

# MARIST

## Honors First Year Seminar Titles and Descriptions Spring 2023

### **Race in the Premodern World**

During the medieval and early modern period (900-1700), travelers from Asia, Africa, and Europe, and the Americas first met, and observed one another's societies, on the trade routes through Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the North Atlantic; on the pilgrimage routes of several religions; or on the passages created by war and conquest. This course will explore the interaction between Christian European culture and various other cultures they conceived of as a different "race." We will pay particular attention to how medieval observers from a variety of places interpreted and made sense of other societies that they perceived as "foreign," drawing on analytical frameworks from different disciplines. We will consider such questions as: How did medieval societies identify peoples as being racially different? How did it change over time, and how does it compare to today? And how did societies respond to this difference? While the Middle Ages is often thought of as the "Dark Ages" -- a period of relative isolation -- this course will challenge that view by exploring the emergence of the main civilizations of the period and how communication between them in the medieval period helped to shape the relations between these cultures to the modern day.

### **Gendered Bodies, Alien Relationships**

Have you ever heard the expression "men are from Mars, women are from Venus"? This expression originates from the title of a book written by a relationship counselor in 1992 that sold an astonishing 50 million copies. But the success of this book, and the adoption of its title phrase as popular wisdom, posed a troubling question for American society at the end of the 20th century: after a nearly 100-year period that saw major advancements in social and political equality, why did such a large number of Americans see the opposite sex not as fellow human beings but as something akin to aliens from outer space? What were the interpersonal effects of this mutual alienation? And does this sense of gendered alienation carry on into the 21st century?

Students in this First Year Seminar will explore questions about gender definitions and roles both historically and today through study of what is commonly termed "speculative fiction." These speculative works (novels, stories, films, and other cultural products) will provide us strange and often provocative lenses through which to examine gender issues in American society. By introducing us to alien peoples, genderless cultures, third sexes, advanced technologies, alternate histories, and both utopian and dystopian worlds, this literature will reveal to us the potential detriments of a rigidly gendered society as well as the possibility of a future free from gender's restrictive influence. Readings extend from the early 20th century to the present, with selections from major speculative authors like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Theodore Sturgeon, Joanna Russ, Octavia E. Butler, and James Tiptree, Jr.

### **Minds and Bodies in Comics**

In this FYS, you will develop your skills as a researcher, speaker, and writer by reading great comics and thinking about how mental and physical experiences are represented within them. Along the way, we will engage with scholarship in a variety of fields, including disability studies, comics history, and visual rhetoric. Throughout the semester you will have the chance to work with the Cannavino Library's impressive and ever-growing collection of comics. In fact, there are so many wonderful graphic narratives that it's hard to choose just a few for the course. If you have suggestions about a particular text that you think I should consider for the syllabus, feel free drop me a line at [Moira.Fitzgibbons@marist.edu](mailto:Moira.Fitzgibbons@marist.edu). I'll definitely consider your ideas!