

Effing the Ineffable: Exploring the Limits of Reading and Writing

English 180: College English

Class Hours: TTh 2-3:30

Professor: Todd Landon Barnes

Office hours: TTh 4-5 and by appointment

What is “writer’s block”? What is the relationship between thought and writing? This course aims to prepare students for the critical thinking, reading, and writing challenges they will face at Ramapo and beyond. In this course, we will explore the idea of the “ineffable” as we read challenging texts by authors who, through various rhetorical strategies, attempt to articulate the inarticulable. By exploring a range of philosophic, literary, scientific and sociological texts, will survey how various thinkers (and their respective disciplines) have grappled with and often tried to expand the limits of representation. While considering the ineffable as something both linguistically unintelligible and morally unspeakable, we will be investigating the elusive boundary between different forms of representation and contents that always seem to exceed or escape such formal bounds.

We will examine and discuss a host of attempts to “eff the ineffable” within a variety of representational contexts. Throughout the semester, we will interrogate language’s attempts to represent experience, film’s attempts to represent dramatic texts, images’ attempts to represent emotions, sociology’s and biology’s attempts to represent race and gender, cartography’s attempts to represent space, and history’s attempts to represent the past. All these discussions will ultimately return us to the ineffable’s relation to the problem of “writer’s block” as students attempt to eff the ineffable in a series of compositions.

Our readings, writings, and discussions will be guided by the following questions: What is the ineffable? Where does interpretive reading end and argumentative writing begin? What activities exceed the limits of reading and writing? Where might we locate seeing, loving, feeling, remembering, performing or experiencing? Do these activities exist inside or outside the purview of reading and writing? Do these experiences serve as metaphors for reading and writing, or are reading and writing metaphors serving the activity and receptivity of such experiences?

Required Texts:

- *Writing Analytically*. Ed. Rosenwasser and Stephen. Cengage. Fifth edition.
- *Style: Ten Lessons on Clarity and Grace*. Joseph Williams. Ninth Edition.
- *A Writer’s Reference*. Dianna Hacker. Sixth Edition.
- *Othello*. Ed. E.A.J. Honigmann. Arden. Third Edition.
- A course reader which will include work by the following writers: F. Nietzsche, R. Barthes, M. Omi and H. Winant, E. Martin, B. Balázs, J. Berger, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, J.L. Austin, M. Foucault, M. de Certeau, C. West, W. Shakespeare, W. Benjamin, T. Eagleton, A. Artaud, J. McGann, and others.

Participation/Attendance

This class will not be possible without your participation. Unlike some courses, the success of this course depends on your contributions, your labor, and your perspective. In addition to the authors we read together, your work will form a central focus of our attempts to understand what it means to articulate the ineffable.

Papers (late/format)

No late papers will be accepted. Your essays need not be perfect, but I do expect them to be on time. Papers will be written, reviewed and returned in accordance with a shared schedule. Late papers threaten to jam what I hope will be the smooth machinery of the review process.

All papers are to be typed and formatted according to the most recent MLA guidelines. Refer to Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* for help with these guidelines. For additional help in writing papers, I encourage you to visit our Center for Academic Success. Their helpful website can be found here: <http://ww2.ramapo.edu/academics/cas/>

Plagiarism

Plagiarism, etymologically, means *kidnapping*. Do not steal the brainchildren of others. Students who engage in plagiarism will suffer the consequences set forth by the university. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, see one of the instructors or the university's guidelines at: <http://library.ramapo.edu/plagiarism.html>

Disabilities/Accommodations

If you feel you might need any accommodations in order to succeed in this course, please let me know privately as soon as possible. Also, you should contact the Office of Specialized Services at 201.684.7514 (voice), 201.684.7092 (TTY), or oss@ramapo.edu (email).

Requirements/Grades

Your weighted grade in the course will be determined according to the following schema:

60% compositions (Essay 1.1=5%, Essay 1.2=10%, Essay 2.1=10%, Essay 2.2=15%, and Essay 3= 20%)

05% *Style* exercises

10% *Writing Analytically* presentations

15% discussion/blog assignments

10% peer review exercises

Week Eight: Performance and Performativity

Austin, J.L. Excerpt from *How to Do Things With Words* (Lectures I/II/III)

Shakespeare, W. *Othello*

10/14 T: Discuss Austin and *Othello* (Act I)

10/16 Th: Discuss *Othello* (Act II-III)

Week Nine: Performance and Performativity (Cont.)

Artaud, A. "The Theatre and Cruelty," & "Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto)"

Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 9: "Making a Thesis Evolve"
Chapter 12: "Recognizing and Fixing Weak Thesis Statements"

10/21 T: Discuss *Othello* (Act IV)/Artaud

10/23 Th: Discuss *Othello* (Act V)/Evolving Thesis Statements

Week Ten: Writing Workshop

Bartholomae, D. "Inventing the University"

Williams, J. *Style*

10/28 T: Writing Workshop (watch *Revising Prose*)/**Paper 2.0 Draft Due (Peer Review)**

10/30 Th: Discuss Bartholomae/*Style*/**Style Exercises 2 Due**

Week Eleven: Images and Re-Imagining

Balázs, B. Excerpt from *Theory of the Film*

11/4 T: Watch Peter Berger's *Ways of Seeing*/**Paper 2.2 Due**

11/6 Th: Discuss Balázs

Week Twelve: Research

11/11 T: **Formulating a Research Question**

11/13 Th: **Library Tour**

Week Thirteen: Research Methods

Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 16: "Finding, Citing, and Integrating Sources"

11/18 T: Discuss Primary/Secondary Sources

11/20 Th: Writing an Annotated Bibliography

Week Fourteen: History and Experience

Benjamin, W. "The Storyteller"

Barthes, R. "Toys"

Woodcock, G. "The Tyranny of the Clock"

11/25 T: Discuss Benjamin/Barthes/Woodcock/**Blog 4 Due/Paper 2.3 Due**

11/27 Th: Discuss Benjamin/Barthes/Woodcock/**Blog 4.2 Due**

Week Fifteen: Final Project Workshop

Rosenwasser/Stephen Chapter 15: "Organizing and Revising the Research Paper"

12/2- 12/4 Peer Review

Week Sixteen: Final Project Workshop

12/9 Research Presentations/Conference