

Introduction to Critical Reading: Literature and Labor

Professor Ethan Mannon

Course Description:

This course aims to introduce students to a wide range of critical and theoretical approaches to literature. We will persistently work to uncover the underlying unities and contradictions in our course texts in order to sharpen our own critical and analytical skills. As one might suspect from the course title, the texts for “Literature and Labor” are connected by their attention to issues of work, labor, and leisure. We will use our course texts to examine a variety of questions: What qualifies as labor? Where does labor end and leisure begin? Are there differences between “work” and “labor,” and, if so, what are they? How has work been defined in the past? What are the connotations of work, labor, and leisure? Are the answers to these questions stable across history, culture, and/or gender? While we will spend the majority of our time on these questions, we will also consider a variety of other topics. Also, because the texts span a generous range of history and are drawn from a variety of genres (drama, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction), we will discuss how such changing contexts affect our course theme.

Required Texts*:

(I have included the ISBNs because it is important that you obtain the correct editions)

William Shakespeare. *The Tempest* (ISBN: 0198321511)

Cormac McCarthy. *The Stonemason* (ISBN: 0679762809)

Barbara Kingsolver. *Prodigal Summer* (ISBN: 0060959037)

Daniel Quinn. *Ishmael* (ISBN: 0553375407)

Ernest Hemingway. *A Moveable Feast* (ISBN: 068482499X)

The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. (ISBN: 0393974294)

*The course texts will be supplemented by handouts and E-Reserve materials from a variety of authors including Willa Cather, Matthew B. Crawford, Tillie Olson, William Wordsworth, Robinson Jeffers, Robert Frost, and Maggie Anderson. You will be required to bring all E-Reserve materials to class.