ENGLISH 251B
The Practice and Theory of Criticism II
(with emphasis on drama and theory)

COURSE SYLLABUS

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In this second part of the Practice and Theory of Criticism we will continue training in close reading, applying it to drama and prose fiction. Also, we will study the ideas that have shaped and controlled the changing ways in which authors have written, readers have read, and critics have examined literature.

We will study one classical tragedy -- Sophocles' Antigone -- and one Restoration comedy -- Aphra Behn's The Rover.

Among the critical ideas are the seminal works of ancient writers -- Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus -- and in the work that made them accessible to the English -- Sidney's Apology for Poetry. Also we will survey selected ideas from the work of succeeding Britons and Americans. Finally, we will sample current literary theory and its application. We will look at one piece of recent fiction, Ken Ledbetter's Too many Blackbirds, to see how critical theory has affected it and how we can use critical theory to understand it better.

TEXTS

Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms
Gosselink, comp., Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present, Kinko.
Ledbetter, Too Many Blackbirds, Gosselink
Behn, The Rover

WORK REQUIRED

Reading:

Read all the assigned works before we take them up in class. You cannot hope to benefit fully from the lectures (which, unlike book reviews, assume a reading of the book) or discussions unless you have the expected listening and participating readiness. As you read, take notes, make marginalia, ask yourself questions, answer them as you read on; don't just sit there running your eyes across the page; get actively involved with the reading experience. "Escape" reading or reading strictly for pleasure is great fun, but we don't learn as much as when we pay more active attention. When you finish a work or a section, sum up. Write a brief response, critique, ask questions about elements that puzzled you. Keep a reading journal. Bring it to class and draw on it. Think about what you have read and be prepared at any time to comment usefully or to ask perceptive questions (or both) about your reading. Have opinions; express them; defend them with citation and interpretation from the works, your critical reading, and your experience of life.
Order of Readings

Plato, Republic X.
Aristotle, Poetics.
Horace, The Art of Poetry.
Longinus, On Literary Excellence.
Sidney, Apology for Poetry.
Dryden, Selected criticism (in Norton Anthology).
Pope, Essay on Criticism (Norton 1090-1108).
Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare (Norton 1266-76).
Wycherley, The Country Wife
Wordsworth, from "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" (Norton 1379-94).
Coleridge, from Biographia Literaria (Norton 1584-1604).
James, "The Art of Fiction."
Brooks, "Irony as a Principle of Structure."
Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature."
Leidbetter, Too Many Blackbirds.
Fish, "Is There a Text in this Class?"
Todorov, "Reading as Construction."
Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Mankind."
Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics."

Written Work

You will have opportunity to submit two critiques on drama (1 February & 7 March) and one on fiction (4 April) of 1000 words each. You may also write two tests on theory and its practice (15 February & 2 April). Each written assignment is worth 20% of your mark.

Oral Participation

In addition to or instead of one piece of written work, you may present an oral seminar (15 minutes) on one of the readings (20%).

EVALUATION

If you present the seminar and five pieces of written work, I will count the five highest marks. However, be sure you submit at least five pieces of work (oral and written). There will be no excuses for coming up short. Late critiques will not be accepted and missed exams will not be made up without appropriate medical documentation.

THE PROFESSOR

I am available outside of class as well as in and enjoy talking with students, professionally and socially, so come by for a cup of tea and a chat. Feel free to discuss anything that interests or concerns you.

Although I am often in my office, I also work elsewhere (in the library or at home), so please do not come by expecting to find me outside office hours. That does not mean I am not happy to see you at any mutually convenient hour. Stop after class or call me for an appointment. If I’m not in when you phone, leave a message on voice mail. I will return your call as soon as possible.

Office HH 255
Phone 2419

Office Hours: 11:30-1 T, 1-2:15 R
and by appointment