

Assignment #1

2018 Summer Critical Perspective Response Prompts

Directions: In addition to closely reading and annotating each of the five texts on the Summer Assignment document, complete each of the following Critical Perspective prompts.

1. After reading and annotating each text, respond to the Critical Perspective prompt.
See sample annotations online. Texts are available on my webpage.
2. Reference the text in your response and use MLA in-text citation.
3. Respond in a full paragraph: typed, double spaced, TNR 12 or Arial 11

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE PROMPTS

“The Rocking Horse Winner” by D. H. Lawrence

In a letter dated January 17, 1913, Lawrence wrote the following:

My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle. What do I care about knowledge. All I want is to answer my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind, moral, or what-not.

How does Lawrence’s portrayal of Paul in “The Rocking Horse Winner” support his belief in “the blood . . . being wiser than the intellect”? How does Lawrence remain true in this story to his metaphor of the intellect as a “bit and bridle”?

“Cathedral” by Raymond Carver

Critic Kirk Nessel, in his discussion of “Cathedral,” notes that the narrator becomes more open as the story progresses, and that this coming is mirrored by the rhetoric of the story. Early on in the story, the narrator feels momentarily “sorry for the blind man,” his insulated hardness beginning to soften. As the walls of his resentment noticeably crack, he watches with “admiration” as Robert eats, recognizing Robert’s handicap to be “no real impairment to his performance at the dinner table. . . . Like Robert, who is on a journey by train, dropping in on friends and relatives, trying to get over the loss of his wife, the narrator is also on a journey, one signaled by signposts in his language and played out by the events of the story he tells.”

Do you agree that the narrator becomes more open? If so, can you cite any other instances where the words he chooses reflect the increasing openness? If you disagree, cite instances where the words he chooses reflect your opinion of the narrator’s behavior.

***Trifles* by Susan Glaspell**

In *American Drama from the Colonial Period through World War I*, Gary A. Richardson says that in *Trifles*, Glaspell developed a new structure for her action:

While action in the traditional sense is minimal, Glaspell is nevertheless able to rivet attention on the two women, wed the audience to their perspective, and make a compelling case for the fairness of their actions. Existing on the margins of their society, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale become emotional surrogates for the jailed Minnie Wright, effectively exonerating her action as “justifiable homicide.”

Trifles is carefully crafted to match Glaspell’s subject matter -- the action meanders without a clearly delineated beginning, middle, or end. . . .

Exactly how does Glaspell “rivet attention on” Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters? In what sense is the play’s “meandering” structure “carefully crafted to match Glaspell’s subject matter”?

***“My Father as a Guitar”* Martin Espada**

In a review of one of Espada’s earlier collections of poetry, Leslie Ullman discusses how the poet brings his characters to life:

The poems in this collection tell their stories and flesh out their characters deftly, without shrillness or rhetoric, and vividly enough to invite the reader into a shared sense of loss. Espada makes vanquished individuals and curtailed family histories present by offering us their remnants, their echoes, in such a way as to make us confront the ruined who.

Does “My Father as a Guitar” present the speaker’s father in the way Ullman describes?

***“The English Canon”* by Adrienne Su**

In her essay “Teaching Literature: Canon, Controversy, and the Literary Anthology,” Barbara Mujica discusses the way in which literary anthologies tend naturally to create lists of works, known as canons, that are to be of especially high quality:

“Anthology” . . . is from the Greek word for “collection of flowers,” a term implying selection. The very format of an anthology prompts canon formation . . . Anthologies convey the notion of evolution (the succession of literary movements) and hierarchy (the recognition of masterpieces). They create and reform canons, establish literary reputations, and help institutionalize the national culture, which they reflect.

How would you categorize the attitude of the speaker in “The English Canon” to the process that Mujica describes? What is your own attitude toward the idea of canons in literature? Do you think some works can be said to be indisputably better than others?