FEEDBACK TUTORIAL LETTER

1st SEMESTER 2019

ASSIGNMENT 1

LITERARY THEORY

LIT811S
Dear Student,

I have just finished marking your assignment and this short Feedback letter serves to highlight some of the pleasing things I witnessed in your assignment, encourage you, challenge you and also give you more direction so as to be fully conversant with some of the aspects that will make you appreciate the course Literary Theory. Worth noting first and foremost is that the first assignment performance was very discouraging.

What I need to highlight from the onset is that most of us did not do well. The performance was just below standard. Most of your assignments demonstrated that you had not put so much effort and what was evident in the assignments was a sense of unpreparedness in the answers and most of you just copied from the internet. There was a sense of originality in some cases but sadly, this was not indicative of wide research and reading.

Let me again emphasise the fact that at this level, it is not enough to rely on the Study Guide only. The Study Guide is there to just give you directions – to guide you so that you can research more as guided by what is in the Study
Guide. Hence, when you make reference to other relevant books and also to the internet sources — I always reward broadly read students. With regards to the questions you did, the Study Guide was therefore not adequate at all for you to explore ad address the question demands fully.

1. Problems identified during the tutor-marking
Wide reading and researching around the area of study is a true mark of scholarship. It is not enough to simply decide to do the assignment and then you just grab the study guide and Tutorial letter and in an hour’s time scribble what comes to you. Hence, for a student to hurriedly go over an assignment in a few minutes is a practice of frustration that does not bear fruits at all. Therefore, you are encouraged to take time on the assignments and to research widely. Please note that this also applies to the examination. Taking note of the fact that time is a non-renewable resource; you are particularly advised to read the different texts and poems many times so as to understand them. A single reading of a text or play or poem is never adequate; it is grossly insufficient. I advise that you read each text closely twice or more times, taking notes and writing your own summaries. This will also help you when it comes to Exam revision.

Referencing
Some students were able to reference their work correctly using the APA referencing style; however, quite a number had no clue how this should be done. Refer to the study guide and note examples of references at the end of the chapter and within the chapter. Try to cultivate a reading culture in yourself; it is the only way you can note some of these issues that I have pointed out in this letter. Because your second assignment requires you to research and have a reference list, I have given referencing examples below. Note that these are not exhaustive; hence I encourage you to buy the APA reference guide from the library.

In-text citation:
Ecofeminism examines the representations of nature by women. Cherrill Glotfelty (1996: xxiv), describes ecofeminism as “a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature”.

Another scholar, Yinestra King (1983:118), concurs and observes that “...the hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing”.
In other words, ecofeminists claim that there are strong “connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of colour, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature” (Warren 2000:1).

Reference List:

Book with one Author:

Book with two Authors:

N.B. Please do not include Wikipedia in your reference list. You can use it but it is not acceptable as an academic reference.

2. Misinterpreted/not clearly understood concepts

Question 1 was mostly misinterpreted. Several of you started with the rather limiting phrase, “Yes I agree.” Beginning your response this way means there is no room for flexibility and hence, no diversified discussion. Some of you merely discussed different literary theories in isolation instead of incorporating these in the discussion.

3. Improving your performance

It is very disappointing to be dealing with sentence construction, paragraph unity and coherence at this level. Try to revise your work thoroughly to avoid some of these mistakes. Short and simple sentences are also recommended if your mastery of the language is below standard. Long and wordy sentences result in more mistakes and meaningless sentences. Try to avoid them if possible.

One reason for such poor English is, once more, failure to follow instructions. I advise you to take time over your assignments. Do not send in your first draft. Rework your draft several times if necessary. Spend DAYS working on your assignment

4. Question Analysis

Once again, I advise you to examine the question closely and underline the key words which you think that your answer needs to address. These are words which will guide you in interpreting the question.

Below are general comments on Assignment 1, followed by specific comments on individual questions. The comments are based on the overall performance of all the students and you need to use them so that you can learn from other people’s mistakes and achievements as well.
Question 1  

(25 marks)

Feminism concerns equality and justice for all women, and it seeks to eliminate systemic inequality in all aspects of women’s lives. Feminisms are inclusive and affirming women; they celebrate women’s achievements and struggles and work to provide a positive and affirming stance toward women and womanhood. Do you agree?

Write your answer in essay form. Your answer should have an introduction, body and conclusion.

In this assignment, you are You were expected to show the shortcomings of literary feminism / criticism of feminism and then discuss the strands which have emanated from mainstream feminism for example the African oriented woman theory, womanism, Africana womanist theory, cultural feminism, liberal feminism, Nego-feminism and STIWA/STIWANISM and contrast them with such versions like radical feminism and separatist feminism.

The majority of you started by saying “I agree.....” This kind of statement does not allow you to debate. It means you remain rigid, and yet the question requires you to carry out a debate. The alternative would be to say, “I agree to a certain extent....” This allows you to examine both sides of the question.

Introduction: Clearly show that you understand the quotation and state that you will show feminism is not inclusive as shown by the shortcomings of literary feminism / criticism of feminism. Hence, you will discuss the strands which have emanated from mainstream feminism for example the African oriented woman theory, womanism, Africana womanist theory, cultural feminism, liberal feminism, Nego-feminism and STIWA/STIWANISM and contrast them with such versions like radical feminism and separatist feminism.

Then proceed to define the feminism theory. Trace its’ historical background briefly. You may follow this structure:

Feminism

a. First wave feminism
b. Woolf and Beauvoir
c. Second wave feminism
d. Biological, psychological, linguistic and cultural aspects that effect feminism
e. Different versions of feminism: Nego-Feminism, Stiwanism, etc.

FEMINIST THEORY

Feminism concerns equality and justice for all women, and it seeks to eliminate systemic inequality in all aspects of women’s lives. Feminisms are inclusive and affirming women; it celebrates women’s achievements and struggles and works to provide a positive and affirming stance toward women and womanhood.
The basis of the feminist movements, both in literature and politics, is that Western culture is fundamentally patriarchal (i.e., created by men, controlled by men, viewed through the eyes of men, and evaluated by men). The 1960s saw the rise of a new, feminist approach to literary criticism. Before the emergence of Feminist Theory, the works of female writers (or works about females) were examined by the same standards as those by male writers (and about men). With the development of Feminist Theory, old texts are re-examined, and the portrayal of women in literature is re-evaluated. New writers create works that more accurately reflect the developing concept of the —modern woman. The feminist approach is only partly based on finding and exposing suggestions of misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) in literature. Feminists are interested in exposing the ways women in literature—both authors and characters—are undervalued. Some feminist scholars have even dissected individual words in Western languages, suggesting that the languages themselves reflect a patriarchal worldview. Arguing that the past millennia in the West have been dominated by men—whether politicians in power or the historians recording it—feminist critics believe that Western literature reflects a masculine bias. As a result, Western literature presents an inaccurate and potentially harmful portrayal of women. In order to repair the potential harm done and achieve balance, feminist critics insist that works by and about women be added to the literary canon and read from a feminist perspective.

Three main areas of study and points of criticism exist in the Feminist Theory:
1. differences between men and women
2. women in positions of power and power dynamics between men and women
3. the female experience

Feminism brands:

Feminist
One who believes in that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially as defined above.

Womanists are concerned with overcoming not only gender discrimination but also discrimination based on race or socio-economic status.

Cultural Feminism
The theory that there are fundamental personality differences between men and women, and that women's differences are special and should be celebrated. This theory of feminism supports the notion that there are biological differences between men and women.

Ecofeminism
Ecofeminism is a theory that rests on the basic principal that patriarchal philosophies are harmful to women, children, and other living things. Parallels are drawn between society's treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its treatment of women. In resisting patriarchal culture, eco-feminists believe they are also resisting plundering and destroying of the Earth. They feel that the patriarchal philosophy emphasizes the need to dominate and control unruly females and the unruly wilderness.
This group views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions.

Radical feminism questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on gender. Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically-determined behavior and culturally-determined behavior in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles.

Discuss other brands showing how differ in their focus, hence the attempt to have a eminist approach that suits the black woman and women of colour. Their experiences are different.

Essay with format to be followed: Introduction, Body and Conclusion.

QUESTION 2  

Glotfelty and Fromm (1996: xviii), define ecocriticism as an "earth centred-approach to literary studies."

In view of the above quotation, explain what you understand by ecocriticism and explain its relevance to literature. Use one novel to illustrate your answer.

Write your answer in essay form. Your answer should have an introduction, body and conclusion.

Introduction:

Explain or interpret Glotfelty's statement. Her definition of the term ecocriticism is somewhat simple when she remarks that eco-criticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." The definition above emphasises that Mankind should continue to make concerted efforts to ensure that the physical environment is kept alive since the human world solely depends on them for sustenance and existence. Interestingly therefore, the nonhuman world appears to be more important than the human since it provides the material support base for humans. Hence, through ecocriticism, man's attention is to his excessive exploitation of natural resources, which in turn continues to make human existence precarious. This assignment will therefore attempt to illustrate this relationship using the text ...... (state the text that you have selected).

The next step is to define the theory itself. Then the application follows.

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism aims to bring a transformation of literary studies by linking literary criticism and theory with the
ecological issues at large.

It is a critical perspective that focuses on the relationship between human beings and the natural world and on how that relationship is structured by the institutions of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, law, science, and economics.

Ecocriticism investigates how nature is used literally or metaphorically in certain literary or aesthetic genres and tropes, and what assumptions about nature underlie genres that may not address this topic directly.

An ecocritical approach may look at nature as a symbol and what ideas it may evoke. The ecocritical approach allows the reader to study a relationship with some human quality and nature. Simply, it is a study between literature and the environment.

It is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. An ecocritical approach brings out the importance of the environment to the major themes in literature. The importance of nature and how nature acts as a symbol can therefore be incorporated into the theme.

Ecocriticism actually launches a call to literature to connect to the issues of today's environmental crisis.

Any suitable texts can be used to illustrate the students' answers as is assumed by the course outline and how the students have been taught during the semester.

Let's look at Neshani Andrea's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* from an ecocritical perspective briefly:

The text posits that violence, the environment and women are interconnected. For instance, Kauna's (the purple violet of Oshaantu) beauty is destroyed by Shange.

The text examines the dualistic relationship between nature and women to reveal their parallel and mutually reinforcing oppressive relationship. Premised on the ecocritical lens, it also shows how relationships between women and nature contribute to a harmonious and healing environment. For instance:

The narrator, Meme Ali shows a natural connection to the beautiful flora and fauna. The "rich green carpet" that stretches over the land in Oshaakati and the "green award that lies before [her]" signify a climate change that
intersects with the people’s livelihood. A strong influence of nature is evident as Meme Ali’s celebratory tone and ecstasy signifies the importance of the harvest to human life:

It is that time of the year again. The season when our village, Oshaantu, camouflages itself in a rich green carpet and provides a breath taking sight, especially from our homestead, which is built on an incline. I wish time would stand still. We had good rains this year and are promised plenty to eat. My heart is full of gratitude as I look at all the omahangu, sorghum, spinach, beans, pumpkins, watermelons, nuts, corn and cabbage. Those of us who worked the extra mile will not have to buy tomatoes, onions, sweet potatoes and guavas for a good while. I gently stroke the rough surface of the omahangu millet in appreciation of the abundance of Mother Nature. God is good, I think (1).

The juxtaposition of the human and nonhuman nature is clearly evident in the above quotation. The description of the rainy season shows plenty of rains mean plenty of food for the community and less work for the women. In this case, the abundance of the omahangu millet (a staple food in Namibia), sorghum, spinach, beans, pumpkins, watermelons, nuts, corn and cabbage are inextricably connected to Meme Ali’s joy. Phrases such as “my heart is full of gratitude” and “I wish time would stand still” express the mutual kinship between the narrator and nature. Good rains mean plenty of food and men, women and children survive on it. The season as described by Meme Ali is also a sign of a healthy ecosystem that is sustainable.

The community also relies on the environment for survival. For instance:

- Meme Ali’s mother-in-law sits under the omunye tree weaving a basket and Meme Ali sits beside her on a straw mat (130).
- The straw is used by the women in different ways, to make mats, baskets and brooms for sweeping (14).
- Clay is used to make pots (15). Mee Maita “brought another small clay pot with ondjoave oil” (16).
- In addition, Mee Ali notes the “beautiful black and white mat from the skin of a once very big cow” that she sits on at Mee Maita’s hut.
- The omalovu (home-brewed drink) that Mee Maita prepares, is stored in a calabash (6) and she pours some of it into “two beautifully crafted itenga” (6).

These are examples that you could use to analyse the relationship between nature and the Oshaantu community.

For example, Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe
The remoteness of Umuofia, the major setting of the narrative, makes it possible for Achebe to explore the rural and natural attributes or features of the society. The village is what may be referred to as a “bush village”; hence, densely taken over by bush, or what may better be called forests made up of trees, plants, and other wild features that characterize a rustic space, otherwise known as flora. In
the same vein, certain animals or fauna have social and religious symbolisms among the indigenes due to the people's deep religious root.

The remoteness of Umuofia equally determines the vocation of the inhabitants—they are predominantly farmers who are conscious of their weather, with keen interest on the weather condition, which regulates the environment.

Therefore, the indigenes are interested in the day, time, weather, or the general mood of the earth where they conduct their affairs. The nature of the environment, to a large extent, determines the actions and decisions in connection to their lives as Africans, farmers, and family members. Therefore, the rainy and dry seasons determine the people's way of life.

For example, men of Umuofia rely on the beginning of the rain to know when to start planting their yam and other farm seedlings every planting season. It is believed that the earth is ready for tilling and planting; hence, good farmers commence farming when the first seasonal rain starts. However, when there is a change in this normal ecological system, it signals danger for the people, as seen in the year Okonkwo borrowed some eight hundred yam seedlings from Nwakkie. This implies that the climatic nature of the environment influences, as well as affects, the lives and culture of the people.

Another example: The forest in Things Fall Apart serves an ecological function. For example: The men of Umuofia, farmers by occupation, also rely on the luxuriant shed of leaves from the trees in the forests to fertilize the earth, as they serve as manure necessary for good agricultural harvest.

Furthermore, the forest also serves as a protection for the spiritual abode of the community deities. The oracle of the Hills and Caves, abode of Agbala, was positioned at the heart of the forest in a cave.

The leaves from the trees and plants in the forest are used for medicinal purposes. Okonkwo gathers some leaves, roots, and barks of medicinal trees and shrubs in the forest to prepare medicinal concoctions for Ezinma (Achebe Things Fall Apart, 68) when she falls sick with iba.

The women also fetch firewood from the dead and dry trees in the forests.

A man's yam barn or field says a lot about his wealth and work ethics. Ownership of a large barn, therefore,
portrays the man as a wealthy man who is capable of providing for his family. It equally makes such men marry many wives and produce many children who will help in the seasonal farming. Yam as a crop is derived from nature, the soil. This crop in Things Fall Apart determines so many things about how some African societies celebrate life and evaluate power. Consequently, a society that fails to understand how crops derivable from the soil.

All the above show the need for ecological consciousness. For instance, yam as a crop is derived from nature, the soil. Hence, a society that fails to understand how crops derivable from the soil stands the chance of losing the most fundamental aspect of his base—the environment.

Conclusion

Marking your assignments was quite a pleasure. I am happy to say that I also obtained new knowledge from some of them.

To those of you who obtained good marks; let me say that as your Tutor Marker, I am very pleased when students excel like that. Bear in mind that marks are not given but awarded and where there is evidence of hard work it is rewarded handsomely.

For those of you with a mediocre average mark; I would like to urge you to work harder. Success comes with hard work.

Finally, I would like to advise all you to read the Study Guide; make use of it exhaustively, as well as any other reading materials you can find. This will help you to prepare for the second assignment. In addition, make your own notes as you read to take note of the significant points in every set text.

Please do not hesitate to call or email us if you have any query concerning any of the course topics.

I wish you all the best in your preparations for the second assignment.

Your Tutor

Dr Juliet Pasi

END OF FEEDBACK TUTORIAL LETTER