

LITR 202-A02: The European Novel

John Felice Rome Center

Fall 2026

Wednesday | 2:30-5pm |

Dr. Barbara Castaldo

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Office Hours: Wed./Th., By Appointment

Course Description

The central theme of this literature course is nature. The selected texts explore the relationship between human beings and the natural world in diverse and thought-provoking ways. We will encounter portrayals of nature's sublimity, its awe-inspiring beauty and power, as well as its more terrifying and overwhelming aspects, rooted in unpredictability and force. Nature will also be portrayed as a source of spirituality and wisdom, often represented as a mystical guide or teacher, alongside a recurring human longing to return to a simpler, more natural way of life.

Through close reading and discussion of texts, we will examine how nature shapes narrative events, influences characters, and frames the philosophical or moral outlooks of each text. In addition, we will consider together the consequences of human intervention in the environment, observing ecological transformations and their ethical implications. Our analysis will be supported and deepened by engagement with ecocritical theory, which will serve as a critical lens throughout the course.



Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze literary texts in relation to their historical, cultural, and ecological contexts.
- Apply key concepts from literary, narrative, and ecological theory (e.g., overdetermination, frame narrative, hyperobjects, flow-on catastrophe).

- Employ ecocritical methodologies to examine representations of the environment and environmental crisis in literature.
- Critically engage with the concept of the Anthropocene, particularly in its intersections with capitalism, energy, and environmental change.
- Explore alternative frameworks of time and agency, including geological versus human history and human versus non-human perspectives.
- Participate in informed discussion of ecological themes and their relevance to contemporary environmental issues.
- Strengthen critical reading, analytical writing, and argumentation skills through structured academic assignments.
- Compare ecological concerns, authors, and literary texts across different cultures and historical periods.

Required Texts / Materials

Assigned readings are posted in the Sakai Resources folder.

Attendance Policy

In accordance with the Rome Center mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, and in compliance with full-time student visa status, all courses adhere to the following attendance policy. Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student and synonymous with academic success. Attendance is mandatory at every class meeting for each course. Lateness or leaving class early will impact the course grade at the professor's discretion. All absences, including medical absences, will be treated the same, unless they are documented long-term conditions or emergencies. Such situations will be evaluated case-by-case by the Academic Affairs office. Once-a-week classes: After 1 absence, a 2% final grade reduction will be applied for each missed class. Missing 3 classes or more will result in an automatic failure (F).

Assessment Components:

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|---|-----|
| Participation and Close Reading Responses | 20% |
| Presentation | 20% |
| Reflective Paper | 30% |
| Final Paper | 30% |

Assignments and Course Expectations

Each required assignment in this course is designed to provide you with 1) a structured opportunity to practice and demonstrate your knowledge, and 2) some flexibility and choice in how you showcase that knowledge. You can choose your presentation and final paper topics, as well as the timing for submitting your presentation, reflective paper, and final paper - all within the final submission deadlines.

Course Readings: Assigned readings are posted in the Sakai Resources folder. Active reading is essential for this course. Whether working with a printed book or a PDF from Sakai, come prepared with key passages marked and ideas noted. For PDFs, you can download the file to your device and annotate by highlighting key quotes (e.g., in yellow) and recording your comments or questions. We will refer to specific passages in nearly every class.

Sakai: Everything for the course will be posted in Sakai, so you will need to be familiar with submitting assignments, accessing collective announcements and private email notifications, accessing feedback and grades, assignment guidelines, and course readings.

Electronic Devices in Class: Technology can be both a helpful resource and a potential distraction. While cell phones are not permitted during class time, I understand that many of you rely on laptops or tablets as important learning tools, so their use is allowed during class. However, I expect you to use these devices responsibly and respectfully, only to support learning and participation. If their use becomes disruptive to you or your classmates, I will ask you to stop using them.

Use of AI: All work submitted in this course needs to be original to you as an author. Any references to other authors must include a citation and quotation marks. The use of AI is not permitted for this course, either for generating content or for enhancing style, because I want you to develop as a writer and critical thinker, rather than simply submitting “perfect” work. You may use synonym tools, Grammarly, or other tools for minor editing or proofreading (not for generating text) - provided that the text you submit is entirely your own original work.

All assignments for this course, including Reading Responses and the Presentation, need to be submitted through Turnitin, which is used to detect the use of AI. Assignments not submitted through Turnitin will not be accepted for grading. Using AI for any portion of the assignments will result in failure of the assignment at a minimum and, potentially, failure of the course.

Participation and Close Reading Responses (20%): This is a seminar-style, discussion-driven course. Your consistent and engaged presence is essential not only for your own learning but also for the benefit of the entire class. For each class session, you will find a set of questions (Reading Responses) to generate conversation: provide a written response to one or two of these questions and use two to three quotations from the assigned reading (quotes may be of any length). Each quote should be accompanied by a brief analysis focusing on both content and style, explaining why you chose that particular quote, what caught your attention, what topics it highlights, what kind of language the author uses, how it connects to the rest of the work, or how it resonates with or differs from other texts. Complete the Reading Response assignment before the beginning of each class session. Occasionally, I will ask that you submit your Responses to Sakai, and I reserve the right to request these submissions without prior notice.

Grading participation and reading responses will be based on two factors: frequency of class participation (at least one contribution at each class session); quality (engagement with readings, attention to others’ ideas, relevance, clarity, depth). If you have difficulty speaking in class, please let me know at the beginning of the course, and we will discuss other options to fulfill the participation assignment.

The participation grade also includes **professionalism and class etiquette:** having your PDF or book in front of you during class discussions; underlined quotes or page number references and notes ready and available at each class; using laptops only for note-taking or course-related work; arriving on time and staying for the duration of class, taking breaks only during the designated times; keeping phones silenced and out of sight.

Presentation (20%): Each student will give one presentation on a text of their choice from the course readings and will lead a discussion on that text. Detailed guidelines are posted in the *Assignments* section on Sakai.

Reflective Paper (30%): The Reflective Paper (six pages, double-spaced) will be a critical reflection, comparative in nature, on a specific course theme assigned by the instructor. Detailed guidelines are posted in the *Assignments* section on Sakai.



Final Paper (30%): The Final Paper (six pages, double-spaced) is a research-based analysis of a novel of your choice that engages with the central topic of the course (nature and the human relationship to it). The essay should develop a focused analytical question and a clear thesis, demonstrating your ability to write critically about literature in accordance with academic conventions. Detailed guidelines are posted in the *Assignments* section on Sakai.

Grading

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|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| 94-100: A | 87-89: B+ | 77-79: C+ | 67-69: D+ |
| 90-93: A- | 84-86: B | 74-76: C | 60-66: D |
| | 80-83: B- | 70-73: C- | 59 or lower: F |

Academic Integrity / Plagiarism

As one of the campuses of Loyola University Chicago, the Rome Center is committed to academic rigor and excellence. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty of any kind are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with Loyola's standards here: http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml. Students are responsible for complying with the LUC Student Handbook.

Late and Unsubmitted Assignments

In general, late assignments are not accepted. However, extenuating circumstances do arise, so please be in touch with me as soon as possible, and before the submission deadline if the assignment is late. Please note that late assignments will not be accepted without prior authorization from the professor and that unsubmitted assignments will receive a grade of zero.

Accessibility Accommodations

Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center during the first week of classes. Please let me know, too, of any accommodation you may need so that we can work together to make this course successful for you.

Statement on Title IX

The Rome Center follows Loyola's [Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, Retaliation](#), and will comply with those as indicated and instructed.

Emails and Communication

The best way to get in touch with me is via email – bcastaldo@luc.edu. I make every effort to respond to emails within 24 hours. However, I do not usually check or reply to work-related emails on weekends or public holidays. Please include the name of the course you are taking when you email me.

My office hours are by appointment, so please feel free to contact me to set up an in-person or Zoom meeting.

For questions about course content, feedback on assignments, grades, or other matters that may require extended discussion, it is preferable to meet in person rather than engage in lengthy email exchanges.

Additional Support

I will provide timely feedback on your assignments and direct this feedback to what is going well or what can be improved for the next assignment. If needed, I am happy to share additional resources to help you with the course materials and assignment guidelines.

However, please note that I cannot review assignments before submission or assist during the writing process. The assignments for this course do not follow a step-by-step format where you receive grades after various stages of improvement, but they are designed to be independent tasks. I recommend using Loyola's Writing Center for students needing some assistance with writing. You can learn more or schedule an appointment at <https://www.luc.edu/writing/>.

And finally... Welcome to this class!

I find the study of literature both intellectually and emotionally fascinating (and a lot of fun), and I look forward to exploring it together. Please do not hesitate to discuss the course or readings with me throughout the semester. As far as possible, I want to ensure the class meets your academic goals as well as those I have outlined in this syllabus.

I am dedicated to fostering an inclusive and welcoming classroom for every student. With this goal in mind, the course is designed to explore the material from diverse perspectives. I invite all students to work together with me to cultivate a learning space built on open dialogue, mutual respect, and a strong sense of belonging for all.

Course Schedule and Readings

I reserve the right to modify the reading schedule or assignments in the event of extenuating circumstances. Any changes will be announced on Sakai and posted on the most up-to-date version of the syllabus there before each class.

Unless otherwise noted, you will read each assigned novel in its entirety.

While reading introductions and supplementary critical articles is optional, doing so is strongly encouraged, as they will deepen your understanding of the texts and contribute meaningfully to class discussions.

Friday Class Day: Friday, September 18

| Date | Topic |
|---------------|--|
| Week 1 | |
| W 9/2 | Introduction to the course. Schedule of presentations. |
| Week 2 | |
| W 9/9 | Mary Shelley – <i>Frankenstein</i> (1818) |
| Week 3 | |
| W 9/16 | Papal audience: no class on Wednesday, September 16 |
| F 9/18 | Friday Class Day: Mary Shelley – <i>Frankenstein</i> (1818) |
| Week 4 | |
| W 9/23 | Joseph Conrad - <i>Heart of Darkness</i> (1899) |



- Week 5**
W 9/30 Hermann Hesse – *Siddhartha* (1922)
- Week 6**
W 10/7 **Reflective Papers due.** Virginia Woolf – *To the Lighthouse* (1927)
- Week 7**
W 10/14 **Fall Break (October 9-18): no class on Wednesday, October 14**
- Week 8**
W 10/21 Virginia Woolf – *To the Lighthouse* (1927)
- Week 9**
W 10/28 René Daumal – *The Mount Analogue* (1952)
- Week 10**
W 11/4 Jean Giono – *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1953)
- Week 11**
W 11/11 Italo Calvino – *The Baron in the Trees* (1957)
- Week 12**
W 11/18 Italo Calvino – *The Baron in the Trees* (1957)
- Week 13**
W 11/25 Environmental Humanities: Key Readings and Perspectives
- Week 14**
W 12/2 **Final Papers due.** Conference on the final papers. Course conclusions.
- Week 15**
W 12/9 **Final exam week.**