The course is summarized and its aims are set forth:

This course will consider the relation of literary art to a class of quasi-artistic objects, namely puzzles of various kinds. We will read texts in which puzzles operate as metaphors for literature, texts that suggest that they are themselves puzzles susceptible to solution by the wary reader, and texts that suggest that the world is a kind of puzzle to be interpreted along the lines of a literary inquiry. We will read novels by composers of puzzles together with the puzzles they composed, examine puzzle classics in media ranging from jigsaw to crossword, and spend some time with the Lilly Library’s collection of mechanical puzzles and puzzle books. Along the way, we will broach the theoretical issues that make puzzles an essential point of perspective onto literary art. Does our interpretation of a literary text arrive at a “solution” to a problem posed by the artwork? Why do verbal artworks, like puzzles, so often operate by frustrating and mystifying the reader? Are aesthetic texts like poems qualitatively different from verbal diversions like crosswords, and if so what constitutes that aesthetic quality?

Concerning class requirements, to wit:

I will frame discussion of some of the most important issues in human culture; in return you will provide me with lively, engaged conversation for two hours every week. Each of you will also give a brief but more formal presentation in the last week of class that engages the puzzling qualities of something that does not appear on the syllabus. As far as written work goes, there will be one brief essay (4-5 pp.) on an open topic due early in the semester, intended primarily to give me a sense of your interests and writing process, and a full seminar paper (12-15 pp.) due at the end of class, which you should think of as a draft towards an article. We will discuss these assignments in more detail as the deadlines approach. Needless to say, I am always willing to meet with you to go over drafts or talk through the direction of a paper, or indeed to be helpful in any way I can. Remember that I have office hours specifically in order to be available to YOU. Even if there are no pressing crises, I encourage you to drop by to discuss your reading, your thinking, or just to play a friendly game of backgammon.

On grading, viz.:

Paper One: 15%
Paper Two: 40%
Presentation: 15%
Discussion: 30%

**Required texts and readings:**

The following texts are readily available at the IU bookstore (and other fine bookstores). They are also on reserve at Wells Library:

Anne Carson, *Plainwater*.
Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*.
Velimir Khlebnikov, *The King of Time*.
Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*.

All other readings will be passed out in class or made available on line. I will occasionally garnish the scheduled readings with brief exemplary poems, puzzles, and selections from critical texts.

**Schedule:**

Aug. 26 – Introduction. Art and puzzles. Difficulty, finitude, the aesthetic.
Aug. 28 – Puzzles per se: examples of poetic riddles and puzzle poetry.

[Sept. 2 – Labor Day, no class]
Sept. 4 – Mises en abyme: Jane Austen, from *Emma*; J. R. R. Tolkien, from *The Hobbit*; Cordwainer Smith, from *Quest of the Three Worlds*.


Sept. 9 – Henry James, “The Figure in the Carpet,” “The Beast in the Jungle.”


Sept. 18 – Anne Carson, “The Anthropology of Water.”

Sept. 25 – Anne Carson, “The Anthropology of Water” again.

**ATTENTION: PAPER ONE DUE**

Sept. 30 – Sigmund Freud, from *Interpretation of Dreams.*
Oct. 2 – Pierre Macherey, from *Theory of Literary Production*; Vladimir Lenin, “Tolstoy as Mirror of the Russian Revolution.”

Oct. 7 – Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids.”


Oct. 23 – Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*; Vladimir Nabokov, from *Speak, Memory.*

Oct. 28 – Poetry in various materials—concrete, ferroconcrete, and the like.
Oct. 30 – Field trip to the Lilly.


Nov. 6 – Jean Starobinski, from *Anagrams*; Michel Riffaterre, from *Semiotics of Poetry*; Paul de Man, “Hypogram and Inscription.”


[Thanksgiving – no class]


Dec. 9 – Presentations.
Dec. 11 – Presentations.