This course offers an opportunity to read deeply into the works of two major American writers, Toni Morrison and Flannery O'Connor. In both fiction and non-fiction, Morrison and O'Connor re-present the United States in the twentieth century as a nation living under a shadow of a curse brought about by its invention and reliance upon violent and dehumanizing codes of racial categorization. Far from the exceptionalist tone one is used to seeing in historical accounts of 20th Century America, Morrison and O'Connor depict a nation still haunted by what William Faulkner once termed those “garrulous outraged baffled ghosts” that stalk through the shadows of the South, a region that has been “dead since 1865.” (Absalom, Absalom!).

In our work this semester, we will lurk in the shadows of what Morrison describes, in her seminal work of literary criticism entitled Playing in the Dark—as “the white literary imagination,” seeking out evidence of the insane and grotesque formulations of blackness that are conjured up consciously and unconsciously in our national literature. As a literary theorist, Morrison is especially attuned to the ways in which a white sense of self depends and even feeds off of its own created notion of blackness, which is always meant to serve and service whiteness’ need to make itself innocuous and innocent. In her critical work, Morrison returns again and again to O’Connor’s fiction finding what she describes as an unusual “honesty and profound perception her understanding of the stranger, the outcast, the Other.”

We will look for constructions of this “other” (and of the many processes by which an other is constructed and projected out) in both Morrison and O’Connor’s fiction. We will read literary critical works by O’Connor that promote a theory of the grotesque in American literature that we will use in our considerations of Morrison’s fiction and non-fiction prose. The other that O’Connor writes of in this context is often given to readers in extreme and sometimes shockingly “not images of the man in the street...[but] images of the man forced out to meet the extremes of his own nature...the result of what our social history has bequeathed to us, and what our literary history forces our writers to attempt.”
Literary studies is currently facing a legitimation crisis, thanks to a sadly depleted language of value that leaves us struggling to find reasons why students should care about Beowulf or Baudelaire. Why is literature worth bothering with?

—Rita Felski, 2014

Though not always consciously, I have been searching for strategies to oppose that [criticism] which assumes that the work of art is essentially a social function or a function of language, amenable to analysis in terms of the currently honorific vocabularies of various sciences.... I propose a mode of criticism more congruous with the sort of literature we admire, a criticism as wary of bureaucratization, as respectful to the mythic and mysterious, as dedicated to a language at once idiosyncratic and humane as, say, Moby Dick or the novels of Kafka.

—Leslie Fiedler, 1950

Moses comes down from Sinai and tells the children of Israel: “Children, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that I bargained him down to 10. The bad news is that adultery is still in.”

—Borsht-Belt Traditional

I invite you to a seminar in exposure, if not immersion and participation. The exposure is to an audacious updating (feminist and queer, Morrisonian and Jamesonian, pan-sensorial and sacramentally alert) of the greatest account ever given of U.S. storytelling, Leslie Fiedler’s Love & Death in the American Novel. For it was Fiedler who first taught us that American narrative is a compulsive restaging (Protestantly energized, Protestantly recaptured) of the interplay among sex, violence, and sanctity, and it is one of the unrecognized achievements of nearly a half-century of canonical revision--under the signs of gender, race, and class--that it re-animates and re-inflects but by no means defangs or escapes Fiedler’s mythography.

By immersion I mean the inhabitation (“slow reading,” if you will) of our neo-canon--in which the reader cultivates her own capture by the text’s knowing, to the point where she is enabled to talk back to the text in its own idiom. I am especially interested in a surprising (shocking, even, given the still-secular avowals of MLA and ASA critique) trajectory of the modern American novel, what we have no choice but to all its temptation to Marian Catholicism, a “dancing in the dark with the Papists” that is nearly ubiquitous yet has remained in the closet of critical disdain and self-denial. After all, what Fiedler observed almost 60+ years ago, that “American literature is distinguished by the number of dangerous and disturbing books in its canon--and American scholarship by its ability to conceal this fact,” is ever more true today. It thus warrants, indeed mandates your help.

To participate, then, is to summon the implications of such immersion and act on the consequent vision of re-emergence. Ideally, it is to contribute to professional praxis at its real cutting edges, beyond the Puritan pedagogy of U.S. Critical Theory, where the impact of visual, sound, and media studies is now being felt in literary studies proper, and where American mythopoetics—its appetite for radiant beauty, its insinuation of fierce wisdom, and its demand for disciplinary-suspicious courage—take command once again.

Our primary reading is to be chosen from:

Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, with “The Minister’s Black Veil”
Herman Melville, Billy Budd, with Ron Hansen, Mariette in Ecstasy
Harold Frederic, The Damnation of Theron Ware
Kate Chopin, The Awakening, with “At Chênière Caminada”
F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, with “Absolution”
Willa Cather, The Professor’s House, with “Coming, Aphrodite!”
Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises, with “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”
William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!
Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God, with Claude McKay, “Jelly Roll”
Complementary readings in theory and criticism, from Fiedler of course, but also from Emerson, Lawrence, Williams, Baym, Berger, Mulvey, Sedgwick, Paglia, Rodriguez, Morrison, Benn Michaels, Butler, Orsi, Fessenden, Simpson, and (should we read The Professor's House) a small host of Duke affiliates. Also—as Huck, too, could not avoid—yours truly.

ENGLISH 616S-01
LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY
Toril Moi, Sarah Beckwith
Wednesday 12:00 – 2:30pm

Traditionally, literary scholars apply philosophy to literature; philosophers mine literature for examples illustrating already existing philosophies. This course aims to find ways for philosophy and literature to shed light on each other. Can literature do philosophical work? How can philosophy be read? We will first study classical encounters between philosophy and literature in Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and Kant. Philosophers might include Sartre, Beauvoir, Fanon, Murdoch, Nussbaum, Derrida, Diamond, and Cavell. Theater and film: Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Hollywood movies. Novels by Coetzee, Sebald, and recent autofiction. A major focus of the class will be ethics.

ENGLISH 890S-01
BLACK MOBILITIES
Jarvis McInnis
Thursday 3:30 – 6:00pm

This course examines cartographies of black transnational and diasporic mobility within African Diaspora literary and cultural studies. Loosely organized around five overlapping cartographies—the Black Atlantic, the Great Migration, Circum-Caribbean & Hemispheric Migrations, European Sojourns, and African “Returns”—this course explores literature, criticism, and theories of black people on the move, from the coercive and fugitive movements of slavery, colonialism, and their afterlives to labor migration and practices of black cosmopolitanism. We will trace these routes of black mobility across a range of literary genres, including slave narratives, fiction, travel writing, and memoir, and alongside theories of diaspora, transnationalism, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Readings may include works by Martin Delany, Zora Neale Hurston, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, Maryse Condé, Erna Brodber, Saidiya Hartman, and Chimamanda Adichie. We may also engage with theoretical and critical work by Paul Gilroy, Brent Edwards, Michelle Ann Stephens, Tsitsi Jaji, Ifeoma Nwankwo, Edouard Glissant, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Joseph Roach, Robin D. G. Kelley, among others. Students may conduct archival research in the Marcus Garvey papers in the Rubenstein Library and attend the “Black Atlantic” performance series hosted by Duke Performances in March 2018.

ENGLISH 890T-01
JOB MARKET WORKSHOP
Michael D’Alessandro
Thursday 10:15am – 12:45pm
Crosslisted Courses of Interest

ENGLISH 582S-01 (LIT 681S-01)
WITTGENSTEIN AND LITERATURE THEORY
Toril Moi
Monday 12:00 – 2:30pm

The course offers an introduction to Wittgenstein’s late philosophy, and asks what its relevance for literary studies might be. We will focus on a detailed reading of important sections of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. We will try to understand Wittgenstein’s vision of language, of philosophy and philosophical inquiry; the relationship between the inner and the outer (for example, the soul and the body; our pain and its expressions), and aspect-seeing (“seeing as”). To deepen our understanding of Wittgenstein’s philosophy and what we can do with it, we will also read relevant texts by J. L. Austin, Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, Jan Zwicky, and Thomas Kuhn, as well as Toril Moi’s *Revolution of the Ordinary*. We will also examine some major text in literary theory (by writers such as Saussure, Barthes, Derrida, Fish, de Man, Felski, etc.). We’ll also discuss one movie (*Blade Runner*, Director’s Cut), and one literary text (TBA) to see how Wittgenstein’s philosophy enables us to respond to them. The course aims to give students interested in philosophy and literature, and in literary theory a solid foundation for further work in these fields.

Courses Originating in the Divinity School taught by English Graduate Faculty

XTIANTHE 782-01 (ENGLISH 890S-02)
POETRY AND THEOLOGY: PART I – G.M. HOPKINS, PAUL CLAUDEL, R.M. RILKE
Thomas Pfau
Monday 5:15 – 7:45pm
Part II will be held Spring 2023

This two-semester sequence explores the relationship between poetry and theology from about 1850 to 2000. Readings will explore works of lyric poetry (by G. M. Hopkins, Paul Claudel, R. M. Rilke, T. S. Eliot, Czeslaw Milosz, and Geoffrey Hill) in relation to issues in theological aesthetics, philosophical theology, and philosophy either contemporary to the authors or as part of their intellectual and spiritual inheritance and formation. – **PART I** explores the poetry of Hopkins, Claudel and Rilke against their respective theological and intellectual background.

**PART I (Fall 2022)** – The premise of this two-semester sequence is that, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, theology no longer constituted an effective counterweight to a world defined and disfigured by massive industrialization and to the immanent explanatory frames of naturalism, materialism, and nihilism that had attained predominance in the West. Overall, theology appeared either to have accepted and now sought an amicable truth with this state of affairs, or it had simply been marginalized by the self-regarding axioms and aspirations of Europe’s liberal-secular-bourgeois order: unfettered production and consumption, imperial expansion, and political and cultural hegemony. To the extent that it had embraced historicism, Protestant theology in particular was effectively trying to conform Christianity to the ambient world, a development that Karl Barth’s unsparing critique of nineteenth-century theology was to throw into sharp relief. In some cases, sociological methods such as we find in the successive accounts of Comte, Renan, Durkheim, Weber appear to have supplanted theological inquiry while retaining some of its dominant tropes. Conversely, on the Catholic side, theological writing and argument after the Restauration shows marked signs of evolving into an increasingly specialized, inward-looking discourse that, under the pontificates of Leo XIII and Pius X, was to culminates in a defiant anti-modernism and neo-Thomist orthodoxy.

Yet even as (with some notable exceptions such as J. H. Newman) theological writing after 1850 no longer has the same hold on the popular imagination that it had enjoyed even a generation earlier during the heyday of Romanticism, a small handful of theologically literate creative writers engage in the work of theological reflection, often transforming and deepening its scope and insights in unexpected ways. As they navigate between the Scylla of self-
secularization and the Charybdis of doctrinal calcification, literature, – and lyric writing in particular, after 1850, and yet again after the cataclysm of World War I, ends up reframing existential and normative questions in far more imaginative and palpably urgent ways than discursive prose is able to do.

In the course of two semesters, we will explore in some depth six poets – G. M. Hopkins, Paul Claudel, R. M. Rilke (Part I), T. S. Eliot, Czeslaw Milosz, and Geoffrey Hill (Part II). In unique and often stunningly creative ways, they all reengage with theological questions and spiritual states – ranging from doubt and despair to prayer and praise – often eclipsed by a saeculum that is “seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil / And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell.” Wary of the languages of disenchantment and the world’s unrelenting decreation, Hopkins and Claudel, in particular, develop a new, expansive poetics of beauty as the fulcrum of praise and conversion. Rather than being superimposed on the world of sensory experience, theological insight here arises from minute observation and articulation of how that world is experienced: as in "skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow," "glassy peartree leaves and blooms" and “Thrush’s eggs [that] look little low heavens.” Just as for Hopkins "Nature is never spent" and “Christ plays in ten-thousand places,” Hopkins writes, so for Paul Claudel, too, a key motive of poetry is a theology of praise: "Praise is the greatest mover of poetry, ... the creative theme par excellence. Nobody sings alone.”

By contrast, the theological dimension of Rilke’s poetry proves more elusive and, paradoxically, emerges most clearly in his later work, in particular the Duino Elegies (1912-1922) written at a time when he has rejected the sentimentalizing Catholicism of his upbringing. It is then that he probes and, ever so cautiously, transcends the hopelessness and incoherence of a purely immanent, naturalistic account of human existence. In Rilke’s minimal theology, what dominates is neither Hopkins's spiritual discipline nor Claudel's expansive and deeply anchored faith, nor indeed a language of praise. Instead, it is a flicker of eschatological hope that underwrites the form and oblique narrative progression of Rilke’s elegies as they probe how “this life, suspended over the abyss, ... becomes once more possible, indeed, receives an ultimate affirmation [Bejahung].” To forge a passage between the self’s abject and dissociated existential condition (strongly reminiscent of Pascal) and what Rilke calls “superabundant being” (überzähliges Dasein) amounts to an undeniably theological project, though carried out in a language seemingly shorn of all transcendent presuppositions and spiritual certitudes. Less in spite than because of its theological reticence, Rilke seems to insist, poetry is uniquely capable of “assimilating this provisional and precarious earth so profoundly ... that its essence will 'be resurrected invisibly within us'.” Inadvertently echoing the long genealogy of Christian Platonism, Rilke thus considers “this intimate and constant transformation [Umwandlung] of the visible into the invisible” to be the essential aim of poetry.

Provisional Reading List:
Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus, trans. Stephen Mitchell (Vintage) and selected letters
Selections from philosophers, mystics, and theologians specifically referenced as influences or indirectly engaged in the essayistic work and poetry of Hopkins, Claudel, and Rilke: these include Duns Scotus, Ignatius of Loyola, and J. H. Newman (for Hopkins); Aquinas and Maritain (for Claudel); Pascal, Nietzsche (for Rilke)
Anne M. Carpenter, Theo-Poetics (Notre Dame UP)
Aidan Nichols, O.P. Paul Claudel: the Poet as Believer (London: Ashgate, 2011)
Romano Guardini, Rilke’s Duino Elegies: an Interpretation (Cluny Media, 2019)
Hans Urs von Balthasar, selected essays and chapters on Hopkins and Claudel
Redeeming Love in Four Late Medieval English Contemplatives: Julian of Norwich, Nicholas Love, Margery Kempe, The Cloud of Unknowing (Anonymous Author)

And from the time it was revealed, I desired to know in what was our Lord’s meaning. And fifteen years and more, I was answered in spiritual understanding, thus: What, would you know your Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who shows it to you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why does he shew it to you? For love. Keep in this and you will know more of the same. But you shall never know different in this, without end.

Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love (begun on 13 May 1373)

This beautiful quotation (modernized here) from the final chapter of Julian of Norwich’s Revelations is an appropriate introduction to this course. It is important to note how Julian’s extraordinary visions of Christ and her dialogues with Christ also elicit a search for understanding, for knowledge, inextricably bound up with love. This observation may indicate why I eschew the terms “mystic” and “mysticism.” The problem is not that they are distinctly anachronistic but that they bring an alien set of assumptions to Julian’s writing and to late medieval spiritual life. Whereas “contemplative,” “contemplation,” and the “contemplative life” are medieval terms (having both English and Latin forms) and do not bring misleading assumptions which become an impediment to our reading. A good guide to the issues here is St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). He associates contemplation with the knowledge of truth (“cognitio veritatis”). Contemplative life pertains to the intellect pursuing the knowledge of truth and involving the will which moves all the power of the soul. So the contemplative life consists of the love of God (“in caritate Dei”) inasmuch as through the love of God a person burns to gaze on divine beauty. Since everyone desires to obtain what she loves, the contemplative life is completed in delight which is in the affective power (“in affectu”), out of which love becomes intensified. For St. Thomas contemplation is the end, the goal of human life, a view with which Julian would concur (see Aquinas, Summa Theologiae II-II.179-180).

Nevertheless, despite such concurrence, this is a course in vernacular writing. Were it on those writing in Latin during the later Middle Ages, it would not include two women writers. Although the seminar involves the study of many central topics in Christian teaching, it is text centered. We will aim to develop forms of reading which engage with the specificities of the four writers we are studying. The texts are complex in very different ways, offering us an astonishingly rich embodiment of a wide range of late medieval contemplation. In their different ways they also make profound contributions to Christian theology: this is especially true of Julian of Norwich.

We will begin with a text you should read before the first class, bringing a copy of the text to the first meeting. I stress this because the text is Nicholas Love’s early fifteenth-century translation and adaptation of an immensely popular and formative Franciscan work, The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ (paperback, Exeter UP and Liverpool UP, 2004). This work itself became a late medieval best-seller. I begin the class with this Carthusian translation because it displays in great detail late medieval traditions of affective devotion and their approach to redemption in Jesus Christ. For those who assume versions of Christianity made out of the Reformation this work offers an illuminating re-education. Alongside it I suggest reading the medieval parts of two outstanding works: John Bossy, Christianity in the West: 1400-1700 (Oxford UP, 1985), and Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars (2nd ed., Yale, 2005). The form of contemplation, the versions of holy family and Christ in The Mirror, were central to Margery Kempe whom we study later in the course. Julian and the Cloud-author were equally familiar with this tradition.

After studying Nicholas Love we will turn to the extraordinary, profound work of Julian of Norwich: visions, meditations, theological explorations into the Trinity. The most accessible affordable text and the one I recommend is The Showings of Julian of Norwich edited by Denise Baker (Norton, 2004). If you want to read this with a good modern translation of the Long Text (her second and full version), I suggest the version by Barry Windeatt (Oxford World Classics, paperback). If you want a densely annotated scholarly edition, Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, The Writings of Julian of Norwich (Pennsylvania State UP, 2005); or the more recent one, re-medievalizing Julian into East Anglian English (cc 1400) by Barry Windeatt, Revelations of Divine Love (Oxford UP, 2016).
From Julian of Norwich to another East Anglian woman who actually visited Julian for spiritual counsel: Margery Kempe. An astonishing lay woman, Margery Kempe had fourteen children, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to many other shrines while becoming an intimate contemplative and spouse of Christ. Her work should be read for this course in either the fine modern translation by Lynn Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Norton, paperback) or her Middle English edition (TEAMS, Western Michigan UP, paperback). We will conclude the course with an extremely demanding and often dazzling work on contemplation by an anonymous author immersed in the traditions of pseudo-Dionysius: *The Cloud of Unknowing*, edited by Patrick Gallacher (TEAMS, Western Michigan UP, paperback).

The primary task of anyone enrolling in this class is to read the set texts slowly and meditatively. I will suggest relevant scholarly work during the class but please prioritize the books by John Bossy and Eamon Duffy cited in the description above. On Julian of Norwich I recommend two works, one by Denise Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings* (Princeton, 1994), and Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich: Theologian* (Yale, 2011). For a fine introduction to contemplative writing in the late Middle Ages: Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism: 1350-1550* (Herder, 2012, paperback).

**A note on class format, expectations, and grading:** This class is a seminar, so attendance and participation are mandatory. Laptops (and other electronic devices) are not to be used in class. A seminar is a dialogic form of learning, very different to a lecture class. In my experience, laptops act as an impediment to the kinds of attention and communication I consider essential to a flourishing seminar. Also, since we will have more than enough to chew on already, please refrain from eating during class.

The grade will come from one essay of not more than 25 pages to be handed in during or before the final class.