ENG 205-16538: ROMANCE AS GENRE AND NARRATIVE MODE

Professor Kirby Brown
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Class Meetings: MWF 10-10:50am
Location: 248 GER

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Though signifying idealized notions of love in popular parlance, romance is about more than the transcendent power and emotional magic of romantic love. As a genre (an expressive form with recognizable and elastic conventions) and as a narrative mode (a specific way of structuring and telling stories with the primary goal of exploring and resolving social contradictions into a coherent moral order), romance explores tensions ranging from class conflict and anxieties over religious, racial, and national identity to the collapse of social institutions, normative authority, and society itself. Understood in these terms, romance permeates everything from “serious” literature and “high” culture to Harlequin romances and pulp western fictions, and finds expression in a variety of forms ranging from epic poems, Renaissance dramas, and gothic novels to speculative fiction, superhero comics, and postapocalyptic TV series and blockbuster films.

CLASS GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

This class will explore the romance through close attention to a handful of representative texts across a variety of forms. While not attempting anything approximating comprehensive historical coverage, it will situate primary texts in relation to the historical contexts and debates out of which they emerge and to which they’re responding and adapting. We’ll pay particular attention to the development of formal conventions and narrative strategies that mark a romance as such. Along the way, we’ll also develop a shared critical vocabulary and a set of analytic tools to interpret various expressions, complications, and refusals of the genre/mode.

Some conventions and narrative strategies we’ll explore include:

- Generic distinctions/continuities between epic, comedy, tragedy, realism, & romance
- Relationships between allegory, character, idea/ideal
- Narrative mode, structure, and the “political unconscious” of the romance
- Plot Structure(s): isolation of “hero/es” from society via quest/journey/adventure; trial through various tests/challenges in exotic, foreign lands/locales; return/integration into society via successful quest, victory, marriage, etc.; resolution of social contradictions, affirmation of emergent social relationships
- Voice: moral development of character, psychological internality, narrative self-consciousness
- Temporality and Setting: episodic/linear, legendary/historical, familiar/exotic
- Motifs: love/marriage, adventure.quest, dreams/fantasy/mystery/imagination
• Themes/Tensions: individual vs. society; words vs. deeds; intent vs. action; passion/desire vs. reason/responsibility; material/empirical vs. metaphysical/affective; intellectual vs. imaginative; familiar vs. foreign/exotic; self vs. other; known vs. unknown

REQUIRED TEXTS
Other required texts available on Canvas

**All required texts are available in the DuckStore as well as numerous online vendors. They are also on reserve in the Knight Library.**

PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE
You are expected to attend class regularly, bring assigned texts to class, and make substantive contributions to class discussions. This requires that you keep up with the reading assignments, make observations and take careful notes for each text, and bring thoughtful questions or concerns to class. Always remain civil and on point in your discussion of texts and ideas.

Though I don’t enforce an attendance policy, be aware that missing class regularly will severely impact your grade due to missed in-class group assignments, free writing assignments, daily/weekly quizzes, and class discussions. If you miss class, it is your responsibility entirely to approach your fellow classmates to get notes for that day and catch up on any material you missed. Please make these initial inquiries and develop specific questions/concerns about the material before emailing me or scheduling an appointment.

Students who observe religious holidays, who are involved in university sanctioned activities, or who have other commitments or circumstances that conflict with academic requirements should inform me and make compensatory arrangements in person well in advance of the absence.

ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENT
This course offers a variety of assignments by which your performance is ultimately assessed so that your final grade is not dependent upon a single skill or performance. These include class participation and individual/group work, a reading/viewing journal, weekly reading quizzes, online discussion forums, short writing assignments, and two exams.

All assignments are due at the beginning of the class on which they are due. Late assignments will be docked 1/2 grade point for every day they are late.

**Reading/Viewing Journal**
You are required to keep a reading journal (“Decomposition Books” @ DuckStore) for this course in which to take notes, ask questions, make observations, and sketch out preliminary and ongoing thoughts about the readings for the week. These journals will be evaluated after each unit on a credit/half-credit/no credit basis. To receive full credit, you must demonstrate legitimate engagement of at least 1.5 single-spaced pages for a given reading assignment on a given day. How you choose to engage the texts or use the journal is entirely up to you. Examples of substantive journal entries are available on Canvas. I strongly suggest that you use the “Strategies for Close Reading” handout appended to this syllabus as a guide for your journaling.
In-Class Exercises
Plan on short, unannounced quizzes, freewriting assignments, and breakout group work at least once a week to evaluate your engagement with and recall of course materials. These activities will be administered at the beginning of class. Under no circumstances will you be allowed to make them up.

Course Discussion Forum (Canvas)
Each student is required to participate in the Discussion Forum on our course Canvas site. These assignments ask you to engage critically with a primary text, essay, concept, idea, or problem and to respond thoughtfully to the thoughts, arguments, and analyses of your peers. Discussants will interrogate a specific problem, question, critical issue or formal element in the materials assigned for the week and mount well-organized, focused, critical analyses of 300-500 words (~2 double-spaced pages) driven by an explicitly articulated thesis and supported by textual evidence and explanation/interpretation of that evidence. Respondents will submit incisive, thoughtful responses of 150-200 words (~1 double-spaced page) to two discussion posts which productively challenge your colleagues to nuance their interpretations, complicate and strengthen a given line of inquiry, expand on their presentation and analysis of textual evidence, and shore up any holes or blindspots that might be present in their arguments. Detailed instructions, sample discussion threads, and critical argument activities available on Canvas.

Take Home Midterm and Final Exams
Both of these exams will be essay in format, comprehensive in scope, and will ask you to synthesize information from across the term. They will incorporate both primary and secondary materials, information from class discussions and group work, as well as relevant topics from discussion threads.

GRADES
Quizzes, Freewrites, Group Work 10%
Reading Journal (RJ) 15% (cr/.5 cr/no cr)
Discussion Forum (DP/DR) 20% (cr/no cr)
Midterm Exam (ME) 25%
Final Exam (FE) 30%

GRADE POINT DISTRIBUTION
F <59.5 B- 79.6-83.5
D- 59.6-63.5 B 83.6-87.5
D 63.6-67.5 B+ 87.6-89.5
D+ 67.6-69.5 A- 89.6-93.5
C- 69.6-73.5 A 93.6-97.5
C 73.6-77.5 A+ 97.6-100+
C+ 77.6-79.5

NOTE: Meeting the minimum requirements for the course (attending consistently, regular participation, and meeting minimum assignment criteria) will typically result in an average grade, or a C on the college scale. Higher grades are awarded based upon exceeding (B) and greatly exceeding (A) minimum expectations.

RESOURCES
I strongly encourage you to take advantage of every resource available to you to improve your research, writing, and critical thinking skills. Two of those are English Writing Associates and Teaching and Learning Center Writing Tutors. Both services are free to all UO students.

English Writing Associates are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course. As peer tutors, Associates are advanced English majors who have been trained to tutor writing. They are thus well-equipped to work with you one-on-one on your writing assignments, helping you understand the process of writing about literature and media while also showing you how to make your
written work for this class more clear and effective. Click here to make an appointment with a Writing Associate today.

**Teaching and Learning Center Writing Tutors**, located in the “Sky Studio” on the 4th floor of the Knight Library, offer “drop-in” sessions to discuss assignments and receive feedback on class writing before handing it in. They also periodically offer workshops in grammar, argument, and other popular forms/concerns. Stop by Sky Studio and work with a tutor beginning week two each term. Click here for more information.

**CLASS COMMUNICATION**
Get in the habit of checking your UO email account regularly (i.e. daily) as this will be our primary means of communication outside of class. **Please be aware that I will not respond to emails sent after 5pm or on the weekend until the next weekday.**

**CONVENTIONS OF ADDRESS**
Speaking to a professor, instructor, administrator, staff member, employer, manager, or colleague is different (at least initially) from speaking/texting with a friend, family member, or other familiar relation. In a professional, intellectual context like the University, it is conventional to refer to faculty, administrators, staff, GTFs and others by their titles (Doctor, Professor, Instructor, Coach, preferred gender pronouns/titles, etc.) unless explicitly instructed otherwise. You should also get into the habit of including greetings, salutations, and language appropriate to such contexts. I will always respectfully refer to you according to your stated preferences and the appropriate context; I expect that you’ll reciprocate in kind.

**INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**
If you have a documented need that necessitates accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me as soon as possible and request that a counselor at the [Accessible Education Center](https://accessible.uoregon.edu) send a letter verifying your requests.

**TITLE IX POLICY AND REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES**
The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, know that help and support are available. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially—i.e. those not required to report—you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO’s 24-hour hotline to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options, as confidential counselors are not required reporters. You can also visit the SAFE website at [https://safe.uoregon.edu/services](https://safe.uoregon.edu/services) for more information. Each resource is clearly labeled as either “required reporter,” “confidential UO employee,” or “off-campus,” to allow you to select your desired level of confidentiality.

**INCLEMENT WEATHER**
In the case of inclement weather, please check the UO homepage, UO Alerts Blog, and local weather stations for information on travel, closures and cancellations. If inclement weather makes traveling to campus difficult, I will notify you by email about whether we are holding class. Whether or not I decide to hold class, you should use your own judgment about the safety of traveling to campus.
ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT
The University Student Conduct Code defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available here.
COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: “THE STRUCTURAL CORE OF ALL FICTION”: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ROMANCE

Week 1
Mon, Sept. 25th Welcome, Logistics, & Initial Questions for Consideration
Wed, Sept. 27th Introduction to the Romance: Genre, Discourse, Political Unconscious (lecture and in-class work)
Fri, Sept. 29th Reading the Chivalric Romance & Medieval Poetics (lecture)
READ: SGGK, 9-18, 195-96

UNIT 2: THE CHIVALRIC IDEAL, EPIC QUESTS, AND POETIC FORM IN SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Week 2
Mon, Oct. 2nd READ: SGGK, 21-53
Wed, Oct. 4th READ: SGGK, 54-95
Fri, Oct 6th READ: SGGK, 96-153
DP#1 (1,3,5,7) due on Canvas by 5pm

Week 3
Mon, Oct. 9th READ: SGGK, 154-89
DR#1 (2,4,6,8) due on Canvas by 5pm
***Note: Bring Computers, iPads, or Phones to view/discuss comics
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DP#1 (2,4,6,8) due on Canvas by 5pm

UNIT 3: THE DRAMA OF EMPIRE AND ITS ROMANTIC OTHERS IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S THE TEMPEST

Week 4
Mon, Oct. 16th READ: ST, ‘Introduction” (pp. lxiii-lxxvii) and “Sources” (pp. 91-105)
DR#1 (1,3,5,7) due on Canvas by 5pm
Wed, Oct. 18th READ: ST, Act 1 (pp. 3-27) & 2 (pp. 3-47)
Fri, Oct. 20th READ: ST, Act 2 (pp. 28-47)
DP#2 (1,3,5,7)

Week 5
Mon, Oct. 23rd READ: ST, Acts 3 & 4(pp. 47-87)
DR#2 (2,4,6,8)
Wed, Oct. 25th  **READ:** *ST,* “The Miranda Trap: Racism and Sexism in SS’s *The Tempest*” (pp. 146-55);  **DISCUSS:** Scenes from Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest* (1968) (Canvas)

Fri, Oct. 27th  **READ:** *ST,* “The Tempest on Stage and Screen” (pp. 180-90)  **VIEW & DISCUSS:** Scenes from Julie Taymor’s *The Tempest* (in class)  **TAKE HOME ME:** Due Monday, Oct 30th on Canvas by 5pm

**Week 6**
**Mon, Oct. 30th**  **VIEW & DISCUSS (cont):** Scenes from Julie Taymor’s *The Tempest* (in class)  **RJ DUE IN CLASS**

**UNIT 4:** *MY HIDEOUS PROGENY:*  **RATIONALITY, ROMANTICISM, AND THE POLITICS OF THE GOTHIC**

Wed, Nov. 1st  **READ:** Excerpts from English romanticism (Canvas)

Fri, Nov. 3rd  **READ:** *MSF,* “Editor’s Preface” (x-xvii), “Introduction” (xxii-xxxv), and “Introduction to *Frankenstein* 1831” (189-93)  **DP#2 (2,4,6,8)**

**Week 7**
**Mon, Nov. 6th**  **READ:** *MSF,* 1-47  **DR#2 (1,3,5,7)**

**Wed, Nov. 8th**  **READ:** *MSF,* 47-95

**Fri, Nov. 10th**  **READ:** *MSF,* 95-146  **DP#3 (1,3,5,7) due on Canvas by 5pm**

**Week 8**
**Mon, Nov. 13th**  **READ:** *MSF,* 146-87  **DR#3 (2,4,6,8)**

**Wed, Nov. 15th**  **READ & DISCUSS:** *MSF,* 203-51

**Fri, Nov. 17th**  **READ & DISCUSS:** *MSF,* 203-51 (cont)  **DP#3 (2,4,6,8)**

**UNIT 5:**  **ROMANTIC NATIONALISM, MANIFEST DESTINY, INDIGENOUS SPECULATIVE FICTION & FILM**

**Week 9**
**Mon, Nov. 20th**  **READ:** Jack London “The God of His Fathers,” Ernest Haycox, “A Question of Blood” (Canvas)  **DR#3 (1,3,5,7)**


**Week 10**
**Mon, Nov. 27th**  **READ:** William Sanders, “The Undiscovered,” Sherman Alexie, “The Sin Eaters” (Canvas)
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| Wed, Nov. 29th| **VIEW & DISCUSS:** Danis Goulet, “The Wakening” (2014)  
**RJ DUE IN CLASS** |
| Fri, Dec. 1st | **VIEW & DISCUSS:** Nanoah Becker, “The 6th World” (2012) |
| **Week 11**   | **TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM DUE ON CANVAS BY 5PM** |
| Fri, Dec. 8th |                                            |
Thoughts and Strategies for Performing Close Readings

To do a close reading of literature, you choose a specific passage and analyze it in fine detail, as if with a magnifying glass. You then comment on points of style and on your reactions as a reader, always using direct evidence from the text to support your claims. Close reading is important because it is the building block for larger analysis. Your thoughts evolve not from someone else’s truth about the reading, but from your own observations. The more closely and actively you can observe, the more original and exact your ideas will be. The following are some thoughts, strategies and potential questions you might consider as you think about how to respond closely, actively, and critically to a text.

Be Patient!
Close, critical, active reading—what David Mikics calls “Slow Reading”—demands patience and time, two things which many of us find ourselves possessing less and less of. It is different from other kinds of reading (and writing!) that we typically do today, much of which is designed to provide quick, easily-consumable snibbets of information seemingly about everything but that often leave us with only a superficial understanding of anything that we’ve read. For this class, I'm going to ask you to commit to slowing down, allowing yourself as much time and attention as your schedules will allow to actively immerse yourself in the texts we'll read this term. On some days you'll have to make strategic decisions about where to invest your time, and you won’t be able to slowly, closely and actively engage each and every text. That's okay! Just committing to making this a habitual practice will yield great rewards, a ton of pleasure, and a genuine sense of knowledge about and familiarity with the materials we cover.

Read Actively
Whether reading for pleasure or in preparation for an assignment, prepare yourself to read actively. Don't read a text simply to get its information, or skim it to get a sense of the main ideas and points (at least don't confine your reading to these practices!). This method of reading is passive: you "receive" the text as you read, and you hold off making any intellectual response to it until after you've finished reading. This way of reading doesn't get you very far and definitely doesn't allow you to fully explore the pleasures gained by becoming “intimate” with a text.

Break the Linear Tradition
Maybe you believe that the most efficient way to write a paper is to read first, think later, and write last of all. To become an active reader, you have to throw that idea in the garbage can and strive to think and write—or think by writing—as you read. When you read, stop to ask questions, challenge the writer, search your soul for what you really believe about the topic at hand, etc. This is where the mutually-reinforcing practices of underlining, highlighting, annotating, and keeping a daily reading journal all come in handy (see “Enter the Conversation” below). And once you've begun writing, go back to the text not simply to find a piece of evidence that will support your claims, but also to continually reconsider the text and your own positions about it!

Trust Your Gut
Once you understand that you ought to be thinking actively as you read, you'll begin to pay more attention to your reactions to the text. It's not a bad idea to keep track of how a text makes you feel while you are reading it. If you find yourself getting angry or growing bored, ask yourself why. Is the argument or narrative coming apart? If so, where and why? Are there too many details? Not enough? Is the narrator a misogynist? bigot? liberal? conservative? jerk? What do your reactions say about your own values, beliefs, social location, and experiences? Pay attention to such responses and try as hard as you can to move past the “whats” of your opinion and into the “whys,” “hows,” and “to what ends” of your developing argument. Such ruminations might well provide seeds for journal entries, discussion posts, group exercises, class discussions, and exam questions.
Enter the Conversation
When writers compose a book, short story, poem, play, etc., they are, in a sense, inviting you into an ongoing conversation. They are taking a position in some debate and asking you to take yours. When you read actively, intellectually engage the text, and write critically about it, you are entering this conversation. However, in order to enter the conversation fully as a writer/speaker, you must first enter the conversation fully as a reader/listener. Pay attention to the text, underline key passages, mark up the margins with your own thoughts, and collect, organize, and expand on those ideas in longer journal entries. This will better enable you to contribute to the conversation in a way that is relevant, thoughtful, and interesting.

Use the Margins
Maybe the best practical advice I can give you about reading more actively is to make use of the margins. An unmarked book is an unread book!!! Marking a text as you read it ensures that you are reading actively. Even the simple act of underlining a passage requires you to ask yourself what is most important in a text. The act of weighing importance is one way of breaking the habit of passive reading. But you can do much more in the margins than simply make note of important passages. You can ask questions in the margins. You can draw arrows, establishing obscure connections in the text. You can note patterns of imagery or language as you see them. You can locate contradictions. You can get feisty, even, and call the writer out for a debate. Remember, neither I nor any of the writers that we'll read have the last word on any subject. (**NOTE: Please DO NOT annotate library materials!!!).

Moving Outside the Text
One important idea to understand when you read, and one that is central to the pedagogy of this course, is that every text is produced, consumed, and understood within a context (or contexts). Remember that every writer is in conversation with other writers, with history, with the forces of their culture and individual experience, with the events of their time. When you understand the context of a work, you can better see the forces that moved the writer to produce a given work and gain a sense for the multiple ways that work might have been understood by a variety of audiences. You will gain clarity about what and why the writer was writing. You may even gain clarity about what you would like to say.

Even if you know nothing about the context of a particular book or writer, you know a lot about the context of a particular reader; you. You are a member of a complex, intersubjective, intersectional experience. Your race, class, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, national origin, ability, affiliations, etc. provide rich contexts that accompany you when you read/engage texts. Note, however, that personal context needs to be examined with care; don't assume that the context of your own experience is “representative” or will always inform you correctly. Rather, interrogate your own contexts as actively, rigorously, and critically as you read a text!

Adapted from http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Close_Reading_Passage.pdf, and the Odegaard Writing & Research Center (http://www.depts.washington.edu/owrc/)
1. **Be Patient—i.e., SLOW DOWN!**
For Mikics, this is the rule from which subsequent guidelines proceed. Without it, you'll receive only minimal benefits from the others. Mikics writes: “Patience means a lot of things. We must be patient not to be overwhelmed by a book’s difficulties. We must be patient to let ourselves be perplexed; to figure out, by trial and error, how to ask the right questions of a book. We must be patient to put in the time and effort needed to read [and write!] well. [We must possess] a happy, and somewhat obsessive, desire for details … [anchoring] our sense of a book’s characters and its argument in small, significant moments … We must not rush to meaning, or demand that an author deliver the point in an easy, palatable way … we have to remember that struggling with a book’s meanings is the whole point of reading, if reading is going to be worthwhile” (54-55).

2. **Ask the Right Questions**
All critical inquiry, regardless of discipline or form, is drive by the questions through which we approach our subjects. Indeed, the questions we ask determine the conditions of possibility for how we'll read and understand a text. Thus, in order to “get from perplexity to engagement” we need to identify useful questions. According to Mikics, “Useful questions connect elements of a book together: What does the beginning have to do with the ending? How do the characters balance or argue against one another? What does a particularly striking passage sum up about the book as a whole … How does the title comment on the work it introduces” (62)? A good indication that you’re asking the right questions is if they consistently lead you back to the text rather than away from it.

3. **Identify the Voice**
Who is speaking? Is the narrator a participant in the action? If so, how invested are they in the narrative? If not, do they possess comprehensive knowledge of events, characters, time and place, or is their story limited to (or focalized through) one or two perspectives? Does the narrator simply describe events or do they comment upon and evaluate characters and events (i.e. editorialize)? Does one voice or perspective dominate the narrative, or are there competing voices, each vying for narrative authority and claims to “truth?” In what ways do the answers to these questions inform our reading and understanding of the text’s main ideas and arguments (i.e., it’s “basic thought(s))?

4. **Pay attention to beginnings and endings**
According to Mikics, structure “tells you something about the way [a text] thinks; openings and conclusions are the irreplaceable backbone of structure” (101). How does the story/poem/play open? What does this opening suggest about the action, characters, and events to come? How does the text end? What does the ending suggest about the text’s main argument or idea? Does the ending reinforce, revise or refute the beginning? If so, how, why and to what effect?
- **EXERCISE:** After reading a text, reread its first and last pages and consider their relationship to each other and to the text as a whole via the questions posed above.

5. **Find the Parts**
This rule draws your attention to the structure of a text and how mapping that structure can lend formal insight into the text’s “basic thought.” Here you’re looking particularly for “the significant changes in a work: transformations of topic, time, place, atmosphere,” narrative voice, character, etc. “that announce such a change or that herald the beginning of a new part of the [text]” (145).
- **EXERCISE:** Make a brief outline of the larger plot structure of the text (not to be confused with story—events as they happen in chronological order!) and identify, where possible, a signpost action, event, location or image that “provides a signature for a scene” in each plot element.
6. **Identify Signposts**
“A book’s signposts tell you what to pay attention to, where to direct yourself in your journey through its pages. Signposts can take the form of key words, key images, key sentences or passages,” echoes and reflections, as well as shifts in location and time. “Think of reading,” Mikics suggests, “as a kind of travel; signposts help you map out your itinerary” (101). Be on the lookout, however. Signposts won’t always provide you the most direct route; sometimes they’ll force you to double-back, take a circuitous route, or forge a new path entirely (101). If you’ve ever chosen the longer route in a Google itinerary, such detours, while at times tedious and time-consuming, often provide the most beauty and pleasure…

7. **Use the Dictionary and Track Key Words**
“Key words are the vital threads that allow you to trace the argument of a book: to follow the drama of meaning that unveils itself in stages, from first page to last” on the way to “opening new perspectives in the reader” (121, 127). In much the same way as signposts that take you off the beaten path, attending to key words can similarly provide insight into a text’s larger conflicts and arguments. At times meaning will shift as the text moves forward, either becoming more honed and precise or more diffuse and hard to pin down.

8. **Find the Author’s Basic Thought**
The question, “What is this book (or poem, play, movie, television series, song, etc.) about,” can be answered in any number of ways. You might describe basic events and characters (plot summary), elements of style, or some of the text’s main conflicts, positions or arguments. None of these responses, however, adequately capture “the deepest and most rewarding answer to the question,” though they are crucial avenues through which to arrive there (127). When trying to find the “basic thought(s)” of a text, think in terms of its “most essential truth(s)” *as you understand it* and the means (i.e. strategies) through which it advance this position. We won’t always agree, but that’s okay. In fact, *reasoned argument and informed disagreement* are the backbones of literary and cultural analysis, as well as the construction of meaning itself.

9. **Be Suspicious**
Cultivating a healthy skepticism (which is not the same thing as despondent cynicism!) is a good thing, especially when it comes to literary and cultural analysis. Note where and how a text moves your sympathies toward a particular character or situation, but don’t go “all in” right away. As with signposts and key terms, texts will often lead you in one direction only to pull the rug out from under you in subsequent pages, challenging you to question your own motivations, investments, values and beliefs as its moral center gets progressively more messy, ambiguous, absurd, or confounding. Heroes and villains are often more complicated than they would at first appear!

10. **Write It Down!**
See “Break the Linear Tradition, “Enter the Conversation” and “Use the Margins” above. After patience, Mikics sees this element as the most ethically-significant component of active, slow reading: “The give-and-take between author and reader takes place on a two-way street. In this imaginary but essential conversation, the reader has a responsibility to keep the author interested. You will refine your perceptions, and become a better interpreter, the more time you spend trying to do justice to a [text], rather than too quickly making it into something of your own. The [text] has something to say, and you are obliged to listen carefully before talking back” (157).

11. **Explore Different Paths**
“Revision, the writer’s most basic tool, is also important for the reader. It’s always a useful exercise to imagine how the author might have begun or ended a work differently, or changed a crucial moment in its plot. Develop a sense of the decisions a writer makes by practicing thought experiments:” What would the work you’re reading be like without a key character? What difference would it make if lacked this or that scene, this or that action? What if it ended earlier or later than it does? What if it was told through a
different narrative voice, or presented non-linearly rather than linearly (or vice versa)? In what ways would any or all of the above “revisions” impact “the basic thought” of the text? As Mikics points out, by considering such questions “you will gain a new knowledge of [and appreciation for!] how writers work, the choices they make” (168).

12. **Find Another Text**

What does the book and your understanding of it look like when read alongside other texts? This component is built into the structure of the course, but I encourage you to perform research on your own and explore other texts across other forms, media and historical moments that speak to the ones we’ll be engaging in class.