

**Comparative Literary Studies Program**  
**Course Descriptions 2017-2018**

**Fall 2017**

**CLS 202 / FRENCH 277: Literature of Existentialism**

**Class Meeting: MW 10am – 10:50am / Disc Sections 9am, 10am, 3pm**

**Instructor: S. Durham**

**Course Description:** This course, taught in English, will serve as an introduction to existentialism, which not only defined the literary, philosophical and political culture for French intellectuals of the post-war period, but also remain indispensable for an understanding of various currents of contemporary literature and culture. We shall begin by discussing the philosophical and literary foundations of existentialism. Then we will examine the moral, social and political questions central to existentialism, as worked out in the fiction, drama, and essays of such authors as Sartre, Beauvoir, Beckett, and Fanon. Finally, we will consider the extent to which post-existentialist thought and culture may be read as a continuation of or as a reaction against existentialism.

---

**CLS 205/ASIAN\_LC 290-22**

**Class Meeting: TuTh 2pm – 3:20pm**

**Instructor: L. Brueck**

**Course Description:** This course will introduce students to the ways in which South Asian (dominantly Indian, but also Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and diasporic) feminist intellectuals, artists, and activists help to shape the global discourse of feminism. After an introduction to the major contours of South Asian feminist discourse and artistic and activist practice, we will pay special attention to modern and contemporary media forms (film, web serials, blogs, journalism etc.) in South Asia that bring a feminist perspective to myriad social issues (gender identity, sexuality, caste, classed labor etc.). Students will also collaborate on critical multimedia media projects of their own.

---

**CLS 279-20/JWSH\_ST 279-20: Modern Jewish Lit in Translation**

**Class Meeting: MWF 11am – 11:50am**

**Instructor: M. Gealy**

**Course Description:** This class will read and discuss selected works of modern Jewish literature in the context of their historical background. We will focus on certain themes and stories in the Bible and in Jewish folklore as well as on particular events and movements in European, American, and Israeli history as a way of better understanding this literature. Though most of this literature dates from the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries up until the present, a study of eighteenth and nineteenth century intellectual and religious currents such as the Enlightenment, Jewish Mysticism, Zionism, and Socialism will help us to understand the literature in its changing historical and social context. Thus while some writers saw modern Jewish literature as a means

of educating the masses to modern secular needs, others saw it as a means of reshaping older forms and religious values, while still others saw it as a means of reflecting timeless humanistic concerns. Among the writers we will read are Sholom Aleichem, I. B. Singer, Anzia Yezierska, Primo Levi, Ida Fink, Ava Schieber, Philip Roth, Amos Oz and Shani Boianjiu.

---

### **CLS 279-21/JWSH\_ST 266/GERMAN 266: Literary Images of the Shtetl**

**Class Meeting: TuTh 3:30pm – 4:50pm**

**Instructor: M. Moseley**

**Course Description:** In collective memory the shtetl (small Jewish town) has become enshrined as the symbolic space par excellence of close-knit, Jewish community in Eastern Europe; it is against the backdrop of this idealized shtetl that the international blockbuster *Fiddler on the Roof* is enacted. The shtetl is the central locus and focus of Modern Yiddish Literature; *Fiddler on the Roof* itself was based on a Sholem Aleichem story. In this seminar we shall explore the spectrum of representations of the shtetl in Yiddish literature from the nineteenth century to the post-Holocaust period. We shall also focus on artistic and photographic depictions of the shtetl: Chagall and Roman Vishniac in particular. The course will include a screening of *Fiddler on the Roof* followed by a discussion of this film based upon a comparison with the text upon which it is based, *Tevye the Milkman*.

---

### **CLS 301/ENGLISH 368: Resisting Interpretation**

**Class Meeting: TuTh 2pm – 3:20pm**

**Instructor: S. Gottlieb**

**Course Description:** Literature always resists -- even as it demands -- interpretation. In certain texts of modern literature, the resistance to interpretation issues into a particularly violent struggle in which points of defiance are difficult to distinguish from moments of defeat. This class will examine some of the literary texts of modernity and the tendency of these texts toward two interpretive gestures or situations: incomprehensible self-closure (and the attendant contraction of a space for self-legitimation) and an equally incomprehensible self-expansiveness (and the exhilarating, scary freedom it entails). We will begin the course with the enigmatic words of resistance repeated by Melville's odd scrivener, Bartleby ("I prefer not to"), and end with the apocalyptic conclusion to Ellison's *Invisible Man* ("Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?").

---

### **CLS 312/ENGLISH 385: Blake's Afterlives: Poetics Beyond the Page**

**Class Meeting: TuTh 12:30pm – 1:50pm**

**Instructor: T. Wolff**

**Course Description:** How did the Romantic poetry and visual art of William Blake come to inspire later artistic misfits and countercultures? How has his example pushed poetics beyond the page? This course explores the unique poetry of Blake alongside its experimental, politically committed, sometimes hallucinogenic afterlives.

Obscure and barely read during his own life, the eccentric Blake might be seen as the prototype of the artistic genius ahead of his or her time, but today we can safely say that his star has risen many times over: in poetry, from the Victorian Pre-Raphaelites, to Walt Whitman, William Butler Yeats, and Allen Ginsburg; and across the arts, from Diane Arbus (in photography) to Jackson Pollack (in painting), Patti Smith (in music), and Kenzaburo Oe (in fiction), Blake's afterlives have proliferated in the 20th century, spanning aesthetic ideologies from the Beat poets to surrealism, abstract expressionism, anti-war art, and punk. Emphasis will be placed on the poetic inventiveness of Blake's mixed-media forms, and his attempts to reinvent the literary object, as we compare his own illuminated poetry and innovative printing techniques with successors, across artistic media. The course is run in parallel with the Block Museum of Art's exhibit, "William Blake and the Age of Aquarius"; a number of our classes and assignments will focus on works displayed and events held in conjunction with this exhibit.

---

### **CLS 312/ITALIAN 370: Calvino's Fantastic World Literature**

**Class Meeting: TuTh 2pm – 3:20pm**

**Instructor: A. Ricciardi**

**Course Description:** Easily the most famous Italian writer of the twentieth century, Italo Calvino's mature, fabulist narratives advanced a cosmopolitan ideal of literature. His creative *oeuvre* opened new worlds because of his taste for literary and ethical adventures and nimble, luminous style. At the beginning of his career, Calvino resisted the appeal of literary realism and neorealism and invented an idiosyncratic new genre of whimsically comic science fiction in *Cosmicomics*. He also was a restless traveler, who wrote extensively about his journeys through the USA, Russia, Japan, etc., and eventually joined the international literary group known as Oulipo, whose members were vocal proponents of the notion of literature as a game. Starting in the 1970s, he became a firm believer in the promise of world literature, which resulted in *Invisible Cities*, Calvino's rewriting of Marco Polo's accounts of his travels through China. In his "hypernovel," *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, Calvino created a sort of imaginary index of world literatures, playfully deploying globe-trotting characters who undertake a worldwide quest through a shifting landscape of literary genres. Finally, in his celebrated Charles Norton Lectures for Harvard University, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, he articulates for his readers the fundamental values of the world literatures that still are to come: lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity. In response, we may well ask: what is the geopolitical map on which Calvino's imaginary explorations unfold? To what extent do Calvino's writings create new possibilities for redefining the very concept of world literature? (*Note:* This class is taught in English.)

---

### **CLS 390-20/ENGLISH 385: Oceanic Studies: Literature, Environment, and History**

**Class Meeting: MW 11am – 12:20pm**

**Instructor: H. Feinsod**

**Course Description:** This course offers an overview to the interdisciplinary field of "oceanic studies," focusing on the great literary, scientific, and cinematic documents of modern seafaring. Writers may include Columbus, Cook, Darwin, Coleridge, Dana, Melville, Conrad, Woolf, O'Neill, Joji, Traven, Mutis, and/or Goldman. How have seas, sailors, ships and their cargoes helped to shape our imagination and understanding of major events and processes of modernity, such as the discovery of the New World, slavery, industrial capitalism, marine

science, the birth of environmental consciousness, and contemporary globalization? What part did seafaring play in the formation of international legal systems, or in epochal events such as the American and Russian Revolutions? How does the rise in contemporary piracy compare to its "golden age" forerunners? How can we discern the history of the "trackless" oceans, and how do we imagine their future now that "90% of everything" crosses an ocean, and the seas are variously described as rising or dying? Our focus in the course will be on writers listed above, but our approach will be radically interdisciplinary, so we will also watch a few films (by Jacques Cousteau, Gillo Pontecorvo and Allen Sekula), and we will read short excerpts from the disciplines of "critical theory" (Heller-Roazen, Foucault, Deleuze, Corbin), labor and economic history (Rediker, Fink, Levinson), and environmental thought (Carson, Alaimo).

---

## **CLS 398: Senior Seminar**

**Class Meeting: W 2pm – 5pm**

**Instructor: T. Wolff**

**Course Description:** This seminar is designed as a forum for the independent development and completion of a substantive scholarly paper in the field of Comparative Literature. The paper must involve either the study of literary texts from different literary traditions or the study of literature in relation to other media, other arts, or other disciplines. To this end, a number of short written assignments will be required, including an abstract, an annotated bibliography (using bibliographical software), and a formal project outline. The bulk of the coursework will comprise the senior paper itself (12-15 pages) and an oral presentation of the project to the class. The latter assignment will serve as a dress-rehearsal for the Senior CLS Colloquium, which will be held at the end of the quarter. The colloquium allows (and requires) all students to present their projects to the entire CLS community, including faculty and graduate students who will be in attendance.