

# THE BROADSHEET

## Now Showing: New Film Concentration

By Marisa Auger and Rachel MacKelcan

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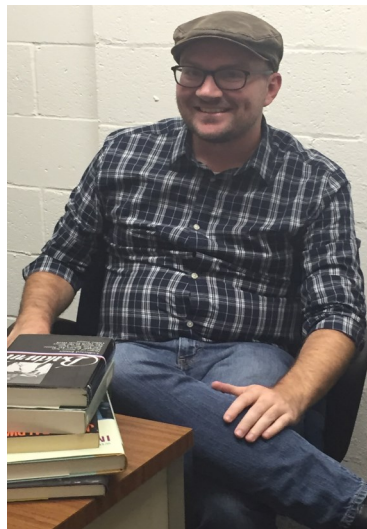
Film Concentration  
Film Strip

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Perhaps you recall sitting in a dull classroom; the instructor walks in slowly, a scowl across his face, and with a sigh, he flips the light switch. The class whispers excitedly as he walks back out the door into the illuminated hallway, but then returns, more slowly than before. The class goes silent as he enters. One false move and he may change his mind. Struggling to pull the awkward cart through the doorway the teacher mumbles under his breath angrily. Always a nuisance, the power cords of the black television and chassis make navigating the doorframe a challenge, but the instructor prevails and the class can barely contain itself. Your heart flutters; you



have been waiting for this: movie day....that was high school.



Now, fast forward a bit and picture yourself sitting in a small classroom. An excited professor walks in calmly and with purpose. He carries his notes tucked neatly at his side, along with a small case that contains today's film and, with a smile on his face, he pulls down the screen. "Let's get started; shall we?" he says, and the class can barely contain itself. Every meeting is just as exciting as that surprise movie day was in high school. (Continued on Page 2)

Photo Credit Marisa Auger

*An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published four times during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.*



This is the beauty of film studies in college.

Beginning next fall, the English Department will be adding officially a film concentration to the existing concentrations in creative writing and literary studies. Dr. Plunkett, who has just returned from a year long sabbatical, and Dr. Vogel, the newest addition to the department's full-time faculty, will anchor the new concentration in film. Both professors were kind enough to provide us with information about their plans for this new initiative and talk about what it means for the English program as it moves into the future.

As a student in our program, you might be wondering why an English Department would want to integrate formally film studies into the major? Well, the two activities are not as different as many might think. "It has become increasingly common in English departments across the country to study films as texts, in much the same way that literary texts are analyzed and studied," Dr. Plunkett observed. As students of English, we have already begun to develop the tools necessary for analyzing literature, and these same tools will serve us well when it comes to in "reading" and interpreting film. Dr. Vogel emphasizes that "film requires a similar skill-set as literary analysis because it also uses active interpretation. All of the things you use to analyze literature, you can use them in film. There are different vocabularies and techniques, but it is a similar approach and process."

The film concentration will require students to take an Introduction to Film History course as well as two additional electives. Our film concentration will differ from what one might find in other academic programs that teach film in one important respect, specifically that "our film concentration will not focus on production aspects of films, but rather analysis of cinematic narratives as reflecting on history and culture," said Dr. Plunkett. Students in the Merrimack English program will have an opportunity to take courses such as Nordic Noir, Green Screen, and Environment in Film. The concentration will not stop there, though. "I am very excited to let students know about this new addition, and I believe it will draw more students into the English program. There are a whole range of possibilities for what students can do with this concentration," Dr. Vogel remarked. He is considering offering a class called New Pop Cinema, which would explore music videos as a breed of film. "It is a film form that offers its own similarities and differences to the traditional feature length films that we watch. These were huge in the 1980's, but even now, they're very influential to young people and watched by millions," he added. Not only will students learn about contemporary film, Dr. Vogel's favorite, but they will also have an opportunity to take Dr. Plunkett's Nordic Noir course, which will introduce the study of world cinema.

Both professors are excited about the future and will infuse the new initiative with personal film favorites and with their passion for the field of film studies. "It would be a great experience for everyone," Dr. Vogel said. "Students bring a lot to the table. Both myself and Kevin offer our own strengths. These courses offer a different way of watching movies, where paying close attention enriches the experience. I find that when students study film, they have more 'ah ha!' moments. I like the idea of looking behind the curtain, which I feel enriches the experience. Analyzing film makes you appreciate it more because you're interacting with art on a deeper level." Dr. Plunkett echoed this observation: "I want students to develop a greater self-awareness of the complex ways in which movies work, and hopefully this will enrich their understanding and experiencing of cinema. This sense of self-awareness I find is profoundly moving. Film has the ability to communicate with images because of its visual emphasis. Film offers a level of visual communication that is completely different from books."

Today, we live in a world that is constantly embracing new technologies and new forms of communication; therefore, the new film concentration seems to be a logical next step for the department. The timing for this new initiative is perfect, as Dr. Plunkett has just returned from a year-long sabbatical researching film archives throughout Europe, and Dr. Vogel has recently joined the full-time English faculty this fall primarily to help develop this exciting initiative. They both bring different interests and skills to the table, which will ensure a dynamic experience not just for English majors and minors, but for all Merrimack students.

## English Department Approves New Sophomore Seminar Requirement for In-Coming First-Year Majors

Beginning in the Spring 2016 Semester, ENG 2055 Sophomore Seminar in English will be launched as the pilot version of what will become a required course for English majors entering the program next fall. Created in order to give sophomores the opportunity to have an experience similar to the Senior Seminar and better prepare them to meet the challenges posed by the program's 300-level classes, the pilot course will be taught by Professor Vatalaro and will be titled "Embodied Romanticism".

Motivating this new curriculum initiative has been a consistent request on the part of senior English majors that a seminar experience be required much earlier in the program. Specifically, students emphasized how enjoyable it was to be in a course consisting exclusively of majors from the same graduation year and how transformative it was to participate in group projects and spirited class discussions about major issues in the field of English Studies. The English faculty, furthermore, has recognized during its own program reform and assessment discussions that a seminar experience existing earlier in the program would provide students with stronger preparation for the program's upper-level requirements.

Although this course will not be as demanding as the Senior Seminar, it will feature inquiry-based, collaborative learning and it will emphasize the idea that scholarship amounts to an ongoing conversation. While the primary mission of the Senior Seminar is to give students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the Merrimack College English program and on disciplinary issues relevant to English studies, the Sophomore Seminar will give students an opportunity to investigate a particular literary topic, genre or period. Responsibility for teaching the course will rotate through the full-time faculty. Students will work in groups, will explore what other scholars have said about the course topic and will add their own voices to those conversations.

During advisement, the English faculty will be strongly recommending that members of the current sophomore graduating class register for the Sophomore Seminar, which will count toward the major as an open English elective. When the course becomes a part of the official English major requirements beginning with the fall of 2016, it will replace ENG 2050 Introduction to Literary Studies as the required gateway course to the major program. Whereas the Senior Seminar is offered in the fall semester of each academic year, the Sophomore Seminar will be offered every spring.

# *Burton's The Miniaturist: Not Quite Perfect*

*By Rosemary Morton*

Historical fiction holds a special place in my heart. Books in this subgenre are among the first I read as a child and they helped cultivate within me a love of reading. So when writers experiment with new techniques within this form I try to read those books as fast as I can get my hands on them. Recently, some historical fiction writers have been stretching the traditional scope of their narratives to surprise and delight their readers with brand new types of stories. One such work that engages in this innovation is *The Miniaturist* by Jessie Burton. This novel follows the conventions of historical fiction but it adds supernatural elements to the narrative. Does Burton succeed? Well, yes and no.

## *The Miniaturist*

Author: Jessie Burton

Publisher: HarperCollins

Date of Publication: 2014



*The Miniaturist* is set in Amsterdam in 1686. It is about an eighteen-year-old girl named Nella, who goes to live with her new husband, a merchant named Johannes, who works for the VOC trading company in Amsterdam. Johannes buys Nella a toy house as a wedding present. At first, the gesture insults Nella, but eventually curiosity gets the better of her and she enlists the aid of the mysterious Miniaturist, a person who makes miniature versions of everyday things, such as dolls and other items that go into dollhouses. At first, Nella is grateful for the help; however, the miniatures of the toy house begin to resemble her life. I found myself wondering if the Miniaturist secretly watches her and, if so, toward what purpose? "Is Nella going mad?" I thought.

Ever since I first learned about this book, from reading about it online and hearing about it from friends, I wanted to read it. At the beginning, the novel seemed to manage the right blend of creepiness and suspense that it needed to hook any reader. For example, the opening line reads, "The funeral is supposed to be a quiet affair, for the deceased had no friends. But words are water in Amsterdam, they flood your ears and set the rot, and the church's east corner is crowded." Jessie Burton does an excellent job opening her story with a prologue that secures the reader's attention and her writing is beautiful; however, the beauty of her writing fails to compensate completely for some of the book's disappointing elements.

First of all, I was unhappy with the back-cover description of the storyline, because it misled me. It advertised *The Miniaturist* as a novel about a woman experiencing supernatural occurrences centered on the dollhouse; however, only part of the novel is about this. Most of the narrative revolves around sexual scandal, and lengthy sections concentrate on tedious details involving trading agreements between characters. An entire chapter, for example, is devoted to talking about a sugar sale that Johannes is brokering, and I remember thinking to myself, "who cares?" but I should have trusted Burton's storytelling ability. As it turns out, the sugar deal becomes greatly important to the scandals that appear throughout the novel. *(Continued on Page 5)*



Another aspect of the novel that bugged me was the absence of easily accessible footnotes. Oftentimes, the characters speak Dutch, but the author supplies translations inconveniently at the back of the book. Consequently, I found myself skipping over the Dutch, running the risk of missing something important. As it turns out, however, I did not lose anything involving the overall story and the novel remained pretty easy to follow, so this aspect of the reading experience never became more than a minor irritation.

Now you are probably wondering why I gave this novel four stars, given some of the issues I just mentioned. The reason is that everything else in the novel was wonderful. The preponderance of sexual transgression and intrigue became more enjoyable than I anticipated, especially when the plot slowed in the middle. Jessie Burton succeeds at connecting the action of her story so well and by the end of it everything makes perfect sense. es-

Burton's character development is also masterful. For example, Nella is alone often in the story and, as a result, she becomes extremely philosophical. Nella contemplates the Miniaturist's plan stating, "In showing me my own story', she thinks, 'the miniaturist has become the author of it herself'. How I wish that I could have it back.'" These long processes of thought occur many times in the novel and they create a window onto Nella's thinking about her new life. Nella, I feel, becomes a stronger individual as the narrative evolves, because she is able to embrace the hardships that are occurring around her. She is also able to help the other characters survive these same hardships.

Though a less prominent feature of the book than I had expected, the narrative thread involving supernatural occurrences turns out to be pretty effective. At various points in the action, Nella suspects that someone is walking behind her, yet when she turns she finds that no one is there. Furthermore, the house, especially at the beginning of the story, is described in a way that makes it seem creepy, making Nella uncomfortable. And Johannes's sister, Marin, inhabits the house, but lives apart from the others and under lock and key.

The conflict between the miniaturist and Nella pervades the narrative. Nella's attention is consistently divided between the scandal happening around her and the secrets that the Miniaturist knows about the family. Often, Nella catches the Miniaturist just before that individual (spoiler alert) disappears into a crowd. I found the suggestion that someone is always watching her a bit unnerving. The miniaturist seems to know everything that is happening and Nella feels that at any time this person can reveal all the family's secrets.

*The Miniaturist*, therefore, is a good novel but does not seamlessly combine all elements. I also thought there were too many plot twists in the novel, as Burton struggled to juggle several plot lines and incorporate elements of the supernatural into her story. Therefore, this novel is not perfect and the packaging of the story by the publisher, especially the promotional material associated with the title, doesn't help. As much as I was entertained, in the end I found myself a bit disappointed, but, I still recommend it as an entraining read.

"In showing me my own story', she thinks, 'the miniaturist has become the author of it herself'. How I wish that I could have it back.'"



Rachel MacKelcan



Marisa Auger

# The Broadsheet Staff

Jessica Bruso



Rosemary Morton



Photos by Kevin Salemne

## RACHEL

Rachel MacKelcan is a Creative Writing concentration sophomore. Her favorite class so far has been “Creative Writing Poetry”. Her favorite books are *Divergent* and *City of Bones*. Her interests include cooking, working, running track, poetry, photography, and history.

## MARISA

Marisa Auger is a senior with an English and Secondary Education double major and a minor in Religious and Theological Studies. Her favorite English course has been “Modern Irish Literature” and her favorite book is *The Great Gatsby*. Her other interests include hiking and reading.

## JESSICA

Jessica Bruso is a junior with a Creative Writing concentration and Secondary Education double major. Her favorite English course so far has been “Creative Writing Fiction” and her favorite book is *Jane Eyre*. Her other interests include crocheting and reading.

## ROSEMARY

Rosemary Morton is a junior with a Literary Studies concentration and a minor in Middle School Education. Her favorite English course so far is “Modern American Literature”, her favorite book is *Pride and Prejudice*, and her hobbies include theater, horseback riding, and concert choir.

## Upcoming Events

Dr. Plunkett's Presentation, "In Search of Nordic Noir." November 6, 2015 at 3:00 pm at The Writers House

Alice Sebold, Writer In Residence. November 16&17, 2015 at The Writers House.

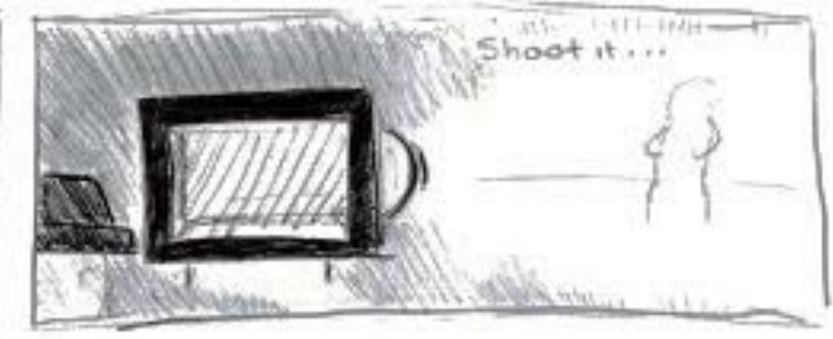
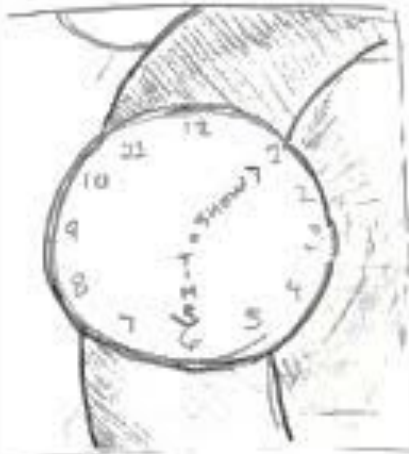
Drop-in Writing Sessions held at the Writer's House Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 1:15 and Tuesdays at 3:30

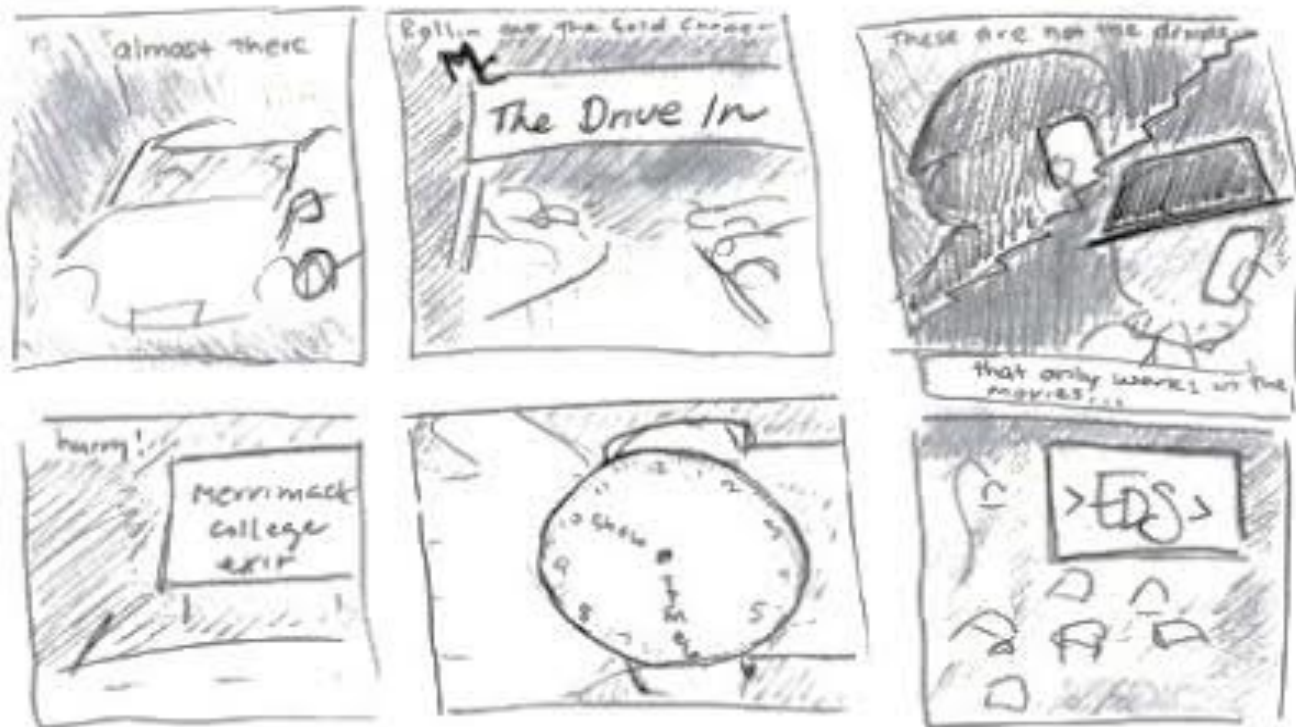


Group from ENG 4102 The New England Shore Seminar visited the Parker River Wildlife Refuge at Plum Island, Massachusetts on Saturday, September 17. This photograph, shot by class member Eric Janowski, was taken from the top deck of one of the preserve's observation towers. The towers provide beautiful views of extensive saltwater marshland surrounding Plum Island Sound, long stretches of beach bordering the North Atlantic, as well as the towns of Ipswich and Newburyport. Pictured in this photo (from left to right): Micaela Trent, Brittany Sullivan, Nicole Sheehan, Dr. Paul Vatalaro, Rosemary Morton, Charlie Lewis and Taylor Inman.

(Photo Credit Eric Janowski)











# Spring 2016 Course Offerings

## ENG 2050 Introduction to Literary Studies

This course introduces students to such traditional literary genres as fiction, poetry, and drama, as well as newer and emerging forms such as the graphic novel, creative non-fiction, digital storytelling, and film. Emphasis is given to teaching students to read closely and to write analytically. The course also familiarizes students with a variety of interpretive strategies. Students leave the course recognizing the value of close reading and self-conscious interpretation. *Required of English majors/minors, Fulfills AL in LS Core.*

**MWF 12:00-12:50 Assistant Professor Ellen McWhorter**

**MWF 1:00-1:50 (Honors Class) Assistant Professor Ellen McWhorter**

**MWF 1:00-1:50, 2:00-2:50 Professor Marie Plasse**

## ENG 2055 Sophomore Seminar (new)

This course will challenge the conventional view that British Romantic writers expended the majority of their intellectual, spiritual and political energies on evading and in many instances transcending the mere physical. Surveying the landscape of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British literature suggests, however, that bodily experience, while not an obvious focal point, provides crucial perspective to each writer's experience. From the Wordsworths' addiction to walking, Coleridge's gout, Byron's clubfoot, Mary Shelley's pregnancies, and Percy Shelley's hypochondria to Keats' tuberculosis, the body accompanies every Romantic journey and every Romantic meditation. *Recommended for sophomore English majors, English elective (if taken before the end of junior year, Fulfills AL in LS Core).*

**TR 12:30-1:45 Professor Paul Vatalaro**

### Before 1800 Literature Courses

## ENG 3141 Chaucer in Popular Culture

Chaucer's tales of corrupt clerics, over-sexed students, fatuous suitors, unfaithful wives, and jealous husbands constitute some of the best stories told in English. This course will explore versions of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, including all sorts of translations—good and bad—for adults and children, as well as film, stage, musical (including rap), and comics versions of the *Tales*, especially those meant for American audiences. The course includes opportunities for students to create their own versions of Chaucer's work. Before 1800. Prerequisite: FYW1050. *English elective, Fulfills AL in LS Core.*

**MWF 12:00-12:50 Lecturer John Chandler**

## ENG3300 Satire and Solitude: Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature

The literature of Restoration England celebrates the pleasures (and pains) of unbridled sexual expression. The naughty Earl of Rochester and the witty Aphra Behn pushed the boundaries of poetic propriety. William Wycherley's play *The Country Wife* scandalized Puritans and delighted the debauched. This libertine impulse, however, gave way to the more wide-ranging satires of the English eighteenth century, from the sly poetry of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* to the adult version of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. But satires on the folly of public life would soon give way to a more introspective literature. By the second half of the century, the poetry of solitude captured the literary imagination and inspired what would soon be called Romanticism. Before 1800. Prerequisite: FYW1050. *English elective, Fulfills AL in LS Core.*

**TR 9:30-10:45 Professor Steven Scherwatzky**



### After 1800 Literature Courses

#### **ENG 3870 Literature of the Harlem Renaissance**

This course will approach the study of literary modernism (roughly 1890-1940) by focusing on the works of the Harlem Renaissance. In Harlem, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a period of social and cultural awakening that inspired an unparalleled degree of artistic expression by African American writers; it also marked a time when the country's systemic racial inequalities could, for a moment, be widely, popularly, and publicly addressed and critiqued. We will examine the diversity of African American identities represented in this literature and consider how the Harlem Renaissance helps to redefine America during this fraught historical moment. Readings to be selected from such authors as Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Zora Neale Hurston. After 1800. Prerequisite: FYW1050 *English elective*, *Fulfills AL in LS Core*.

**MWF 10:00-10:50 Assistant Professor Ellen McWhorter**

#### **ENG 3880 Michael Jackson: Reading the King of Pop as Cultural Text**

As a pop star who reached unprecedented levels of fame, artistic success, and wealth in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, and who was later ridiculed, criminalized, and vilified by the very society that elevated him to such heights, Michael Jackson constitutes a most complex and revealing cultural text. The many analyses of Jackson by scholars and journalists since his death in 2009 underscore our growing interest in understanding the cultural significance of his life and art. In this course we will learn to "read" Michael Jackson's work as a musician, songwriter, dancer, and visual artist in order to explore the ways in which Jackson's art and cultural presence intersect with and comment on late twentieth-century ideas about gender, race, sexuality, media/celebrity culture, and the role of the popular artist in society. Our primary focus in the course will be Jackson's short musical films, but course materials will also include selections from Jackson's recorded music, filmed concerts, television appearances, interviews, public statements, autobiographical writings, and press coverage, along with popular culture theory and recent scholarship on Jackson. After 1800. Prerequisite: FYW1050. *English elective*, *Fulfills AL in LS Core*.

**MWF 11:00-11:50 Professor Marie A. Plasse**

### Film Courses

#### **ENG 3745 Green Screen: Environmental Film (new)**

This course examines ecological themes through the medium of film. What ideas do films communicate about the natural world? What impact do they have on audiences? What can close, critical readings of these movies reveal? We will explore such questions through three main branches of cinema: narrative feature films, documentaries, and music videos. Films will include *Blade Runner*, *The Emerald Forest*, *Jurassic Park*, *Earth Song*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Into the Wild*, *I Heart Huckabees*, *Avatar*, *Waste Land*, and *Wall-E*. Prerequisite: FYW1050. *English elective*, *Fulfills AL in LS Core*

**MWF 2:00-2:50 Assistant Professor Joseph Vogel**

**ENG 3755 World Cinema: Nordic Noir (new)**

Henning Mankell, author of the iconic Wallander detective novels, once famously commented that “crime is the truest reflection of times.” Nordic crime stories not only create compelling narratives, but also examine a variety of social and political issues that define the so-called “welfare states.” Over the last decade these various crime narratives found in books, television programs and film have gained inordinate popularity across Europe and America under the brand of “Nordic Noir.” And amazingly this success has transformed these small Nordic nations into global players in the world of television and film. This is our focus in this class. In the process we will study how these Nordic crime stories create what Andrew Nestingen describes as a pop cultural site for “debates over individualism, collectivity, gender and transnational relations.” Some of the Nordic films and television programming studied will include *The Bridge*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *Insomnia*, and *Wallander*. Prerequisite: FYW1050. *English elective, Fulfills AL in LS Core.*

**TR 11:00-12:15 Associate Professor Kevin Plunkett**

### Creative Writing Courses

**ENG 3900 Creative Writing: Fiction**

This course is designed for students interested in working with fiction writing. The first half of the course involves analyzing selected short stories and working with targeted creative writing exercises. The second half of the course is focused on workshopping students’ two longer stories. Prerequisite: FYW1050. *English elective, Fulfills AL in LS Core.*

**TR 11:00-12:15, 2:00-3:15 Professor MaryKay Mahoney**

**ENG 3920 Creative Writing: Poetry**

This course is designed for students interested in writing poetry. The course will involve reading poetry as well as working with focused creative writing exercises and the reading and discussion of students’ poetry in workshop format. Prerequisite: FYW1050. *English elective, Fulfills AL in LS Core.*

**TR 2:00-3:15 Andrea Cohen, Director of the Writers House**

### Internships

**ENG 4850 Public Service Internship Fall or Spring (8 credits)**

As participant observers, students study theoretical and practical approaches to government by serving as research and staff aides to leaders in the public sector at the federal, state or local levels of government. Students must work at least an average of 20 hours per week in the field. In addition, students will work individually and in groups with the internship Director to produce a 20-25 page research paper on a topic related to the internship experience. Prerequisite: Senior and junior with permission from the Instructor and the English Department Chair. Four (4) of the eight (8) credits earned may be used to fulfill the English major elective requirement. *English elective, Fulfills X in LS Core.*

**TR (meeting times to be announced) Associate Professor Harry Wessel, Political Science**

**ENG4852 Co-Curricular Internship (no credit)**

Qualified, intermediate or advanced students working under the supervision of full-time English Department faculty in any one of a variety of non-credit bearing co-curricular internship opportunities offered as part of the English program, including: English Department Newsletter Production Board, Senior Spring Symposium Production Board, Writers House Programming Board, and Field-Research. Through hands-on experience, the co-curricular internship cultivates in students greater knowledge and skill at performing core tasks relevant to publishing, event planning, marketing, journalism and more. 10-15 hours per week. Permission of Instructor.

**(Meeting times to be announced) Professor Paul A. Vatalaro, Ph.D.**