FEEDBACK TUTORIAL LETTER

2nd SEMESTER 2019

Assignment 2

LITERARY CRITICISM
(LRC621S)
Dear Student
Allow me to give you feedback with regards to Assignment 2 for Semester 2, 2019. Although there was an improvement in Assignment 2, it is rather worrying that some of you cannot write essays at this level. Secondly, most of you scored mediocre marks because you merely copied from the internet again.

The highest mark was 76%, followed by 2 students with 70% and then a few in the 60s. I expected a better performance especially after the face-face-face vacation school lectures. For those who didn’t come, I really encourage you to attend vacation school because in the 8 hours we meet together, we cover a lot.

In the event that you are not able to attend vacation school, I really encourage you to get in touch with me as your tutor so that I can help you if you find yourself struggling. The support services are all around you and me as your Tutor I want to see you doing well; but one thing for sure is that I will not give you marks – I award marks. You have to earn them.
The three questions which you were supposed to respond to were quite clear and not too complicated. However, relying on the study guide alone is not enough. You have to research further and I have also posted a lot of notes on the E-learning platform for the benefit of everyone. I will also upload a folder with presentations prepared by the FM students. If you are not enrolled please make sure you do so asap so that you have access to the notes. I’m sure the notes will help you to prepare adequately for the exam. There is no scope since the questions a broad spectrum of the course. Focus on all the literary critiques from Plato to TS Eliot.

The nature of the exam will have a similar structure to the 2 assignments that you have done. There will three essay questions and you must answer all of them. Please pay particular to the key words used by each critic, from Plato to Eliot. You should be able to explain the terms in detail. Students have a tendency to focus on Plato and Aristotle; my advice is do not ignore any of the critics. Make sure you can explain their perspectives well, at least to get a pass mark in the exam. Also note that, it is far from enough to write any information that comes to you in any manner without paying attention to the question and this will be very important when it comes to the examination. Please make sure that you specifically respond to the question that has been asked – understand the question and respond directly to the question.

With this in mind, let me now address your performance in the assignment.

With regards to the individual questions, I will only comment briefly since I have also written some comments in the body of each assignment and these are the comments which apply specifically to you. I encourage you to seriously look at the comments; you might find them helpful. If you do not understand anything with regards to the comments, please contact me and get clarification.

**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 samples answers to the questions that you might find useful:

**Question 1**

Write an essay of about 500 words in which you explain the relationship between tradition and the individual talent.

Below are some ideas that you can use and sample essays from some students that you might find helpful.

- In his essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot makes the overall case that the individual talent of a given poet, or artist of any kind, must always be measured in relationship to a tradition of poets and artists.
- He says: “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.”
- He also adds: His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.
- You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.”
- According to Eliot tradition and individual talent are not separate entity. They are inseparable and hence go together.
- Eliot states that knowledge of tradition plays vital role in the development of personal talent. He writes, “Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves the historical sense.”
- In fact, Eliot maintains that a contemporary poet or artist should actually strive to earn his or her way into this preceding tradition. New works must first take into account this tradition and build on it, and they will be judged critically in relation to this tradition.
- Individual literary and artistic production, then, relies heavily on tradition. The poet or artist must have a keen awareness of and respect for the past. Even more, the poet has to work hard to engage with this tradition.
- The poet is not a passive recipient of tradition but actively engages with tradition to develop new work.

**Assignment 2**

**Question 1**

According to T. S. Eliot, there is an interdependent relationship between tradition and individual talent. Tradition is defined in the dictionary as the transmission of customs or beliefs from one generation to the next. In literary criticism, tradition according to Eliot, refers to literary works of the past. Eliot says that tradition includes the historical sense. It includes the social, historical, economic and cultural factors that have influenced literary works. These literary works of the past go on to influence works of the present.

Individual talent Eliot says is the originality in the works of a writer. If a writer comes up with new and original ideas, such writer is said to have individual talent. Eliot suggests that an audience usually praises an artist for the aspects of his works, which does not resemble anyone else’s. That people derive
pleasure from works that are different from works that they have seen before and they always attempt to find “something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed.” (Eliot, 1919).

Eliot reconciles these two seemingly different concepts, i.e. tradition and individual, in his essay. Although artists are encouraged to nurture their talent and produce works that are unique, they may also have to rely on existing literary works for inspiration and structure. In doing this, they must still avoid imitating works of the past, they must maintain their originality.

Eliot says that there is a simultaneous conformity that happens between new and old works. He says that existing works are already complete before new work arrives and these works maintain order, even after fresh and new works are introduced. This order of traditional works, is however always slightly altered by the novelty of new work. Eliot says that the past should be transformed by the present as much as the present is guided by the past.

This is why in literary criticism, works are compared and contrasted against works of the past. Artists are judged by the standards of the past, although the originality and uniqueness of their work is appreciated at the same time. It is therefore good for an artist to reflect on similar works of the past, as he creates his own.

Eliot says that in this mission to balance tradition and individual talent, an artist must obtain this knowledge which includes the historical sense, through great labour as it cannot be inherited. Historical sense he says is indispensable to anyone who continues as a writer and this is what compels a man to write with the consciousness of all literature that has existed before his time.

Eliot further states the historical sense is the “sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together” and this is what makes a writer traditional. This also makes the writer acutely aware of his place in time and the contemporariness of his works.

We can thus see that although tradition must be positively discouraged as said by Eliot, it still influences new works, as much as new works alter and change it.

**Question 2**

As a literary critic and theorist, Cleanth Brooks has made meaningful contributions to the development of New Criticism with his books and essays. One of this books being the Well-Wrought Urn. (Pasi, 2018) It is explained that New Criticism is a literary movement which examines how poetry functions independently from the historical and author-bound context. This theory posits that poetry should be evaluated by its text only and not on the background of the author or our own reactions to works. Riding on this concept, Brooks is said to argue that critics should explore the interior of the poem without looking at its historical or authorial context. (Pasi, 2018)

The Well-Wrought Urn is one of Brooks’ best known contributions to this New Criticism movement. Although brooks has received criticism for his failure to address the historical background of a text, Brooks through The Well-Wrought Urn, helped give a voice to formalist criticism which emphasizes the interior life of a poem and it is said to be regarded as the most important document in the New Critical school of literary analysis and teaching. (Pasi, 2018)
In an attempt to respond to historical and biographical criticism, it is stated that The Well-Wrought Urn studies ten of the most renowned English poems. It is also said that Brooks claims that poetry is a self-contained entity which can be analysed and interpreted without reference to the historical or biographical information. The Well-Wrought Urn is said to be written for those who want to learn how to analyse and evaluate poems accurately and responsibly. ((Pasi, 2018)

The Well-Wrought Urn besides being a response to historical criticism and upholding that all poetry can be analysed and interpreted by its text only, seeks to impart other important ideas while analysing ten of the most renowned English poems.

Further in this book, Brooks rejects paraphrasing of poetry in the chapter which is titled The Heresy of Paraphrase. Brooks believes that by using our own words to interpret a poem, we are splitting the poem between its form and its content. He states that paraphrasing a poem takes away from its original meaning and it should be avoided. He argues that form and content are inseparable and that form in itself has meaning. He further says that the structure of a poem resembles that of architecture or a painting.

Brooks along with the rest of the New Criticism movement critics, is said to have been criticised for his focus the text and his failure to take into account the biographical and historical context in analyzing these texts. Brooks still however holds that the structure of poetry is paradox and he believes that “‘imagination’ reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities.” (Pasi, 2018)

Brooks through this book The Well-Wrought Urn and other books and essays, became a central figure of New Criticism and the advocate for its theory that favored close reading over historical and biographical analysis.

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**QUESTION 2**

25 marks

Write an essay of about 500 words in which you describe the purpose of Brooks’ *The Well-Wrought Urn*.

Below are some points that you could consider:

Describe the purpose of Brooks’ *The Well-Wrought Urn*.

The 10 poems examined in the *Well-Wrought Urn* closely by Brooks. The purpose was to:

- Respond to historicist criticism, which seeks to interpret poems within the historical context in which they were written.
- Argue that all poetry can be analysed and understood exclusively by its text.
• Seek to reject the paraphrasing of poetry as a way to find its meaning.
• Note that form and content, or content and medium, are inseparable in a poem.
• Show that form is meaning.
• Show that all poetry can be analysed as self-contained entities.
• Show that poetry can be interpreted without recourse to historical or biographical information.

Summarise the key features of New Criticism.

Below are some of the points that you could have explained. In a nutshell, New Criticism:

• emphasises explication, or "close reading," of "the work itself;" “the text and the text alone" approach.
• rejects attention to biographical and sociological matters.
• examines the relationships between a text's ideas and its form, between what a text says and the way it says it.
• views a poem, a piece of literature, is the thing in itself, with a definite entity of its own separate both from the poet and the socio-cultural milieu in which it is produced.
• lays emphasis on the study of the text, and its word by word analysis and interpretation.
• states that the music of a poem, its imagery and versification, its total structure must be taken into account to arrive at its meaning.
• words must be studied with reference to their sound, and their emotional and symbolic significance. attempts to be a science of literature, with a technical vocabulary.
• asserts that the goal of literature is not the pursuit of sincerity or authenticity, but subtlety, unity, and integrity –and these are properties of the text, not the author.
• functions under the assumption that the work is not the author's; it was detached at birth. The author's intentions are "neither available nor desirable" (nor even to be taken at face value when supposedly found in direct statements by authors). Meaning exists on the page, and on the page only.

Below is another sample response that you may find useful:

Question 1
The essay “Tradition and Individual Talent” by Elliot defines the term tradition as “a part of living culture inherited from the past and functioning in the formation of the present”, and individual talent as “novelty or newness that the writer brings in his or her writings...” (Pasi, 2018, p.162). According to Elliot the two terms work together, they are inseparable; they have a relationship that enable them to work together.

Elliot states that, “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.” Dead poets and artists are the ones that started the work of art and poetry although they do not give a complete meaning alone. Individual talent is developed from tradition, meaning that every poet makes research on the works of a dead poet to make a meaning of his own. It is against this background that we say that tradition provides for individual talent, it allow the continuity of the work even though the author or poet is
dead. He continues to say, “His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artist.” It is not only the individual that need to be praised; the dead poet is also of outmost importance because his the foundation on which individual talent is established.

The other relationship is that the two are interdependent. What happens in the past influences the present and vice versa. The work that the current poets or artist continues exploring modifies the work of past poets. According to Pasi (2018), a new work of art cannot be evaluated in isolation without reference to past literature and tradition. No wonder Eliot states that, “Tradition is a matter of much wider significance”, the work that the present poet or artist obtain through hard work shapes the present work. The present work though adjusted and modified is referenced to the past literature. We can therefore conclude by saying that the past and present poet are interdependent; the past poets are the source while the present poets are modifiers of old literature.

Present poets or artist compare or contrast the work of dead poets to come up with their own work. In his essay, Eliot states that ever poet or artist must strive to find “his or her way into this preceding tradition.” This can only be achieved when an individual obtain the knowledge and work of the past poet through great labour, because it is not given on a silver plate or inherited. This knowledge then enables the poet to seek his new meaning by finding differences and similarities. This is done so that no one imitates or copies the work of other poets or artist though they are dead. It is the existence of tradition and individual talent that makes this possible, without tradition present poet would find it hard to come up with something new in the world of literature today.

Question 2

“_The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry_ by Cleanth Brook is a collection of essays published in 1947 that examines ten poems in the first ten chapters. The eleventh chapter “seek to reject the paraphrasing of poetry as way to find its meaning” (Pasi 2018, p.167). These essays saves a specific purpose.

This collection of essay shows a clue on how to interpret and analyse poems. Pasi suggests that, this collection of essays can be a textbook for those who want to see how to analyse and evaluate a poem accurately and responsibly. He says that a poem can be analysed and interpreted without reference to the time when it was written. He emphasizes that the text of the poem is the key, which can help the reader to interpret and analyse the poem, not the biographical information. In the essay, “What Does Poetry
Communicate?” Brook analyses and interpreters the poem “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” by Herrick. He says the poem talks of the conflicts between Christian and Pagans worldviews and he gives an example of a raindrop metaphor in the last stanza to show us how to analyse it without any assistance to its biological background.

The Well Wrought Urn is a response to historicist criticism. The past poet and schoolers believed that a poem could not be interpreted without knowing its background information. They believed that you had to know what was happening at the time when the poem was written in order for you to interpret and analyse the poem. Brook however rejected such criticism, he believed that they text itself when ready with careful consideration would review it meaning. He emphasized that the poem’s form is the main element that gives the poem its meaning. Brook also rejected the idea of paraphrasing a poem to get its meaning. He says that paraphrasing a poem “...distort the relation of the poem to its ‘truth’...” in other words, paraphrasing can change the meaning of the poem. “The poem says something in a certain way for a reason. And if you try to sum it up or explain what “happens” in it, then you lose the very thing that makes the poem a poem” (Shmoop Editorial Team, n.d., para. 1).

The other purpose was to show that the format and content of the poem cannot be separated. Pasi (2018), states “The general principle of the inseparability of intuition and expression holds with special force for the aesthetic intuition” (as cited in Brooks, 1947). Content and form make us to see and appreciate the beauty of poetry. When the two are separated, we either get an arranged literally work without a main theme or a content without form, which would not give us the desired effect. According to Vale and Opali (2015), form and content are interdependent and work together to produce a harmonious effect, hence the reason why Brooks emphasizes that they cannot be separated because one cannot exist without the other in the world of art and poetry.

Reference List


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Suggestions for future assignments and examinations

Finally, as you prepare for the examinations, you have to show how the different critics relate to one another. For example, how Plato and Aristotle differed or were similar – follow the line of thought - that Aristotle wrote that poetry was a pleasurable process of imitation; Wordsworth and the romantics saw poetry as an overflow of emotion and intellect; T.S. Elliot on the other hand, sees poetry as an escape from emotions – leaving the emotional by channelling accessible emotions. You can as well speak of Elliot’s impersonal theory of poetry as well as the idea that a poet escapes emotion in poetry. In the assignment you could also talk about his emphasis on tradition and the idea that channelling average emotions allows the poet to surpass emotion. Brooks on the other hand, set guidelines for a “good” poem-unity, format as meaning, no moral point to literature, all literature is metaphorical etc. You have to be so precise – be very clear about what exactly the key points in each of these critics are!!

Then also linked to this point is the need to plan your work. Before you begin to write please jot down the points you will include in your essay – that will guide you and prevent you from including unnecessary information. Planning is very important please, even in the examination; write down the points you are going to include in the essay (on a rough paper of course!) and when you conclude your essay, restate these points as you link them to the question, showing how your essay has responded to the question.

As you prepare for the examination, please check out the major critics and major critical epochs. Please note that there is a sense of continuity between them all so make sure that you see how they all relate. In other words, be very clear with regards to how each of the critics/periods were similar and dissimilar. That is a very important dimension in this course! Know exactly how they differ and how they agree. It is therefore important to know the key facts relating to each of the periods. You also need to be able to apply the different views using works of literature as a way of focussing and concretising the different views. This can be from works of poetry, prose or drama – therefore have clear examples at hand.

Hard work in this course will always yield results. Be encouraged to go through your assignments, your study guide and your additional notes thoroughly. I wish you all the best in your endeavours.

Conclusion

Marking your assignments was such an enlightening experience. The overall performance was quite discouraging, especially in this course which most students find difficult. Try to improve in the examination; read the study guide and the recommended texts and study them. Remember that you cannot say you are studying literature when you have not read any texts on second language acquisition. Most of these are available in the library. Remember to make your own notes as you read.
I wish you all the best in the examination. Read the Study Guide and the notes on the E-Learning platform thoroughly; make use of it exhaustively, as well as any other reading materials you can find.

I hope that these comments will be put into effect. I thank you very much for conscientiously working through your assignments.

I wish you all the best in your studies and I am looking forward to well-prepared and exhaustive responses in the exam.

Please check the e-platform for extra notes. I have already registered you so that you can have access to the notes.

Please do not hesitate to call or email us if you have any query concerning assignments.

Your Tutor

Dr Juliet Pasi