I, Literary Critic

How I’ve grown: a chronological view of my development as a critic over the course of EL312
What is a literary critic?

- When I began this class, I could not define the responsibilities of a literary critic. Considering the definition at the start of the class resulted in confusion and a further series of questions. I found that I knew little about being a critic or how to utilize different schools of criticism. What, exactly, did criticism entail? I couldn’t even answer that question, let alone understand the role I would take on in this class.
Essentially, I looked like this:

“What am I doing with my life? I can’t do this. Gasp.”
And wrote about my fears:

“Or is it simply an analysis of the text? Do I really know how ‘criticism’ is defined or what it entails? I'm afraid I do not, and I hope this class answers the overwhelming amount of questions I have on criticism at its most elemental level. If I do not answer these questions prior to the start of nitty gritty work with criticism in class, I'm afraid I may miss the reasoning behind why we are conducting criticism. I am also curious as to the difference between ‘Write an analysis’ and ‘Write criticism.’ What are the differences between the two, and what does this mean?”
I was kind of a hot mess.

- Our initial blog posts and conversations in class focused on philosophers and the ways in which their musings applied to literary criticism. Again, I found myself at a loss, though slightly comforted by actual text to refer to. The problem was, that text was so complicated and old school that I had some trouble formulating intelligent thoughts and queries.
I tried my best with Plato, Aristotle, Pope, and other fellas. I was tired.

“Plato… the bed maker… made a bed… this bed is real. And soft.”
I persevered through the start to gain a bit of insight.

- My blogs and Difficulty Analyses began establishing links between primary texts on theory and literature. The connections drawn served as the basis for developing my identity as a literary critic. Though I did not recognize it at the time, I began defining for myself what a literary critic does and how different criticisms could be applied.
My first effort connected Dylan Thomas and the Symbolic Code

“After attempting to apply specifically the Symbolic Code to Dylan Thomas’ ‘A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London,’ however, I soon came to understand the complexity of the codes. Keeping the definition of the Symbolic Code in mind, I looked back at Thomas' poem after reading it the first time. The inherent polarities Barthes poses can be seen throughout the entirety of the poem. We can assume the narrator is an adult, as he (or she) considers the deceased a child. This establishes one contrast within the poem in terms of character.”
I was still confused, but I also knew I was gaining clarity.

“Dang, this ish is hard. But I’m growing! My work is paying off!”
The first portfolio happened.

- Freudian theory followed shortly thereafter, along with works by Lacan. These proved the most difficult texts to work with all semester. Still, my blog posts began increasing in length and comprehension of the primary texts being studied and discussed in class.
I attempted to study the critical texts as much as the literary texts presented.

“Lacan coined the theory of ‘self’ and how we begin understanding who we are and that our reflections are representations of ourselves at a very young age. A sense of ‘self’ indicates a sense of recognizing one's own inner workings and understanding one's own conscious thoughts. By separating this concept of ‘self’ and contrasting it with the word ‘Other,’ it appears the ‘Other’ designated to homosexuality tears self-identity from this type of queer theory and creates a wall between the two where connections cannot be established.”
And in that moment, I knew I was becoming a critic.

“Does this beard make me look like a young Freud?”
My second and third portfolios passed, and my interest grew.

- We began studying theories that intrigued me. An attraction to feminist and gender theories always resided somewhere inside me, and authors like Lorde provided me the chance to consider literary works from Angela Carter in ways I had not before.
I also gathered information on new theories I became engrossed in.

- PTSD and its literary relevancy has become one of my favorite schools of criticism. I actually chose to do my class presentation on it and was able to tie in some other pop culture favorites like Tin Tin and Holden Caulfield.
Instead of asking “What is criticism?” I began integrating different disciplines within it, like psychology, which includes PTSD.

- “Post traumatic stress disorder
- Aids in understanding a trauma victim’s perceptions of the world
- Can legitimize and validate a victim’s post-experience state
- Prior to PTSD as a diagnosis, a category did not really exist for labeling post-traumatic mentality and physiology”
And it clicked.

“I wonder how PTSD explains Holden’s symbolic reference to the ducks in the pond? Allie’s death surely relates.”
Literary criticism has no concrete definition.

- Literary criticism is an umbrella term for all sorts of unique criticisms, each one possessing their own definitions and sub schools of thought. Being a literary critic means understanding literature. It means reading primary texts. However, no standard definition can be given for it, because each unique theory changes the meaning of literary criticism.
Thus, being a literary critic also has no singular definition.

- I can use all different schools of criticism to find meanings in both primary texts and literary texts. I can consider these writings through various scopes, including ones I still struggle to enjoy and find meaning in. Being a literary critic means having favorite schools of criticism, like feminist and gender theory. It does not limit, but rather expands, my abilities as a reader and writer.
I am a literary critic, and I approve this message.

Warning: Growth and development in EL312 may cause unnatural urges, such as dancing to Jay-Z and wearing oversized shades.
Sources