ENGLISH 251B

Criticism 2

Spring 2001

Instructor: B. Cantar
Office: HH 258
Office Hours: Tues. Thurs. 10:00 - 11:30 or by appointment

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

English 251B builds upon the skills and knowledge gained in English 251A. English 251B surveys and elucidates some of the modern theories of textual interpretation making available different strategies for the reading and analysis of literary and non-literary texts. The main goals of English 251B are to enable students to become perceptive, thoughtful and independent readers of different kinds of texts. We will focus upon three closely related areas of concern: the text, the reader, and the world. Part One, on textuality, considers the question of whether the literary artifact is or is not an imitation of nature or reality, and moves through the various notions intrinsic to the text itself, to the contemporary theories of the rhetorical and figurative nature of language and how those notions produce and control our interpretations of a literary text. Part Two, on the reader, surveys differing theories of the part readers or audiences, their psychological and emotional repertoires, play in the interpretation and response to texts. Part Three, moving out to the world or culture, considers those theories and theorists that seek to examine and analyze the effect of literature in a wider sense, in the construction of identity both cultural and individual, examining the embeddedness of literary texts in their historical and contemporary settings. At the end of each section, these theories will be tested against William Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

NB: This is a seminar not primarily a lecture course although for purposes of imparting information, I will have to lecture a portion of the time. I do, however, expect all students to contribute to class discussion. For the balance of the time, starting in week 3, on May 17th we will have an oral group seminar presentation each week on some aspect of that week’s theory with a written summary handed following the presentation. Because there will be no final examination in this course, the course grade will be divided among the oral and written assignments throughout the term. There will be three written assignments one of which will be in-class, a piece of textual analysis, to assess students’ grasp of theoretical concepts. Therefore, all students would be well-advised to come to class regularly, to have read the material assigned, and to be fully prepared to discuss and debate points. While no mark is assigned for attendance and participation, a student may well earn bonus marks for their regular attendance and engaged participation in class discussion.

REQUIRED TEXTS:


HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:


Assignments and grading:

Short paper (4 page summary of assigned theoretical essay) due May 24th 20%
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Mid-term test: June 12th 20%
Essay (6-8pp.ds) July 24th 40%
Group Seminar: 20%

ASSIGNMENTS AND LATE POLICIES:

Essay Topics will be distributed several weeks before the due date. Papers are due in class on the due date. If you have any difficulty with this, please inform me ahead of time and make other arrangements. Never slip a paper under my office door and always keep a copy of any paper you submit.

Extensions for valid health reasons must be cleared with me in advance of the due date. Medical documentation will be required. Papers handed in without prior permission will be subject to a penalty of 2% per day late. Papers handed in more than two weeks late without prior permission may not be accepted and the student will receive a mark of zero for that assignment. Essays must follow the MLA format for documentation.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS:

Seminar dates will be distributed by lottery during the first weeks of term. The group will appoint one person as chair with the responsibility of getting the group together and organizing the presentation. Each seminar should be approximately 20 mins in length, and can be either an elucidation of the theoretical concepts under discussion in that particular week, or, an application of that concept to a portion of a literary or non-literary text. If the students choose the option of application, they must provide copies of the target text to the rest of the class, or provide an overhead projection of it. Regardless of the option chosen, each presentation must 1) clearly summarize the major points of the theory under consideration, 2) must develop a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the theory and 3) raise some issues or questions for discussion following the presentation.

PERSONAL CONSULTATION
My regular office hours are listed at the top of the syllabus: Tues. & Thurs. 10:00-11:30 am. If you have to get in touch with me and I am not in my office, leave a message on my voice-mail. I check these frequently and will get back to you. I am also reachable by E-mail address: bcantar@watarts.uwaterloo.ca

PLEASE NOTE:
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.
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Seminars Begin on May 17th

Unless otherwise noted, all readings are from Modern Literary Theory: A Reader.

PART ONE: TEXUALITY

May 1 Preliminaries and intro
May 3 Russian Formalism: Victor Shklovsky, from “Art as Technique
May 8 Structuralism: David Lodge, “Analysis and Interpretation . . .”
May 10 Roland Barthes, “To Write: An Intransitive Verb?”
May 15 Louis Althusser, from “Ideology and the State”
May 17 Terry Eagleton, from “Criticism and Ideology”
May 22 Barthes, “The Death of the Author.”
May 24 Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play . . .” Short paper due
May 29 \textit{Hamlet} as ideological form
May 31 \textit{Hamlet} as ideological form, cont’d

PART TWO: THE READER

June 5 Wolfgang Iser, from “The Reading Process.”
June 7 Harold Bloom, from “The Anxiety of Influence.”
June 14 Helene Cixous, “Sorties”

June 19 Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics”
June 21 Judith Butler, “Variations of Sex and Gender: Beauvoir.”

June 26 \textit{Hamlet}: through the eyes of . . .?
June 28 \textit{Hamlet} through the eyes of . . .?

PART THREE: THE WORLD

July 3 Bakhtin, from “Discourse in the Novel”
July 5 Foucault, from “The Order of Discourse”
July 10 Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder”
July 12 Said, from “Culture and Imperialism”
July 17 Homi BhaBha, “Of Mimicry and Man”
July 19 bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness”

July 24 \textit{Hamlet} in the Shakespearean world Long essay due
July 26 \textit{Hamlet} in our world—conclusions