes different types of science across cultures and social classes. By the end of the course, students will develop an ethics of reading for illness not as a monolithic condition but rather as an experience that has unique cultural codes and mechanisms that need to be known to better understand it and probably treat it. Distribution Area: Humanities
AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)

AS.300.409. Modernist Animacies and the Politics of Wonder. 3 Credits.

From dancing skeletons and Mickey Mouse to nuclear-powered robots and Fritz the Cat, modernist visual culture is replete with iconic images of animated existence. This course surveys these diverse forms of "animatedness" emerging within the interconnected histories of special effects film and animated media, focusing on their entanglement with broader modernist practices, movements, and styles between the 1920s and the 1970s. Students will explore the shared origins of animation and special effects in the frame-by-frame manipulations of early trick film, the hopes and fears attached to machine aesthetics in German expressionism, French surrealism, and Soviet avant-garde cinema of the 1920s, and the ambivalent agency expressed by animated bodies in American and Japanese cartoons of the 1920s-40s. They will then assess the continuities and ruptures in the aesthetic and political commitments of interwar and postwar modernisms through case studies from North American, Central and Eastern European, and Japanese animation. By engaging with the diverse forms of "animatedness" and animated media presented in this course, students will develop critical theoretical, historical, and comparative frameworks for navigating the complex entanglements of organic life, emotional states, and machine technologies that increasingly define contemporary existence.

Prerequisite(s): Students may not have taken the AS.300.321 version of this course.

AS Foundational Abilities: Culture and Aesthetics (FA3)

AS.300.412. Indigenous Ecologies: Thinking with Indigenous Worldviews. 3 Credits.

There are almost 500 million Indigenous people in the world. They speak a variety of languages, produce knowledge in their mother tongues, and have deep connections to their lands and cultures. Indigenous people have been at the helm of a Global Indigeneity Movement that has mobilized both scholarship and activism in search of a better world. Despite their best efforts, the rich indigenous cultural production and their worldviews remain confined to very limited circles. Building on the notion of "indigenous ecologies," which spans a wide range of approaches and fields, this course will interrogate some of the salient questions related to literature, translation, extraction, environmentalism, and social justice from the perspective of Indigenous creators. The students will engage with materials produced by Indigenous thinkers, filmmakers, activists, and academic scholars to gain a deeper understanding of indigeneity across cultures and continents as well as the myriad critical ways in which its proponents approach knowledge production, climate change, and many other pressing questions. AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Citizens and Society (FA4)
EN Foundational Abilities: Engagement with Society (FA4)
Writing Intensive

AS.300.418. The Modernist Novel: James, Woolf, and Joyce. 3 Credits.

In this course, we will survey the major works of three of the greatest, most relentless innovators of the twentieth century – Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce – who explored and exploded narrative techniques for depicting what Woolf called the "luminous halo" of life. Distribution Area: Humanities
AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)
EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)
Writing Intensive

AS.300.421. Introduction to Concepts and Problems of Modern Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Critical Theory. 3 Credits.

This seminar aims at providing a survey of some fundamental concepts and problems that shape modern and contemporary debates in philosophy, literary studies, and the humanities at large. This term we will study different notions of existence, language, truth, power, otherness, race, gender, and reality. This course serves as the proseminar in methods and theory for graduate students in Comparative Thought and Literature but is open to students in all departments. Distribution Area: Humanities
AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Citizens and Society (FA4), Ethics and Foundations (FA5)
EN Foundational Abilities: Engagement with Society (FA4)
Writing Intensive

AS.300.429. Literature of the Everyday: The Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel. 3 Credits.

The ordinary, the common, the everyday: why does literary realism consider the experiences of the average individual to be worthy of serious contemplation? In this course, we will closely read a set of novels by Flaubert, Mann, Dickens, Zola, Tolstoy, and Woolf from the period in which the development of realism reaches its climax. These novels transform the conventions for the representation of lives of lower and middle class subjects, revealing such lives as capable of prompting reflection upon deep and serious questions of human existence.

Prerequisite(s): Students who have taken AS.001.116 are not eligible to take AS.300.429.

Distribution Area: Humanities
AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1)

AS.300.501. Independent Study. 1 - 3 Credits.

Undergraduate student having directed work with a specific faculty.

Prerequisite(s): You must request Customized Academic Learning using the Customized Academic Learning form found in Student Self-Service: Registration > Online Forms.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Citizens and Society (FA4), Projects and Methods (FA6)

EN Foundational Abilities: Engagement with Society (FA4)

AS.300.508. Honors Seminar. 3 Credits.

The Honors Seminar is a mandatory component of the Honors Program in Humanities, which offers qualified undergraduates the possibility of pursuing an independent research project in their Junior and Senior years in any humanistic discipline or combination of disciplines: intellectual history, comparative literature, philosophy, critical theory, psychoanalysis, religion, film, etc., as well as points of intersection between the arts and the sciences. Sophomores who plan to study abroad in their Junior year should also consider applying to the Program. In the 2024-2025 academic year, the Seminar will focus on a close reading of Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello and associated texts, which will serve as a point of departure for discussion on the relation between different intellectual disciplines and the idea of the humanities.

Prerequisite(s): You must request Customized Academic Learning using the Customized Academic Learning form found in Student Self-Service: Registration > Online Forms.

AS Foundational Abilities: Writing and Communication (FA1), Culture and Aesthetics (FA3), Projects and Methods (FA6)

EN Foundational Abilities: Creative Expression (FA3)

Writing Intensive

AS.300.603. Emerson, Baldwin, Cavell and the Unfinished Promise of America: Then and Now. 3 Credits.

At a time when racial, economic, social, cultural, religious, and political divides seem more irreconcilable than ever, the very fabric of democracy shows its vulnerability in the United States as well as at the global scale. This seminar aims to study how different thinkers, in different historical periods, addressed the challenges, betrayals, and fragile hope of the American Dream and how their voices resonate with contemporary authors and problems inside and outside the United States.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS.300.604. Cicero and Deleuze. 3 Credits.

A comparative study of the philosophy, rhetoric, and naturalism of Marcus Tullius Cicero (Rome, 106–43 BCE) and Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995). Texts include Cicero's *On Fate* and *On Divination* and Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. The seminar will explore themes pertaining to the environmental humanities and eco-criticism, semiotics, materialisms, stoicism, and the practice of cross- and trans-historical comparison and invention.

AS.300.605. Late Heidegger. 3 Credits.

This course will consist of a close reading of the eleven texts collected in Heidegger's 1954 volume "Vorträge und Aufsätze," including such seminal pieces as "The Question Concerning Technology," "What is Called Thinking?," "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," "... poetically man dwells..." and "Aletheia." Discussions in English; reading knowledge of German required.

AS.300.609. Old/New Questions: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Scholarship in the Humanities. 3 Credits.

The academic profession is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. However, in many cases, graduate training has yet to fully adapt to this shift. Beyond the changing nature of knowledge production, which now requires scholars to engage with fields of expertise that might not have been necessary in the past, institutions—especially liberal arts colleges—are seeking candidates who can work across disciplines to fill gaps in their curricula and foster collaborative scholarly synergies with colleagues in other fields. Moreover, academia is shaped by both continuities and interruptions, and interdisciplinary scholarship, with its venture-friendly approaches, offers a way for students to revisit old questions and explore new ones by endeavoring to explore uncharted paths. Hence, students in the humanities will benefit from both the opportunities and the challenges that come with engagement with interdisciplinary critical approaches. This year-long seminar draws on the experience of a broad pool of interdisciplinary scholars at Johns Hopkins University. It seeks to introduce students to a variety of conceptual, epistemic, experiential, experimental, and methodological approaches that JHU faculty members have used to produce interdisciplinary knowledge. Students will have the opportunity to hear directly from these faculty members, read their work, and discuss the processes and methodological choices they made—or chose not to make—in their interdisciplinary work. By revisiting old questions and raising new ones from an interdisciplinary perspective, this seminar will help incoming graduate students in the humanities develop a deeper appreciation for interdisciplinary scholarship and gain insight into the professional opportunities that can arise from proactively embracing approaches that span multiple disciplines. The students will also have opportunities to collaborate with each other throughout the year.

AS.300.611. Schopenhauer's 'The World as Will and Representation'. 3 Credits.

A close reading of Schopenhauer's magnum opus, one of the most influential works of philosophy in 19th- and 20th-century literature and art.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS.300.613. Modern Drama. 3 Credits.

This course offers a survey of modern drama, from the mid nineteenth century to the present. We will sample a broad range of dramatic styles and movements in order to uncover the variety of ways theatre has made sense of the human experience over the past two hundred years.

AS.300.617. Philosophy and Literature in Either/Or. 3 Credits.

Celebrated and reviled alike, Kierkegaard's 1843 *Either/Or* has been viewed as both the culmination of the Enlightenment project and the birth of existentialism, a playful work of romantic literature and a piece of late-Hegelian philosophy, a vindication of the secular everyday and the articulation of a modern faith in a transcendent God. In this course we read the work closely and in its entirety and pay particular attention to the relation between its philosophical arguments and literary forms of presentation.

AS.300.618. What is a Person? Humans, Corporations, Robots, Trees.. 3 Credits.

Knowing who or what counts as a person seems straightforward, until we consider the many kinds of creatures, objects, and artificial beings that have been granted—or demanded or denied—that status. This course explores recent debates on being a person in culture, law, and philosophy. Questions examined will include: Should trees have standing? Can corporations have religious beliefs? Could a robot sign a contract? Materials examined will be wide-ranging, including essays, philosophy, novels, science fiction, television, film. No special background is required. Distribution Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.623. Modern American Poetry: Engaging Forms. 3 Credits.

A dive into the poetry of Wallace Stevens, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, Muriel Rukeyser, and Langston Hughes (among a few others), exploring American modernism's aesthetic and philosophical preoccupations. How do these texts' formal ambitions engage with philosophical thinking as well as social concerns and political theorizing? Writing assignments: two short presentation papers and either two 10-12 pages papers or one, multi-drafted, 20-25-page seminar paper.

AS.300.628. Introduction to Concepts and Problems of Modern Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Critical Theory. 3 Credits.

This seminar aims at providing a survey of some fundamental concepts and problems that shape modern and contemporary debates in philosophy, literary studies, and the humanities at large. This term we will study different notions of existence, language, truth, power, otherness, race, gender, and reality. This course serves as the proseminar in methods and theory for graduate students in Comparative Thought and Literature but is open to students in all departments.

AS.300.629. Theory, Now and Then: Autonomy, Form, Critique. 3 Credits.

This course explores recent developments and disputes in critical theory in relation to their longer philosophical genealogies. The three topics—autonomy, form, and critique—have been the subject of much recent debate, contention, and new analysis, yet each was also a source of critical and philosophical interest in years past. Our aim will be to make sense of today's exciting and controversial interventions in conversation with earlier theory. "Historical" theory writing will include Poe, Adorno, Benjamin, Lukács, Cavell, R. Williams, Shklovsky, and Jameson; contemporary theory will include Stephen Best, Barbara Fields, Sharon Marcus, Walter Benn Michaels, Sianne Ngai, Nicholas Brown, Rita Felski, Caroline Levine, Mark McGurl, and Toril Moi. Distribution Area: Humanities

AS.300.631. On Literature and Ethics. 3 Credits.

Arguments for the immorality of literature, the morality of literature, and the amorality of literature. Can a literary text be evaluated on ethical grounds, and how? How do literary texts make ethical arguments? What does it mean to read literary texts or do literary criticism in an ethical mode? We will be concerned throughout with the philosophical uses, and abuses, of literary forms. Writing Intensive

AS.300.633. Departmental Seminar. 1 Credit.

Presentations by faculty, students, and invited speakers.

AS.300.634. Contemporary Opera and Literature: Identity, Society, Politics. 3 Credits.

Composer Matthew Aucoin has recently called opera "the impossible art." Its impossibility feels particularly acute today, as it is buffeted by competing media, genres, and attention. Yet since 2000, opera has never seemed as vibrant, with composers new and old continuing to engage with its "generative impossibilities," using a variety of literary genres as their sources. This class considers central opera examples from the past twenty years, looking at compositions by such creators as Thomas Adès, Unsuk Chin, Missy Mazzoli, Terence Blanchard, and György Kurtág, among others. These composers and their performers and critics engage with a variety of literary genres including novels, short stories, memoirs, and plays, as well as different media, chief among them film. They address opera's tangled history and its possible roles in our contemporary world, asking questions about race, class, ideology, the environment, politics, and identity. This class will do the same, asking what opera today is capable of doing that other genres (musical and otherwise) cannot. How can—and does—opera speak to the present moment? The class will spend time developing a theoretical and practical vocabulary for considering both literary texts and how best to listen to, watch, and analyze opera. No musical background is required.

AS.300.635. Foucault's Late Seminars: the Courage of Truth and the Care of the Self. 3 Credits.

In his latest seminars Foucault shifts his attention from power relations and historical scientific paradigms to the study of the history and philosophical, ethical, and political implications of the knowledge and care of the self as well as its relation to truth. In our current context, where speaking of a supposed "post-truth" epoch is commonplace, the analysis of the later works of Foucault provides precious insights in the nature of subjectivity, social and power relations, and the enduring significance of the search for truth regardless of any particular epistemological attempt to define what 'truth really is.'

AS.300.636. Forms of Moral Community: The Contemporary World Novel. 3 Credits.

Literary and philosophical imaginations of moral community in the post-WWII period. Texts include: Coetzee, *Disgrace*; McEwan, *Atonement*; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*; Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*; Roy, *The God of Small Things*; Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*; Mistry, *A Fine Balance*; Morrison, *Beloved*; and essays by Levi, Strawson, Adorno, Murdoch, and Beauvoir on the deep uncertainty over moral community after the crisis of World War II. Close attention to novelistic style and narrative will inform our study of the philosophical questions that animate these works. What does it mean to acknowledge another person's humanity? Who are the members of a moral community? Why do we hold one another responsible for our actions? How do fundamental moral emotions such as contempt, humiliation, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, and regret reveal the limits of a moral community?

AS.300.647. Comparative Methods and Theory: Formalism and Materialism (Graduate Pro-Seminar). 3 Credits.

This pro-seminar provides a brief overview and map of the theoretical and philosophical positions in the major debate, still ongoing, between formalism and materialism. Its aim is both theoretical and historical: to help graduate students understand the range and depth of these positions as well as their development over time, continuing to this day. We will study fundamental philosophical works (Kant, Hegel, Marx, de Beauvoir), classic theoretical texts (Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, Bourdieu), and contemporary variations on these debates (Fish, McGurl, Moi, Pippin), to name a few. The course fulfills the pro-seminar requirements in comparative methods and theory for CTL but is open to all graduate students.

Distribution Area: Humanities

AS.300.802. Independent Study Field Exam. 3 - 9 Credits.

Graduate student having directed work with a specific faculty.

AS.300.803. Dissertation Research. 10 - 20 Credits.

Dissertation research and discussion of progress. Limited to students writing dissertations.

AS.300.804. Dissertation Research. 10 - 20 Credits.

AS.300.805. Literary Pedagogy. 3 - 9 Credits.

Teaching Assistant graduate student

AS.300.810. Directed Readings. 3 Credits.

Directed Readings

AS.300.812. Graduate Research. 3 - 9 Credits.

Graduate Research

AS.300.813. Teaching Assistantship. 3 Credits.

Teaching assistants are required to register for this course. See handbook for details.

AS.300.891. Summer Research. 9 Credits.

Summer Research