

St Jerome's University
ENGL 251: Literary Theory and Criticism
4:00–5:15 MW Winter 2020

Contact Info:

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Course description (from the calendar):

What exactly are we doing when we study literature? By examining a selection of critical methods and theoretical approaches, this course will enhance understanding of the many different emphases, values, and priorities critics bring to literature, and the many available perspectives on what constitutes literature's significance.

Course overview and objectives:

This course aims to provide an introduction to contemporary approaches to the study of literature and non-literary texts. It focuses first on literature's sensitivity to limitations associated with rationality, at least when the latter is understood in particular ways, and on the strengths of select contemporary theories in exposing those limits. It then unfolds and traces some of the effects upon literary criticism of a certain theory of language. Finally, it engages a different theory of language, self, and other further to explore dimensions of rationality through literature.

Throughout we will read theoretical excerpts and literary and non-literary texts. Emphasis will be placed on the development of critical skills, including the acquisition of critical vocabulary, and the practical engagement of contemporary theories through journal exercises, in-class and final examinations, and an essay.

Required texts:

All required readings are available on LEARN or elsewhere.

Course requirements:

Ongoing:	Journals (4x5%)	(20%)
3 Feb:	Early Mid-term	(20%)
6 April:	Essay	(25%)
Exam period:	Final Exam	(25%)
Participation:		(10%)

Late policy and return of work:

Papers are due by email at 11:59 p.m. Please use the format FirstnameLast initial (eg JoeS) for the file title. Late papers may be docked 2%/day; late papers will also not necessarily receive comments. Essays will be returned electronically. Journal entries are due in hardcopy at the start of class on the day the reading is taken up.

Email correspondence:

By all means feel free to contact me regarding any aspect of the course.

Schedule of Topics

Introduction

Literature and the Critique of "Rationality"

Feminism and rationality as male
Critical Race Theory and rationality as white
Psychoanalysis and rationality as repression

3 Feb.

Early Mid-term

Language, Science, and Radical Hermeneutics

Science and language
Eagleton and Macmurray – love, knowledge, and values
Gadamer – radical hermeneutics, prejudice, and questioning
Ricoeur – ordinary referential function, poetry, and belonging-to
Williams – freedom, the relationality of the word
Four poems

Structuralism and Poststructuralism

Saussure, linguistics, and Structuralism
Derrida, Nietzsche, and Post-Structuralism
Lacan and Post-Structuralism applied to psychoanalysis
Foucault and Post-Structuralism applied to historicism

Conclusion

NB: This course is highly dialogical. Readings will be assigned as we go.

The Journal Entries:

These are due at the start of class before the reading in question is taken up. Respond to either the critical reading or to a story assigned for an upcoming class in terms of the theoretical approach currently under discussion. (By all means consult the relevant introduction in Rivkin and Ryan, *but you may not write on their introductions.*) Keep the entry *short* (generally no longer than a page, handwritten). Try to engage the material analytically but also be sensitive to and honest about your impressions. The journal entries provide you with an opportunity to mimic or ventriloquize a critical approach by using key vocabulary and concepts. Have fun with them. Journal entries will be marked on a modified pass/fail basis (i.e. A/B/NMR). I'll record your best four. *At least one must come from the section on Radical Hermeneutics.* N.B. You'll have more than four opportunities to write journal entries.

The Mid-term:

The mid-term will test your understanding of the material covered to date: the introductory material, the three critical approaches discussed thus far, including relevant critical vocabulary, and the various texts considered.

The Essay (1500 wds):

Write an essay on the literary work or cultural artefact of your choice, deploying select critical vocabulary from one theory of literature. Emphasis should be on the application of a theory to engage in critical analysis of the novel *rather than a critique of the theory itself*. Marks will be given for consistency and depth of engagement of the chosen theoretical approach, for the level of believability or demonstrated commitment to the approach taken (limited to the confines of the essay itself, of course), as well as clarity and strength of thesis and, within the parameters of the theory, argumentation.

The essay must include a research component. Find at least one article that actively applies a contemporary literary theory to the work on which you are writing. Engage the argument of the article in your essay. Cite the article in appropriate MLA or Chicago format. Papers are due by email at 11:59 p.m. Please use the format FirstnameLast initial (eg JoeS) for the file title.

The Final Exam:

The test in the examination period will focus on the portion of the course after the early midterm. It will be a closed book exam and may include short answer, passage recognition, and mini-essay questions. It may also include an application question involving some sort of cultural artefact.

UW Policy Regarding Illness and Missed Tests:

The University of Waterloo Examination Regulations (www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf) state that:

- A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the “University of Waterloo Verification of Illness” form or it will not be accepted. This form can be obtained from Health Services or at www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html.
- If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, he/she normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor.
- The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may on religious grounds require alternative times to write tests and examinations.
- Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative examination time.

Official statements on other relevant University of Waterloo policies:

“Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm>. When in doubt please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing academic offenses and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm>. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm>.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72, Student Appeals, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm>.

Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.”