Where does law come from, and what do we want law to do? Try answering this question – and you will find yourself telling a story. This course examines the complex relationship of law and narrative in the modern world primarily through the lens of the realist novel, but with a variety of different kinds of texts. At the heart of the class will be a cluster of Victorian novels, Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, and George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, and a set of legal and interpretive documents falling into three narrative activities: binding, trying and dying. While our historical base will be William Blackstone’s classic English statement of law, his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, we will also draw on such texts as Peter Brooks and Paul Gerwitz’s *Law’s Stories*, essays by Catharine Mackinnon and Robin West on feminist jurisprudence, and historical studies of such questions as “alibis” and “victim statements.” And surrounding our key novels will be a host of shorter, provocative texts in European and American literature: Kafka’s “Before the Law” and *The Trial*, Shirley Jackson’s *The Lottery*, Russell Baker’s *The Sweet Hereafter* and Atom Egoyan’s even more brilliant film adaptation, and Scott Turow’s *Presumed Innocent* (film, not so great!). And yes, we will study “Law and Order” in all three of its incarnation – classic; Criminal Intent and Special Victims Unit (originally, “Sex Crimes” – ponder that!). But throughout, we will return to our questions: how does law “bind” persons together (masters and servants; guardians and wards; husbands and wives); how does it “try” us (who is guilty; who innocent; who decides, and on what evidence?) and finally, how does law help us die, and how does the “dead hand” of the law inscribe us even after death? Law, custom, novel and story – throw in a fairy tale and a myth or two, and you will be fully a part of this exploration of why and how law continues to matter.

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