ENGLISH 251B
LITERARY CRITICISM: THEORY

MC 4042
Tues. & Thurs. 1:00-2:30

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8:00-9:30; Thurs. 2:30-4:00

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

While English 251A focusses on the practical application of literary criticism, English
251B emphasizes the theoretical approach. English 251B centres on two interrelated questions:
What is literature? What is language? We begin with the issue of representation: How does
something called "life" get into and out of texts? This leads to questions about what writers and
readers do with literature, and about the cultural, social, and political contexts in which they do
what they do.

The course is not a historical survey. Readings emphasize 20th-century theories, but
representative works from the classical period (Plato, Aristotle, Longinus) and from the 19th
century are included for background and comparison. 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 251B is to help you become a more perceptive and thoughtful
reader of both literary and theoretical texts. Specifically, the course introduces you to some terms
and theories in literary criticism and explores how they can be applied to texts. Written work and
group work should help you to articulate your understanding of these theories and your responses
to texts. I hope that the course will also add to your enjoyment of reading.

TEXTS:

The following texts are required:

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Case Studies in Contemporary
Criticim (ed. by Paul H. Fry) (Bedford/St. Martin's).
Nathaniel Hawthorne, Young Goodman Brown and Other Stories (Dover).
Raman Selden, Theory of Criticism (Longman).

The following text is recommended:

Jane E. Aaron and Murray McArthur, The Little, Brown Compact Handbook, First Canadian
edition (Addison-Wesley). (Please note: All royalties derived from the sale of this text
will be donated to the department of English scholarship fund.)
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

I. Weeks beginning May 1, 8, 15: Representation:

1. Mimesis and Realism:
   Plato (12-18); Aristotle (45-51); Zola (54-56); Brecht (66-73); Shklovsky (274-77);
   Barthes (76-77).

   Pope (85-86); Wordsworth (86-88); Blake (91-94); Wilde (252-54); Rime of the
   Ancient Mariner (pp. 3-24)

II. Weeks beginning May 22, 29, and June 5: Subjectivity and Reader-Response:

1. Subjectivity and Emotive Theories:
   Longinus (153-54, 167-68); Wordsworth (175-78); Mill (178-80); Richards (146-49,
   182-85); Wimsatt (314-16).

2. Reader-Response:
   Aristotle (191); Poulet (200-202); Jauss (205-11); Iser (214-17); Barthes (299-302,
   318-20); Johnson (397-400); Rime of the Ancient Mariner (pp. 97-130).

III. Weeks beginning June 12, 19, 26: Form, System, and Structure:

1. Structure and System (Structuralism):
   Plato (348-49); Aristotle (350); de Saussure (351-53); Propp (353-55);
   Culler (375-79).

2. Structure and Indeterminacy (Deconstruction):
   Nietzsche (383-85); Derrida (385-90); Hartman (394-97); Rime of the
   Ancient Mariner (pp. 261-314).

IV. Weeks beginning July 3, 10, 17, 24: History, Culture, Society and Literature:

1. History and the New Historicism:
   Lovejoy (426-28); Tillyard (428-31); Williams (414-15, 431-34); Foucault (437-38);
   Guillen (438-40); Rime of the Ancient Mariner (pp. 168-219).

2. Ideology and Marxism:
   Blake (457); Mackerey (463-66); Eagleton (466-68); Marx (446-47);
   Benjamin (447-52).

3. Feminism:
   de Beauvoir (533-37); Showalter (537-41); Cixous (541-43).
GROUP WORK:

In the first week I will divide you into groups of approximately six students. I anticipate that there will be some time during the Thursday class to gather in your groups. The room can accommodate some groups; I'm hoping for warm, dry weather on Thursdays so that you may meet outside, if you wish.

The purpose of the group will be to discuss issues that I propose and also to toss around ideas for essays. Each group will be given a different story from *Young Goodman Brown and Other Stories* as the basis for the two informal essay topics.

Each group will appoint a president and vice-president who will be responsible for taking attendance, leading discussions, and generally for ensuring that the group is accomplishing its tasks. The informal essays should give me some idea of the work that the group has done. Ten per cent of the final mark will be based on group attendance and participation. I will arrive at a mark in consultation with the president and vice-president.

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS:

One short formal essay of four or five double-spaced typewritten pages (approximately 1000 words) will account for 15% of the final grade.

Two short informal essays of five or six double-spaced typewritten pages (approximately 1250 words) will account for 40% of the final grade (i.e., 20% each).

Group attendance and participation will account for 10% of the final grade (see above).

One 3-hour final exam will account for the remaining 35% of the final grade.

(Note also: One number grade (1%) may be subtracted for each day 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.*)

The Faculty of Arts requires that we notify you of the following:

"Note on avoidance of academic offenses: All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offense is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy # 71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy 71 (Student Academic Discipline) which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (p. 1:11). If you need help in learning how to avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean."
ENGLISH 251B—ASSIGNMENTS:

Please note:

A formal assignment is closed in the sense that it deals with a specific, limited topic on which you present your ideas. It is essentially objective, with little personal intervention ("I"). Its basic structure is: Introduction, Body, Conclusion. I usually mark it according to three equal criteria: Content, Organization, Style and Correctness. Sources should be documented according to MLA style rules.

An informal essay is open in the sense that it deals with a much broader topic on which you explore issues and suggest directions, as opposed to reaching conclusions. There will consequently be more personal intervention ("I"). While I emphasize Content in marking it, I will also take Organization, and Style and Correctness, into consideration. Sources should be documented according to MLA style rules.

ESSAY 1:

Due: Thursday, May 25, 2000.

Length: Four or five double-spaced typewritten pages (approximately 1000 words).

Topic: Write a formal essay on the following question:

In the introduction to Part I, Chapter 4 of The Theory of Criticism, Raman Selden writes: "Both Wittgenstein and de Saussure have contributed to the undermining of a picture view of language and its accompanying common-sense philosophy" (96).

To what extent does one of the following writers subscribe to the "picture view of language": Jonson, Bacon, Locke? To what extent does either Wittgenstein or de Saussure undermine this view? Limit yourself to the selections in Part I, Chapter 4, and please do not refer to any other sources.

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Essay 2:

Due: Thursday, June 16, 2000.

Length: Five or six double-spaced, typewritten pages (approximately 1250 words).

Topic: Write an informal essay on the following question:

Discuss possible reader-response approaches to your group's story from Young Goodman Brown and Other Stories. Refer specifically to the story and to reader-response theorists. If you wish, refer to the section on reader response in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, but please do not refer to any other sources.

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ESSAY 3:

Due: Thursday, July 6, 2000.

Length: Five or six double-spaced typewritten pages (approximately 1250 words).

Topic: Write an informal essay on the following question:

Discuss possible deconstructionist approaches to your group's story from Young Goodman Brown and Other Stories. Refer specifically to the story and to deconstructionist (and, if you wish, structuralist) theorists. If you wish, refer to the section on deconstruction in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, but please do not refer to any other sources.