Criticism 1

Criticism is a form of argument. It is a genre of scholarly writing that is at the heart of literary studies as an academic discipline. This course, which is required of all English majors, is designed to help you to develop your skills as a writer of criticism.

Like other forms of writing, criticism is judged by readers on the basis of specific expectations and conventions. Just as readers do not expect mathematical formulae or computer code in a poem or a novel, they do not expect personal experiences or extra-textual digressions in a critical essay. On the contrary, readers of criticism look for a sensitive argument based on the close analysis of a literary work or other text.

Criticism 1 is described in the calendar as "[a]n introduction to strategies of reading, interpretation, and analysis of literary and non-literary texts . . . ." All preparation for effective criticism begins with a careful reading of the text: its words and sounds, structure and plot, figures and forms, audience and speaker, echoes and borrowings--its construction, in short. Of course, many critical readers are thoughtful and emotional readers, too: they hold on to what they see and feel when they first read a text. But when it comes to formulating their interpretation of a work, critical readers provide evidence for their feelings and insights based on a careful analysis of the text's elements and construction.

By learning to consider a range of textual elements, our criticism will, of course, more effectively persuade others of our point of view. But reading carefully is about more than making our criticism persuasive; it is about our own satisfaction as readers, too. After all, just like a great painting, performance, or song, good literature enchants us with the beauty, mystery, and power of its construction.

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Course content and goals:

English 251A is an introduction to the method and craft of careful text-centred reading and to its persuasive verbal and written communication. In this section we will consider a wide array of exciting works, from all periods, by English, Canadian, American, and other authors working in English. The course will provide students with hands-on training in textual analysis, and in the canons of acceptable evidence for critical writing on literary texts.

The course has three main goals. On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- identify the building blocks of texts using accepted critical vocabulary;
• analyze the role of these building blocks in the construction of a text; and

• make persuasive use of textual evidence in a critical essay.

Class organization and format:

Class meetings of this section of Criticism 1 will function as a workshop. We will test and refine our individual reading skills and contribute to a team reading effort. Class time will be dedicated to practising the skills involved in critical reading, analysis, and communication. In addition to literary works, we will also examine some non-literary texts— including ads, music, cartoons, and perhaps some videos.

English 251A is required of all English majors and honours students because the strategies of reading and analysis it introduces are central to the other English courses you will take over the next two or three years. The best way to meet the goals of the course is as an independent learner, practising the analytic strategies that you are introduced to in Criticism 1 in class, with a study partner, and at home.

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Logistics:

Office: Hagey Hall 257; Phone: 888-4567, ext. 2416
Office hours: 4:00-5:00 Tuesday and 1:00-2:00 Thursday, or by appointment

Required Texts:
Robert Scholes, et al., Text Book, 2nd ed. (St. Martin’s)
M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 7th ed. (HBJ)
Course Packet (available by the second week of classes)

Recommended Texts:
Joseph Gibaldi, MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 5th ed. (MLA)

Assignments:
Attendance and active preparation for and participation in seminar discussions and exercises (10%); a 15-minute seminar presentation on a text (20%); an in-class essay on a text (10%); a 3-page paper on a text or texts (20%); and a final examination (40%).

Students ARE REQUIRED to prepare course readings ahead of the relevant seminar meeting AND to participate in class discussions and exercises. Seminar exercises will
include the analysis of a magazine advertisement (subject to peer assessment) and regular breakout groups on five textual domains (a sign-up sheet for the breakout groups will be circulated in the second week of classes). Seminar presentations (in groups of two) will be scheduled for dates throughout the semester (a sign-up sheet will be circulated in the second week of classes; texts will be assigned the week prior to presentation dates for the sake of fairness).

The in-class essay will be held on October 18. The paper MUST be handed in to the instructor at the start of class on November 15. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, and fastened with a staple (do not use plastic report folders or other fasteners or covers); if using a word-processor, laser print your paper and do not use right justification. A page is 250 words. Papers must follow the format laid out in the MLA Handbook, 5th ed. Papers late without prior permission may be penalized 2% per day. Uncompleted assignments will be graded F-.

NOTE: Please keep a photocopy of any paper you submit, and never hand a paper in by sliding it under (or sticking it to) my office door.
I. Introduction: Sound, Sequence, and Speaker

September 11 & 13: Introduction: Sensation and Construction
Margaret Atwood, “You fit into me” (Scholes)
Sylvia Plath, “Daddy” (Hunter)
Shakespeare, “That time of year thou mayst in me behold” (handout)
Mona Van Duyn, “What the Motorcycle Said” (Hunter)

September 18 & 20: Speech Situations:
William Wordsworth, “Old Man Travelling: Animal Tranquillity and Decay, a Sketch” (handout)
Kamala Das, “An Introduction” (handout)
Langston Hughes, “Theme for English B” (Hunter)

Supplementary Texts:
John Hollander, “Adam’s Task” (Hunter)
Lewis Carroll, “Jabberwocky” (Hunter)
Margaret Atwood, “Siren Song” (Hunter)

II. Metaphor and Metonymy

September 25 & 27: Metaphor, Literally:
Scholes et al., Text Book, chapter 2 (pp. 45-59, 76-87)
Sylvia Plath, “Morning Song” (Hunter)
Ezra Pound, “In a Station of the Metro” (Hunter)
Emily Dickinson, “A narrow Fellow in the Grass” (Hunter)

October 2 & 4: Conventions and Extensions:
Scholes et al., Text Book, chapter 2 (pp. 120-127)
Sir Thomas Wyatt, “Whoso List to Hunt” (Course Packet)
Edmund Spenser, Amoretti 64, 67 (Course Packet)
Shakespeare, “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” (Hunter)
Mary Wroth, “Am I thus conquered? Have I lost the powers” (Course Packet)
Robert Frost, “Design” (Hunter)
Supplementary Texts:
Margaret Avison, "Snow" (Course Packet)
Blake, "The Sick Rose" (Hunter)
Randall Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (Hunter)
Emily Dickinson, "The Brain--is wider than the Sky--" (Hunter)

III. Plot and Point of View

October 9 & 11: Shaping Stories:
Scholes et al., Text Book, chapter 1 (pp. 1-13, 40-44)
Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (Course Packet)
Robert Browning, "My Last Dutchess" (Hunter)

October 16, 18 & 23: Modes of Address:
Jonathan Swift, "A Modest Proposal" (Course Packet)
Edgar Alan Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado" (Course Packet)
Robert Lowell, "For the Union Dead" (Course Packet)
Alan Ginsberg, "America" (Course Packet)

Supplementary Texts:
Edgar Alan Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (Course Packet)
Mavis Gallant, "My Heart is Broken" (Course Packet)

IV. Prosody and Metre

October 25 & 30: The Three Beats:
anon, "The Three Ravens" (Course Packet)
Emily Dickinson, "Because I could not stop for Death--" (Hunter)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Metrical Feet" (Hunter)
William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow" (Hunter)

November 1: Sound, Sense, and Appearance:
Alexander Pope, "Sound and Sense" (extract from An Essay on Criticism in Hunter)
Robert Herrick, "The Pillar of Fame" (Hunter)
e. e. cummings, "Buffalo Bill’s" (Hunter)

Supplementary Texts:
Walt Whitman, "I Hear America Singing" (Hunter)
e. e. cummings, "in Just--" (Hunter)
William Carlos Williams, "This is Just to Say" (Hunter)
V. Intertextuality

November 6 & 8:  Text as Context:
   Scholes et al., Text Book, chapter 3 (pp. 129-162)
   Iain Higgins, “Lot’s Wife” (Course Packet)
   Shakespeare, “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments” (Hunter)
   Wendy Cope, “Not only marble, but the plastic toys” (Hunter)

November 13 & 15: Parody and Tribute:
   Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach” (Hunter)
   Anthony Hecht, “The Dover Bitch” (Hunter)
   Christopher Smart, “For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry” (Course Packet)
   Wendy Cope, “For I will consider my lover” (Course Packet)

Supplementary Texts:
   Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (Course Packet)
   William Blake, “The Little Black Boy” (Course Packet)

VI. Wordplay, Practice, Review

November 20 & 22:  Metatexts:
   Scholes et al., Text Book, chapter 4 (pp. 251-255)
   Donald Barthelme, “Sentence” (Course Packet)
   James Joyce, excerpt from Finnegans Wake (Course Packet)

November 27 & 29: Review and Conclusion:
   Camie Kim, “They Speak Quickly” (Course Packet)
   Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (Hunter)
   W. B. Yeats, “Leda and the Swan” (Hunter)

NOTE: Supplementary texts are provided for further study by students, and for possible class use. A small number of other texts--including ads, songs, and cartoons--will be introduced as appropriate.
Shakespeare, Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death’s second self that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceiv’st, which makes thy love more strong
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

Wordsworth, “Old Man Travelling: Animal Tranquillity and Decay, a Sketch”

The little hedge-row birds,
That peck along the road, regard him not.
He travels on, and in his face, his step,
His gait, is one expression; every limb,
His look and bending figure, all bespeak
A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought--He is insensibly subdued
To settled quiet: he is one by whom
All effort seems forgotten, one to whom
Long patience has such mild composure given,
That patience now doth seem a thing, of which
He hath no need. He is by nature led
To peace so perfect, that the young behold
With envy, what the old man hardly feels.
--I asked him whither he was bound, and what
The object of his journey; he replied
“Sir! I am going many miles to take
A last leave of my son, a mariner,
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
And there is dying in an hospital.”