Allow me this bold statement: The content of and investigation within this course can and will undergird your scholarship in every other course in literature and textuality you take hereafter. From Aristotle to Slavoj Žižek, we will explore the lineage of critical thinking that has led through recent poststructuralist positions to today’s emphasis on literary and textual ethics.

Rather than work chronologically, though, we will assess epistemic shifts in philosophy and criticism by tracing the indebtedness of today’s theory to prior critical positions. How, for instance, is William Wordsworth’s famous “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* reliant upon Friedrich Schiller — and how, in turn, does Wordsworth inspire Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, and even today’s cutting-edge theorists of New Humanism, with their concern relevant to environment, ecology, and technology? Why, in the resurgence of interest in narrative ethics, should we read contemporary critic Marshall Gregory alongside Wayne Booth, Matthew Arnold, and even Plato? In short, our exploration will consider the concepts and ideas that have circulated through critical approaches to literature for centuries and found their way back, with modification, in the contemporary theories of Judith Butler, Wolfgang Iser, Michael Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, among others.

Most crucially, we will at every turn apply our study of criticism and theory to literary texts, thus making our learning relevant and transferable to your further studies in this program and beyond. In short, this course not only will provide you with a foundation in the philosophical, critical and theoretical premises that have spurred and analyzed writing as a representation of the human condition, but also will allow you to practice and develop those skills in a safe, collaborative environment. — Kurt Bullock