About the Instructor

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About the Course

1. Course Title: “Words and Power: How to Read Literary Texts”

2. Course Description (please provide a very clear summary of the proposed course in one paragraph that can be understood by a general audience which has no background in your particular field.)

The Greek philosopher Socrates found writers and poets to be so dangerous he wanted them exiled from his ideal Republic. But what did he fear in a reckless imagination and a creative re-making of the external world? More recently in the 20th century both totalitarian and democratic regimes have had, arguably, ways of regulating words, spreading myths, and mitigating dissent. This course explores links between literature and the world it describes, with a specific focus on the question: what are the links between words and power? Chronologically, the focus will be on four broad eras as we trace how this analysis has shifted and been developed from the classical period to the present: (1) classical Greece (Plato & Aristotle) as we think of how the sophists related to public debate; (2) Enlightenment Europe, where challenges to monarchical and despotic power found expression in a new type of writing on art and literary texts (Hume, Burke, Kant, de Staël); (3) the nineteenth century (Marx, Baudelaire, Nietzsche); and finally (4) the modern and contemporary era, where a range of literary theories re-visit and
reformulate this question (Saussure, Roland Barthes, Benjamin, Foucault, Edward Said). By moving between literature, philosophy and a broader cultural history, the goal is to provide students with an analytic “toolkit” that can be used to think critically not only about literary texts, but also “social” texts, society and cultural works.

3. Course outline with clear, widely understandable phrases denoting major topics (with subheadings, if necessary) and distribution of hours (should add up to 45 hours). Weekly assigned readings (including page numbers to access reading load) should be incorporated into outline.

1. Introduction (3 Hours)
   • I review the topics to be covered and the primary questions to be addressed. We review our “origin story” for European literary criticism & theory. I ask students why we should be self-aware and critical of its exclusions, and yet why we need to learn its language to rework it. Students are encouraged to understand critically how traditions are established, and to place each of these authors (many canonical) in a revised, global context.

Part I, Classical Greece

2. Plato (3 hours)
   • Topics: Literature, fiction and lying. How Socrates understood the real, and literature to be an imitation of this greater reality rooted in his theory of the ideal forms. The real and a (mere) copy. What Plato wrote and what Socrates said. Why it is significant that Socrates is known as "The one who didn't write" (instead, he only spoke).

3. Aristotle (3 hours)
   • How to define the genre of tragedy. The "unities" of action, time and place. The role of drama and tragedy as a social and ritual institution in Ancient Greece. Aristotle’s critique of Plato's idea of the forms. Aristotle’s defense of imaginative works, and its links with his notion of catharsis (or release)

Part II, Enlightenment Europe

4. David Hume (3 hours)
   • I introduce the broad questions for Part II of the class: what was the "Enlightenment," and where was it? 18th-century Scotland, England, America, Germany & France. Europe’s colonies (Haiti, India, the Black Atlantic). Major debates: rights, sovereignty, revolution, abolition. The middle class/bourgeoisie and the public sphere. The rise of the novel & the newspaper in relation to these classes. We turn to Hume’s essay to discuss aesthetics, taste and judgment as thinkers in the period debated whether one "standard" of taste could be said to hold across so many classes, and diverse groups of people (diverse in religion and race). I also introduce the centrality of colonial knowledge—information being collected in Europe’s colonies—in shaping these reflections on the self.

5. Edmund Burke (3 hours)
   • We focus more specifically on the important categories of the "sublime" and the "beautiful." What is considered "sublime" and why? In what way are these two terms aesthetic judgments? How do they relate to political questions and the examination of power? How might we understand these two words in terms of gender? Is the "sublime"
masculine, while the "beautiful" is feminine? We discuss how Burke's emphasis on emotions, on the body and physical responses, challenges other "rationalist" accounts of how humans behave in the Enlightenment.

6. Immanuel Kant (3 hours)
   • I introduce the German thinker and philosopher; we explore Kant's view of taste, and make connections with previous authors (Hume, Burke). Is beauty subjective or objective for Kant? Kant's desire for "disinterested judgment." How is the "good" distinct from the beautiful for Kant? We look at some visual, art historical examples to make his descriptions less abstract. Is the artwork a privileged sphere of autonomy? Does it allow for a certain kind of artistic/aesthetic freedom?

7. Germaine De Staël (3 hours)
   • We discuss De Staël's understanding of the "imagination," and her defense of literature and even specifically the novel against those who see it as unserious. How she distinguishes between literature and history, and sees history unable to "act on you with sustained moral effect." Fiction does not find an obstacle in "passions"; rather it learns to make use of them. How literature, and the ethical training it provides, might have prevented in her view the events of the "Reign of Terror" in France. Finally, we look at her early examination of the status of women writers in the Enlightenment.

Part III, the Nineteenth Century

8. Marx (3 hours)
   • How to understand Marx as an internal critic of the Enlightenment. He begins with the notion of freedom but argues that up to now these notions have only existed on paper or in theory for most people in the world. His transformative project; an incomplete project of enlightenment. How he critiqued and reworked previous thinkers (Locke, Adam Smith, Hegel). We discuss the crucial notions of contradiction, alienation, and labor in his thought. How Marx understood his thinking to be "materialist," and how this relates to his notions of "base" and "superstructure." Are culture, literature, and the arts to be seen as (mere) superstructural reflections of a deeper economic base? How Marx understood the transformative role of the bourgeoisie. Can we understand contemporary globalization (or critique it) using terms from his analysis?

9. Baudelaire (3 hours)
   • Baudelaire's understanding of beauty—especially in the urban space. We discuss how he coins the word "modernity" and what he might have meant by it. I also try delineate his relatively novel understanding of two types of "beauty" that exist: one fleeting and ephemeral, the other permanent. Why did Baudelaire praise mere surfaces? His interest not only in the past but in "painting the manners of the present." We explore other key notions which help with understanding the modern city: the flâneur (or solitary walker), the dandy, the role of the crowd in a city, and the pleasures of anonymity—even the pleasures of alienation.

10. Nietzsche (3 hours)
    • We discuss Nietzsche's Idea of "genealogy" and distinguish it from "history." How has Nietzsche made an impact on later thinkers of the 20th century (authors such as Foucault and Derrida), influential in both literary criticism & philosophy? We discuss how
Nietzsche's training as a philologist informs his view of truth as depending upon unstable and unreliable metaphors. We explore how language, for Nietzsche, was viewed in some of his writings as an inadequate way to express reality.

Part IV, The Modern Era

11. Saussure (3 hours)
   • Nietzsche's scrutiny of language serves as a bridge to the systematic and potentially technical approach which the Swiss linguist Saussure developed in his "general theory of signs." We examine the rich applications of his theory of language as an "ensemble of signs," and the significance of his argument that all signs are "arbitrary" in their relation to what they signify. We consider his distinction between individual speech (parole) as opposed to the social creation of a collective (langue). We turn to some concrete illustrations of what he meant by terms such as "signifier" and "signified" as part of his general theory of the sign, or "semiotics."

12. Freud (3 hours)
   • We explore Freud's contributions to the arts of interpretation—initially the interpretation of dreams—but consider how his method relies upon illustration from literary texts (e.g. the Oedipus complex) and later is used to interpret a broad range of literary and cultural documents. We discuss the importance of his understanding of "unconscious" and unacknowledged desires, and how this necessarily challenged the idea of a self-aware subject in full control of its actions and emotions. We incorporate other key ideas from his thinking, such as the "manifest" versus "latent" content of dreams, or his idea of "condensation" and displacement.

13. Benjamin (3 hours)
   • Walter Benjamin's importance lies in his understanding of the effects of technology upon the arts, in his admiration for what was seen as "outmoded" and yet his optimistic view of the possibilities of new artistic media such as the "sound film." We explore how he builds upon ideas from both Freud and Marx to read such new objects as the built environment of the city around him (Paris in his case; I draw some local examples from Chicago). We consider, further, his implied theory of the artwork as emerging out of the context of ritual and religion (where an object has a use, and a "use value") into the space of the museum (where "exhibition" value takes over).

14. Barthes (3 hours)
   • French critic Roland Barthes is our point of entry to the critical movements of "structuralism" (as these impact literature, anthropology and art history), and we look at his very accessible essays in Mythologies. Here he returns us to the questions of power in his efforts to unmask how "ideology" operates: by passing off what is culturally specific—or in his argument the viewpoint of a specific class—as a universal value. We explore in particular his analysis of photographic images to understand how he viewed the photo as compressing and conveying an "ideology" but attempting to do so in a way that undercuts reflection.

15. Edward Said, Orientalism (3 hours)
   • We close our course by returning to a topic that has only become more timely since Said proposed it in 1978: the arguable role of how European and American literary and
scholarly texts make or construct an image of the "orient." How far back can one date this process—to Greek antiquity, to the Crusades, to the Renaissance, etc.? We review the many debates around this analysis, alongside his notion of secular or "worldly" criticism as a type of analysis which engages rather than represses the "world, the text, and the critic" as three key factors of interpretation. We explore how (for Said) the British and French empires have shaped literature and culture of Europe and America profoundly since the 18th century, and why bringing this to view allows for new, more global and less provincial readings of even canonical texts.

4. List required texts and/or readings. In all instances, give author, title, and date of publication. State how the texts and readings will be made available to the students – blackboard, open access, for purchase from book store, etc.

• All readings, except where otherwise noted, will be taken from a single textbook to be purchased from UIC Bookstore. The ISBN number (978-0393932928) will be posted in advance on Blackboard and in the course description so that used copies can be purchased online. Any readings not contained in this book will be posted as PDFs on Blackboard.

1. Introduction. No assigned readings.

2. Plato, Selections from *The Republic* (ca. 375 BCE). Excerpts from Books 2, 3 & 7, 10


4. David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), pp 392-405


6. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) [Selections]

7. Germaine de Stael, "Essay on Fictions" (1795), "On Literature considered in its relationship to social institutions" (1800), p 504 (introduction), pp 507-520


11. Ferdinand Saussure (1916), *Course in General Linguistics* (selections)

12. Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," (1900/1929); "The Uncanny" (1919)
14. Roland Barthes, Mythologies (1957), From Work to Text (1971), selections

5. Please list the course learning outcomes.

Students will become familiar with key thinkers of literary criticism (many also central to the history of philosophy). Students will anchor this approach in classical Greek authors (Plato, Aristotle) whose terminology and concerns are central to the debates which commence in the 18th century and continue to the present. Students will gain an especially strong sense of the period from 18th century to late 20th century, which is the focus of weeks 4 to 15.

Students will be able to interpret and understand the transmission of ideas from these authors to Europe in the 18th century.

Students will also engage with a range of authors (Hume, Burke, Kant, De Stael) who debate whether taste is “universal” for all ages and geographic places or culturally specific (to Europe, to Christendom, etc.).

With the start of 18th century, we enter an incipient global period (visible in the examples writers such as Hume, Burke, and Marx discuss), and students will be able to interpret and understand the circulation of ideas between Europe and its colonies as well as think critically about how current debates on tradition, race, and identity are framed.

Students will also be able to reflect critically upon how the discipline of European literary criticism itself has been formed (what were its exclusions and inclusions, and why?)

6. Please briefly explain how course learning outcomes will be assessed. Please note that our general education courses normally include a substantial paper writing assignment appropriate for the subject matter (a minimum of one 5-7 page paper or two 2-3 page papers) and emphasize opportunities for instructor feedback early in the course to facilitate student improvement. For example, either several papers dispersed throughout the semester, or a final paper where an outline, bibliography and rough draft is required prior to submission of the final paper.

The learning outcomes will be assessed in the following manner:

1. Class Participation is a vital component of this course. The success of this class depends on the students’ active engagement with the texts and with one another. Grades will therefore be partly based in part on class participation. My goal, which I mention to students, is to encourage them to speak once in each session.

2. Six Brief Written Responses & (possible) Quizzes. Over the course of the semester, students are asked to submit six brief written responses (approx. 250 words) to the reading assignment, posted to the course website. These responses will also hopefully help students prepare their
thoughts for class discussion. No secondary sources need be used for these answers (but if they are, I asked that they be cited). Occasionally students may be asked to read aloud their comments in class. Responses are due, posted to the discussion board, two hours before class on the day our class meets, and are only graded as "satisfactory," "unsatisfactory" or "fail." The specific due dates for responses are indicated on the syllabus.

Throughout the semester, I reserve the option to give unannounced quizzes on the reading materials for the day which consist of short questions or identifications. The aim is to ensure that students have done the reading for the day and are keeping up with assignments. (However, I have found I rarely need to do this.)

3. Papers. I ask students to write two 5-page papers (approx. 1200-1300 words). I encourage students to use the UIC Writing Center, and give them an automatic 1-day extension on the due date if they do so (as an incentive). Paper topics are given out one week to ten days in advance. Submissions of papers is entirely electronic, through Blackboard. Students usually receive back a marked up PDF sent by email or Blackboard.

4. One In-Class Exam. I usually give 1 in-class exam, in part because I have found some students do better on these, while others excel at paper writing. It consists of short identifications and written essay responses. It is a "closed book" / "closed device/gadget" exam.

5. One In-Class Presentation with Partner. I ask students to undertake one in-class presentation, done with a partner in class. These take place at the end of the semester during the final week of classes. They are intended to be brief, about 7-10 minutes in length, and serve as a review of topics from over the course of the semester. The idea is for students to select one work of theory or criticism they have read and relate it to the interpretation of another literary or artistic text. The aim is to have an exercise in "applied" criticism in relation to a range of cultural and literary objects (films, music, photography, etc.). I have also found that the collaborative approach lessons anxieties and creates ties between students that sometimes outlast and extend beyond the class and classroom meetings.

6. Grades for Course. Overall I use the following approximate percentages to calculate grades.

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<tr>
<td>Class Participation (including attendance)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written Responses / &amp; Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>In-class exam</td>
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<td>Two Papers</td>
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<td>Final Presentation</td>
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About the Course’s Fit with General Education

The General Education Core includes six categories. Please consult the UIC website on general education (http://catalog.uic.edu/ucat/degree-programs/general-education/) and indicate 1-2 core categories in which you believe your course would fit best. Preference will be given to courses that include either Understanding the Creative Arts or Exploring World Cultures as one of their two categories.

___ Analyzing the Natural World (No Lab)
___ Understanding the Individual and Society
  X Understanding the Past
  X Understanding the Creative Arts
___ Exploring World Cultures
___ Understanding U.S. Society

Please write a separate justification for inclusion in each selected General Education category (about one paragraph per category).

For **Understanding the Past**, this course exposes students to several key events of the European Enlightenment that arguably have given shape to the modern world: (1) the engagement with Greek authors, sometimes referred to as the “reception” of classical authors in the 18th century; (2) we reflect on the cultural impact of the expansion of European empires (especially the British and French) on the realm of arts and ideas (for example, the debates on human nature that occur with the encounter with the “primitive”; divergent notions of taste in the encounter with “the Orient” and Asia (both China and India); (3) the significance of the French Revolution and the debates it engendered (through authors in Britain as well as France itself). All these topics give students an understanding of how the Enlightenment, colonialism and critiques of it, played a crucial role in establishing the terms we still use in the present to analyze modern societies.

Therefore, the specific learning outcomes with regard to “Understanding the Past” this course satisfies are:

  X Critically analyze the cultural, economic, geographical, and political processes that influenced historical events.

  X Recognize, describe, and explain the nature of past historical events and their consequences for the present.

  X Understand and explain the significance and influence of the past and its connection to current political, scientific, and cultural forces.

For **Understanding the Creative Arts** this course provides an essential vocabulary needed to discuss the art (or science) of interpretation. Indeed, some of our authors (Saussure, for example) aspired for a method drawing on analogies from more empirical sciences (linguistics). Others draw on long literary traditions extending to antiquity to make their claims about value (Hume on “the Standard of Taste,” for example). Finally, authors such as Marx or Freud change the very terms of the debate. Put simply, Marx
adds the idea of the social formation of ideas in concrete material contexts, while Freud places into question the idea of a coherent, intending subject in full control of her desires and judgements (there is the unconscious to consider, repressed desires and motives, etc.).

Therefore, the specific learning outcomes with regard to “Understanding the Creative Arts” this course satisfies are:

- Basic issues of interpretation. How does a work mean anything? How does one determine meaning? How can a work have numerous meanings, often at the same time?

- Questions of value. How can such creative works be evaluated? How are critical vocabularies developed? How does a work come to be called a “classic”? How do new works and genres become accepted as art?

- Questions of cultural and historical context. How do creative works relate to the societies in which they are produced and received? How do cultural roles of creative products, definitions of art, institutions, markets and patronage affect the creation of works of architecture, art, music, literature and other media?

Select the appropriate learning outcomes from the general education catalog description (you may select as many as are appropriate, but you must pick at least one) and list which assessment methods will be used to assess each outcome.

**Additional Information**

If there is anything else you’d like the Honors College Educational Policy Committee to consider (this may include your curriculum vitae, teaching evaluations, teaching awards you have received, past teaching for the Honors College, and so on), please note it here:

I try to include the use of technology in the classroom, but always with a view to ensuring that it serves the ends of learning more effectively (rather than troubleshooting technical problems). I’ve also tried to implement elements of what is referred to as the "flipped classroom" so that more class time can be devoted to discussion rather than the conveying of information. One modest example of this is having student submit their responses on Blackboard, which I read 20 minutes before class begins. I find myself integrating the observations which students make in their responses rather naturally as we discuss relevant points from the text at hand.

_____________________________________________ 15 Dec 2016 _______________________
Signature of the Course Proposer Date

_____________________________________________ ____________________________
Signature of the Department Chair Sunil Agnani Please Print Your Name Date