

LITR 202: The European Novel
John Felice Rome Center
Spring 2026
Wednesday | 2:30-5pm
Dr. Barbara Castaldo, Ph.D.
Email: bcastaldo@luc.edu
Office Hours: Wed./Th., By Appointment

Course Description

The central theme of this literature course is nature. The texts selected explore the relationship between human beings and the natural world in diverse and thought-provoking ways. We will examine 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 considered 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. In addition, we will reflect on the consequences of human intervention in the environment, considering ecological transformations and their ethical implications. Through close reading and discussion, students will analyze how nature shapes narrative events, influences characters, and frames the philosophical or moral outlooks of each text. 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 posted in Sakai.

Student 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:

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

To successfully meet the learning outcomes of this course, you must fulfill the following requirements:

Course Readings: 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, download the file to your device and annotate by highlighting key quotes (e.g., in yellow) and recording your comments or questions. You will be expected to refer to specific passages in nearly every class.

Sakai: This course relies on the Sakai platform for all materials and communication. You are expected to check Sakai regularly for collective announcements and private email notifications, 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, 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 all students 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: For several reasons that I would like to discuss with you, the use of AI is not permitted in this course, either for generating content or enhancing style. You may use synonym tools, Grammarly suggestions, and other editing applications, provided that the text you submit is entirely your own original work. Using AI for writing the final paper or for any of the assignments will result in an F in the assignment or even an F in the course and might jeopardize the rest of your studies at Loyola.

Participation and Close Reading Responses (20%): This is a seminar-style, discussion-driven course. Your consistent, engaged presence is essential not just for your own learning but for the benefit of the entire class. You are expected to come to class fully prepared on the assigned readings and contribute thoughtfully to discussions using your Close Reading Responses. For each class session, you will find a set of questions, and you are required to provide a written response to one or two of these questions, using 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. These responses will form the basis for much of our discussion and for your Participation grade, and will prepare you for both the Reflective Paper and the Final Paper.

I will ask you to read or discuss your selected quotes in class, and occasionally you will be required to submit your Responses to Sakai without prior notice. To earn a strong participation grade, you should contribute to class discussions at least once per session. If you have difficulty speaking in class, please let me know at the beginning of the course.

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) will be a comparative literary analysis of two texts of your choice, other than the text already examined in the Presentation. The essay should develop a focused analytical question and a clear thesis, demonstrating your ability to write critically about literature in line with academic conventions. Detailed guidelines are posted in the *Assignments* section on Sakai.

Grading

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.

I expect that all work you produce for this course will be your own and that you will not submit work you have already completed for other courses. Submitting the same Responses as another student will be considered plagiarism. Paraphrasing or otherwise copying the work of another person without citing the source of the words and ideas will be considered plagiarism.

Late and Unsubmitted Assignments

Late assignments will not be accepted without prior authorization from the professor. 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.

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

You can contact me via email at bcastaldo@luc.edu. I typically respond to emails within 24 hours on business days. I do not usually check or reply to work-related emails on weekends or public holidays. 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. Please remember that emails to me, as your instructor, should be written in a professional tone and include a proper greeting as well as the name of the course you are taking.

And finally... Welcome to this class! I find the study of literature both intellectually and emotionally fascinating (as well as a lot of fun), and I look forward to exploring it together. Please do not hesitate to converse with me about the course or the readings throughout the semester. As far as possible, I want to make sure the class meets your own 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 through 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 you are expected to consult the most up-to-date version of the syllabus there before each class.

Unless otherwise noted, you are required to 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: February 6

Date	Topic
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Week 1	
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W 1/21	Introduction to the course. Schedule of presentations.
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Week 2	
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W 1/28	Mary Shelley – <i>Frankenstein</i> (1818)
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Week 3

W 2/4

Mary Shelley – *Frankenstein* (1818)

F 2/6

Friday Class Day: Joseph Conrad - *Heart of Darkness* (1899)

Week 4

W 2/11

Hermann Hesse – *Siddhartha* (1922)

Week 5

W 2/18

Papal audience: no class on Wednesday, February 18

Week 6

W 2/25

Virginia Woolf – *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

Week 7

W 3/4

Reflective Papers due. Virginia Woolf – *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

Week 8

W 3/11

Spring Break (March 6-15): no class on Wednesday, March 11

Week 9

W 3/18

René Daumal – *The Mount Analogue* (1952)

Week 10

W 3/25

Jean Giono – *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1953)

Week 11

W 4/1

Italo Calvino – *The Baron in the Trees* (1957)

Week 12

W 4/8

Italo Calvino – *The Baron in the Trees* (1957)

Week 13

W 4/15

Environmental Humanities: Key Readings and Perspectives

Week 14

W 4/22

Final Papers due. Conference on the final papers. Course conclusions.

Week 15

W 4/29

Final exam week.