ENGLISH 251A (05)
LITERARY CRITICISM: PRACTICE

HH 150
Tues. & Thurs. 2:30-4:00

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

English 251A is an introduction to the theory and methodology behind the formal study of
English literature. The main emphasis is on a close reading of lyrical and narrative poetry and
short narrative fictional prose.

The course is skills-oriented and therefore not a lecture course. In-class exercises and group
work will constitute a major portion of class time. Students are expected to come to class
regularly, to have read the material assigned and thought about it, and to be prepared to discuss
and even debate points.

Because we will not be concerned with what critics have said about specific texts, the
course will not require you to do secondary research.

OBJECTIVES:

The basic aim of English 251 is to help you become a better, more confident reader and
writer. You will study some of the terminology and tools necessary for close reading and the
formal analysis of texts. By the end of the course, you should be able to define key terms (listed
below) and recognize examples in texts. Applying these terms and examining methods and
patterns in a variety of works should help you to articulate your responses to texts and to write
more effectively. I hope that the course will also add to your enjoyment of reading.

KEY TERMS:

Key terms include grammatical terms, poetic devices (or prosody), linguistic, figurative,
and rhetorical devices, and narrative elements.

Grammatical terms include the parts of speech, the names of tenses and moods of verbs,
types of phrases and clauses, and basic types of sentences.

Poetic devices include musical devices (alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia);
types of rhyme (end, internal, perfect, imperfect, masculine, feminine); stanza forms (couplet,
tercet, quatrains, etc.); some conventional verse forms (ballad, Italian and English sonnets, blank
verse, free verse); and the basics of rhythm, such as types of feet (especially iambic, anapestic,
trochaic, and dactylic) and the terminology for describing the length of a line of verse (especially
trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter).

Linguistic devices include diction (connotation, denotation); contradiction (paradox,
oxymoron); and levels of language (formal, informal, colloquial).
In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams distinguishes between figurative language or tropes, and rhetorical figures. Under the heading *figurative language*, he includes simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, irony, pun. Under *rhetorical figures*, he includes apostrophe, rhetorical question, antithesis, and parallelism. Other important terms include imagery, symbolism, archetype, motif, and allusion.

Basic *narrative elements* include speaker, setting (time, place), and point of view.

**TEXTS:**

The following texts are *required*:
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Young Goodman Brown and Other Stories* (Dover).
Alice Munro, *Open Secrets* (Penguin).
Robert Scholes et al., *Text Book*, 2nd ed. (St. Martin's)

The following texts are *recommended*:
Jane E. Aaron and Murray McArthur, *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*, First Canadian Edition (Addison-Wesley). [This text has very useful sections on punctuation, grammar, and sentence errors, as well as suggestions for writing essays and a summary of the MLA style. *Please note: All royalties derived from the sale of this text will be donated to the Department of English scholarship fund.*]

The poems for the course will be provided on handouts.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:**
(I have not included *A Glossary of Literary Terms* in this schedule, but we will be referring to this text regularly. The poems listed for each class are the main poems, but we will continually return to earlier poems.)

**Sept. 9 & 11:** Introduction.
Poetry: Grammatical Terms (poems 1 - 5).

**Sept. 16 & 18:** *Text Book*: "Linguistic Basis of Metaphor" (46-56).
"Metaphor in Three Poems" (57-59).
Poetry: Patterns and Structures (poems 6 - 11).

**Sept. 23 & 25:** *Text Book*: "Metaphor and Dream" (60-63).
"Surrealist Metaphor" (64-65).

**Sept. 30 & Oct. 2:** *Text Book*: "Metaphor as a Basis for Thought" (76-87).

**Oct. 7 & 9:** *Text Book*: "Metaphorical Concepts" (88-103).

Oct. 21 & 23:  
*Text Book: "Metaphor and Metonymy" (120-27).*  
Poetry: Allusion (poem 28).

Oct. 28 & 30:  
*Text Book: "Story and Storyteller" (2-18).*  
Narrative: Narrative Structures and Plots; Hawthorne, "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" (1-9).

Nov. 4 & 6:  
*Text Book: "Aristotle and the Advertisers" (40-44).*  
Narrative: Point of View--First Person; Munro, "A Wilderness Station" (222-263).

Nov. 11 & 13:  
*Text Book: "Intertextuality" (130-36).*  
Narrative: Point of View--Third Person; Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown" (24-34).

Nov. 18 & 20:  
*Text Book: "Transforming Texts (2)" (142-56).*  
Narrative: Narrative Plot and Time; Munro, "Carried Away" (1-58).

Nov. 25 & 27:  
*Text Book: "Completing Texts" (160-62); "Interpreting Texts" (172-85); "Identifying with Texts" (186-94).*  
Summary (poems 29-30).

**GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS:**

Two short essays of four or five double-spaced, typewritten pages, or the equivalent in handwriting (approximately 1000 words). These two essays, taken together, will account for 30% of the final grade (i.e., 15% each).

One longer essay of six to eight double-spaced, typewritten pages, or the equivalent in handwriting (1500-2000 words). This essay will account for 30% of the final grade.

One 3-hour final exam will account for 30% of the final grade.

The remaining 10% of the final grade will be based on attendance and participation.

*(Note also: One number grade (1%) may be subtracted for each day that a paper is late, unless an extension has been granted in advance. *No paper will be accepted after the other students' papers have been returned to them.*)
ESSAY TOPICS:

NOTE: These essay topics require a careful and thoughtful reading of the texts and no use of secondary material. Use the MLA style for documenting page or line references from your primary sources and for your list of works cited (bibliography). I will give you some basic points on the MLA style; for more information, see the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (4th ed) or *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* (pp. 222-53).

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ESSAY 1:

**DUE:** Thursday, October 9, 1997.

**LENGTH:** Four or five double-spaced typewritten pages or the equivalent in neat handwriting (approximately 1000 words).

**TOPIC:** Discuss the use of metaphor, as well as any related figures of speech, in either "Domination of Black" (*Text Book*, pp. 68-69) or "Dark Pines under Water" (handout, poem #31). Relate the use of metaphor (and other figurative language, if you wish) to the structure or pattern of the poem, to the ideas and emotions that the poem is expressing, and/or to the poem’s power and depth.

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ESSAY 2:

**DUE:** Thursday, October 30, 1997.

**LENGTH:** Four or five double-spaced typewritten pages or the equivalent in neat handwriting (approximately 1000 words).

**TOPIC:** Discuss aspects of diction, rhythm, rhyme, and stanza form in either "I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--" or "After Death" (handout, poem # 32 or # 33). To what extent do these features match up with the voice in the poem and/or with the sentiments and emotions that the poem is expressing? Do they align, or do they contradict?

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ESSAY 3:

**DUE:** Thursday, November 27, 1997.

**LENGTH:** Six to eight double-spaced, typewritten pages or the equivalent in neat handwriting (1500-2000 words).

**TOPIC:** Analyse issues of point of view and time in either "Roger Malvin's Burial" (*Hawthorne*, pp. 60-75) or "The Albanian Virgin" (*Munro*, pp. 93-149). How do these issues affect the structure of the story and/or your interpretation of the characters and events of the story?