

English 110 Midterm Exam

Part 1 — New Criticism

Transcendent meaning in any great work of literature is inevitably buried in certain predictable places within the text – or at least that’s what New Critics believe. The truth and organic unity of a text await only the “unearthing” of themselves through our slow, close examination of certain rhetorical devices (e.g. tone, speaker, point of view, metaphor, irony & paradox, etc.) that the author has strategically deployed throughout the text in order to set up the ultimate resolution of the work. Ultimately, it is the successful layering of these rhetorical devices and strategies throughout a poem or novel that makes the work great.

Using Tillie Olsen’s short 1930’s novel *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* along with the principal concepts you’ve learned from your study of New Criticism earlier this term, do a New Critical reading of one short selection of your choice from the novel. Double space your work, use standard academic language (third person, present tense, no slang speech) and refer to relevant vocabulary terms from New Criticism as you unfold your analysis. Use standard MLA citation rules when quoting or paraphrasing outside sources, as always. **Responses should be approximately two pages in length.**

Keep your focus narrow and clearly defined from the start: make a single literary argument about how Olsen does something specific, and stick to it for the duration of your analysis by offering discussion, explanation, and examples from the text. You do not need to give a full summary of the selection although you will need to *explain and justify* why you’re choosing to focus on a specific rhetorical device, and that will require at least some summary work of the Olsen selection *and* of New Criticism. Take your time, say one important thing that a New Critic might say when looking at this work, and say it well.

Part 2 — Reader Response

Reader Response theory holds that a text and its author work in tandem with readers to “shape the text” and give it meaning. We do this by describing our subjective reactions to a text (either our own or an implied reader’s) as a way of breathing life into it, of personalizing it in order to make it real, and to imagine what the author’s intentions were when she/he composed the work. Discussions regarding how certain textual details affect us, creating certain predictable or unpredictable emotional and intellectual effects, are then reconnected to actual rhetorical features of the text that we think make us feel a certain way when reading – this helps us tie our responses to actual textual analysis without straying too far outside the text – something even Reader Response enthusiasts don’t wish to do.

Respond to an excerpt of your choosing from one of Raymond Carver’s stories in *Cathedral* as a practitioner of Reader Response would. Focus on specific details and language choices in a given pivotal passage, and use them to help you describe how the text and your own knowledge base work together to create meaning from his work. You may use first person voice if you wish, but be sure to keep your language in present tense as much as possible, and keep the discussion sufficiently analytical by always tying your subjective responses back to close textual analysis. Double space your work and refer to relevant vocabulary terms from Reader Response as you unfold your analysis. Use standard MLA citation rules when quoting or paraphrasing outside sources, as always. **Responses should be approximately two pages in length.**

Keep your focus narrow and clearly defined from the start: describe a single major subjective response to the work and then trace it back into the text, explaining how Carver does something specific with his language in order to get you to think or feel something specific which in turn helps you understand the story. You do not need to give a full summary of Carver’s novel, nor do you need to completely summarize the Reader Response approach. Again, take your time, say one important thing that a Reader Response critic might say when looking at this work, and say it well.