ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

ENGLISH 251A, LEC 002
CRITICISM I
FALL 2005

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AIMS OF THE COURSE
This course introduces you to basic concepts and techniques of literary analysis. The reading includes both critical texts, which illustrate how one analyses poetry, narrative, non-fictional texts, and so forth, and literary texts we use as our testing ground. After thinking initially about what makes literature ‘literary’, that is, what distinguishes it from ordinary spoken and written discourse, we look in turn at poetry, narrative prose, drama and non-fictional texts (rhetoric). The ultimate aim is to provide you with a toolbox for literary study and to train you in how to make a literary-critical argument.

COURSE OUTCOMES
By the end of the course you should:

- be able to use some basic tools in the analysis of poetry, narrative prose, drama and non-fictional prose
- understand how to support a critical analysis with evidence drawn from a text
- be familiar with some fundamental literary-critical concepts
- be competent in the practice of what is often called ‘close reading’

CLASS STRUCTURE
As a general rule, we will use the first class on any particular topic (e.g., scansion, focalization) to familiarise ourselves with a particular set of critical tools. We will then spend a second session using these tools in the analysis of a particular text.

Discussion of the critical readings will be open: you should come prepared with questions. But when analysing literary texts, we will work in groups of 4-5 students. Each group will be responsible for coming up with an analysis of the work in question, using the relevant critical material. You will be provided with time in class to meet in these groups. In the sessions devoted to the analysis of particular texts, time will be set aside after group meetings for certain of the groups to report back to the class as a whole on their conclusions, i.e., to present their analysis of the text in question. These analyses will be count towards the final grade.

COURSE TEXTS
The texts, critical and literary, will be found in a Course Reader on sale at the University Bookstore and at University Graphics outlets
ASSESSMENT
Mid-term exam: 25%
Group analyses: 35%
Final paper 8-10 pp.: 40%

The mid-term exam will cover some of the general issues we have discussed, but will principally concern the analysis of poetry. It will consist of some simple exercises and a couple of opportunities for the analysis of particular poems.

I’ve described the group analyses together. The Group analysis mark will be the average of the separate marks each group receives for its analytical work. Group analyses will be graded on the basis of: knowledge of the relevant critical method; interest and sophistication of the literary analysis itself; ability to build on earlier discussions and incorporate the methods we have learned earlier.

The final paper will be an analysis of a work of your choice, but chosen in consultation with me. It will give you an opportunity to put to work the methods you have learned during the course. Papers should adhere to normal scholarly conventions in matters of notes and bibliography and should not be single-spaced (though 1.5 lines will do fine), should have adequate margins, and so on. I call your attention to the University and Faculty rules on plagiarism, which will certainly be enforced if the need arises.

Papers will be graded on the basis of: clarity, shrewdness, and sophistication of argument; depth of reading; quality of writing and organization; independence of thought; presentation.

TOPICS WEEK-BY-WEEK

September 13
Introduction

September 15
Literature and Literariness

September 20
Poetic language/figures of speech

September 22
Poetry: Meter and rhythm
September 27
Poetry: Metre and meaning
Critical reading: Fussell
Literary text: William Shakespeare, Sonnet 64

September 29
Poetry: Function of rhythm, rhythm and syntax
Literary text: John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book 1, lines 1-26

October 4
Poetry: rhyme
Literary text: Sylvia Plath, ‘Daddy’

October 6
Poetry: figurative language (metaphor, metonymy, etc.)
Literary text: John Keats, Sonnet ‘If by these rules our English must be chained’

October 11
Poetry: free verse

October 13
Mid-term examination

October 18
Narratology: actions/events I

October 20
Narratology: actions/events II
Critical reading: Chatman
Literary text: Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’

October 25
Narratology: time I

October 27
Narratology: time II
Critical reading: Genette
Literary text: Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’
November 1
Narratology: characters and focalization I
Literary text: Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’

November 3
Narratology: characters and focalization II
Literary text: James Joyce, ‘Eveline’

November 8
Narratology: style
Literary text: James Joyce, ‘Eveline’, in The Dubliners

November 10
Drama

November 15
Drama II
Critical reading: Kelsall
Literary text: Harold Pinter, selection from Act one of The Homecoming

November 17
Rhetoric: proclamatory genres

November 22
Rhetoric: newspapers
Literary text: Articles from The Toronto Star

November 24
Rhetoric: newspapers
Literary text: TBA
November 29
Rhetoric advertising
Literary text: TBA

December 1
Course review