

Professor Ryan James Kernan

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Office Hours: Th. 5:00-6:00 and by appointment

353:230 Great Works of Literary Theory

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES | SPRING 2014 - LITERARY THEORY
02 TTH5 CAC 19671 KERNAN SC-106

This course will provide an overview of literary theory from its poetic and rhetorical beginnings to contemporary theoretical and critical discourses about literary studies and the nature of literature itself. Our reading list will span from ancient texts to contemporary ones, including (but not limited to) essays by Aristotle, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, T.S. Eliot, Immanuel Kant, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Frederic Jameson, Plato, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edward Said, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Virginia Woolf. We'll start with texts written prior to the twentieth century, beginning with the poetics and rhetorical theories of the Greeks and Romans, and move to explorations of medieval hermeneutics, Renaissance humanism, and Romanticism. Students will then spend the remainder of the semester being introduced to works reflecting modern and contemporary trends in literary theory and criticism like Formalism, New Criticism, (Post-)Structuralism, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction, Feminist and Gender Criticism, Marxist Criticism, New Historicism, Postcolonialism, and Postmodernism. In addition to their active participation in class, students will be required to complete two take home exams.

Required Textbook

The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism
ISBN-13: **978-0393932928**

Course Objectives

To both familiarize you with the seminal texts of literary theory and to help you **read those texts at a college level**. "Read," in this sense, means a deep engagement with the text where you not only recognize what is explicit on the page, but also formulate your own understandings of how the work conveys meanings. You'll better learn to think of each work both in terms of its parts and as a whole.

Learning Goals (Departmental Website)

1. knowledge of literatures in English, their historical, cultural, and formal dimensions and diversity

2. strategies of interpretation, including an ability to use critical and theoretical terms, concepts, and methods in relation to a variety of textual forms and other media
3. the ability to engage with the work of other critics and writers, using and citing such sources effectively
4. the ability to write persuasively and precisely, in scholarly and, optionally, creative forms.

Close Reading

This is the “meat and bones” of what we’ll be focusing on all quarter. A close reading pays detailed attention to the particular elements of a text’s language and relates those elements of language to the larger issue of how the text conveys complex meanings to the reader. The elements we will look at include word choice, sentence construction, imagery as well as several other poetic devices and figures of language. Examining these elements helps us to arrive at a deeper understanding of a text and helps us to explore the text’s crucial issues (social, political, philosophical, familial, etc.).

Discussion

Your discussion sections offer you a place for exploration, a space where—if you come prepared—all can benefit from your insights and from those of others. Exploring texts can be difficult, and fascinating discussions depend on a variety of opinions. **You should never be afraid to ask a question. THERE ARE STUPID PROFESSORS, BUT THERE ARE NOT STUPID QUESTIONS.** Discussion is meant to clear up any confusion you might have about lectures, our texts or the essay writing (or test-taking) we’ll be doing. Most of the time, I’ll be able to stay after lecture to answer brief questions, and you should also (in all of your classes for the rest of your academic life) take advantage of my office hours! Office hours allow you to get one-on-one help with any difficulties you may encounter, and your visitation keeps professors from getting too lonely and spiteful in their offices.

Attendance Policies

Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. All absences must be reported through the absence reporting website. Absences must meet Rutgers University standards. Missing beyond two classes or unexcused absences will result in points being deducted from your grade. Extended absences may result in a failing grade.

Grading Breakdown

Attendance-10%
Participation - 35%
Take Home Exam #1- 20%
Take Home Exam #2- 35%

Antiquity

- 1) January 21st Course Introduction
January 23rd Plato. *Republic*, Books II, III, VII, X
- 2) January 28th Aristotle. *Poetics*
January 30th Horace. *Ars Poetica*

Medieval Hermeneutics

- 3) February 4th Augustine/Aquinas/Dante. *Norton* selections
February 6th Maimonides. *The Guide of the Perplexed*

Renaissance Humanism and Neoclassicism

- 4) February 11th Sidney. *The Defence of Poesy*
February 13th Corneille and Dryden. *Norton* selections
- 5) February 18th Pope. *An Essay on Criticism*
February 20th Johnson. *Norton* selections

Enlightenment

- 6) February 25th Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Intro and First Book)
February 27th Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Second Book)

Romanticism

- 7) March 4th Wordsworth. "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1802)
March 6th Coleridge. *Biographia Literaria*
March 6th **Take Home Exam #1 Distributed**

Marx, Engels, and Arnold

- 8) March 11th Marx/Engels. *The German Ideology; Grundrisse; Preface....*
March 13th Arnold. "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time"
March 13th **Take Home Exam #1 Due**

SPRING BREAK

Freud and Nietzsche

- 9) March 25th Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams; The "Uncanny"*
March 27th Nietzsche. "On Truth and Lying...."; *The Birth of Tragedy*

Feminism and Gender Theory

- 10) April 1st Woolf. *A Room of One's Own*
- April 3rd Gilbert and Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*

Formalism

- 11) April 8th Eliot. "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; "The Metaphysical Poets"
- April 10th Brooks. *The Well Wrought Urn* / Wimsatt and Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy"; "The Affective Fallacy"

Structuralism

- 12) April 15th Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics*
- April 17th Barthes. "The Death of the Author"; "From Work to Text"

Post-Structuralism and the origins of New Historicism

- 13) April 22nd Derrida. *Of Grammatology*
- April 24th Foucault. "What is an Author"; *Discipline and Punish*

Post-Modernism and Post-Colonialism

- 14) April 29th Lyotard. "Defining the Postmodern" / Jameson. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society"
- May 1st Said. *Orientalism* (Intro.)
- May 1st **Take Home Exam #2 Distributed**
- May 8th **Take Home Exam #2 Due**

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