

II. Literature and Philosophy

Prof. Randall Auxier, Southern Illinois University,
Carbondale

20 h, biweekly, Institute of English Studies

This course is about the relationship between will (in numerous senses) and imagination (in the Kantian sense of the term, as modified by our principal literary authors). Imaginative literature gets at these matters indirectly but more effectively than didactic forms of philosophy. Does imagination have any *independent* power or sway over human will (quite apart from what imagination does for reason, understanding, and judgment)? Or perhaps we should ask whether will *commands* imagination, wholly or partly (and with the term "will" I include desire, but there is far more to human will than the coalescing of desire; will is, at bottom, the unification of all our *precognitive* powers, perhaps including even sensibility). The idea that reason, especially, with its teleological structure, may play some role relative to both will and imagination will be a common point of departure for our inquiry, but the entire gesture of imaginative literature, from Romanticism to Stephen King, is to move *away* from the hegemony of narrow ideas and concepts *provided by* reason and toward a more robust ideas *about* reason, as including our feelings, emotions, sentiments, passions, prophecies, destinies, and even common sense (*sensus communis*). We find these ideas embodied in characters, and the choices they make (and their blind spots), as well as in situations and epochs. We will read Poe, Melville, and trace their themes into contemporary writing: Stephen King, Phillip Pullman, Chuck Klosterman, Gregory Maguire, and Umberto Eco. Richard Shusterman's *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* will provide our general framework.