ENGLISH 251A

The Practice and Theory of Criticism

(emphasis on poetry)

Co-op Section

SYLLABUS for FALL, 1983

This A part of English 251 emphasizes close reading of poetry, both for itself and as an introduction to the close reading of fiction, drama, and satire, which is the emphasis of the B part to be offered in the Spring term of 1984. This A part is also concerned with theories of criticism that apply to literature as a whole (whereas the B part will focus on theories of the genres examined).

Theory

The theories studied are those which have underlain the writing, reading, and criticism of literature from the time of the ancients right up to the present day. They are concerned with the fundamental questions of what literature is and how it works. The text for this part of the course is Criticism: The Major Statements, ed. Kaplan (St. Martin's). From it we shall examine the following: Plato, selections from The Ion and Book X of The Republic; Aristotle, Poetics; Sidney, Apology for Poetry; and Longinus, On the Sublime. On Oct. 27, a mini-test (one hour long) will be held on theories studied to date, and on Dec. 1 a two-hour test will be directed to all the theories examined in the term. Marks received in these tests will constitute one-quarter of the final grade.
Practice

In learning the skill of close reading, we shall consider how rhythm contributes to poetry and how literature works through indirectness. We shall then examine aspects of imagery, diction, structure, and implication.

With most of these topics, students will read assigned poems before class, will take part in an oral discussion of them in class, will observe how critiques could be written on the topics, and will then submit critiques on similar but fresh poems assigned for the purpose. The instructor will mark the critiques before class, and in class, on the return of the critiques, students will join in an examination of the poems in the light of the ideas expressed in the critiques submitted. The marks received on the critiques will constitute three-quarters of the final grade.

Texts of the poems examined will be found in two places: in hand-outs and in W. K. Thomas's The Fizz Inside, which also provides illustrative analyses of certain poems. Useful in this practical part of the course as well as in the theoretic part—and also in many other literary courses—is the final text assigned: Holman's Handbook to Literature (Odyssey).

Schedule

Critiques are to be submitted to HH 263 by 4:30 p.m. on the following Tuesdays:

Oct. 11: Critique on imagery (750 words)
Nov. 1: Critique on diction (750 words)
Nov. 15: Critique on structure (1000 words)
Nov. 29: Critique on implication (1000 words).