



**Instructor:** Mari Ruti

~ mari.ruti@utoronto.ca

**Course Number:** ENG280H5S

**Course Title:** Critical Approaches to Literature

**Course description:** This course presents some of the highlights of literary and aesthetic theory from the last two hundred years. Rather than providing a comprehensive overview, the course is designed to foreground themes, concerns, and questions that have been of perennial interest to literary critics (and students of literature). We will consider the complex relationship between reader and text; the value, relevance, and pleasure of literature; the criteria of aesthetic judgment; the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime; the poetics and challenges of interpretation; as well as the often quite heated politics of criticism, including feminist, ethnic, and postcolonial challenges to the Western canon. The course poses the following question: What is the purpose of studying literature? What does literature give us? How does it relate to our social and political world? Does it refine our minds? Allow us to feel more deeply or authentically? Or help us live more meaningful lives? In what ways do we as readers participate in the production of meaning? What, if any, is our responsibility as readers? Is there a relationship between beauty and justice? What constitutes the distinctiveness of literature (in comparison to other sites of

Continued...

cultural production)? What is the significance of what the text hides, represses, or leaves out? What constitutes readerly or interpretative generosity? Does the author's race, gender, or nationality impact literary production? Who gets to decide what counts as literature? And why does this matter?

**Required Reading:**

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*  
Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*  
Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*  
Coursepack of essays and book chapters

**First Three Texts/Authors to be Studied:**

Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*  
Jean-Paul Sartre, "Why Write?"  
Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*

**Method of Instruction:**

Lecture

**Method of Evaluation:**

two in-class tests: 25% each  
5-7 page paper: 40%  
class participation: 10%