Lit 229 Final Project: Getting Critical

Each week’s discussion has had you apply a specific lens (or set of lenses) to the works we’ve been reading. This is exactly what literary critics do, and the schools of literary criticism you’ve been exposed to (such as the Marxist and Feminist approaches we took to Douglass’s *Narrative*) are simply lenses – a set of questions, a methodology, a specific set of tools that critics who sign on to those schools apply to a work of literature.

That’s one key to being a literary critic. The other is being tuned into what others are saying about the text you’re studying. Any article or book that doesn’t include evidence that the writer has read pretty much everything related to his/her topic will be ignored or, at least, criticized for that lack.

You’re going to get a taste of both of these elements of literary criticism in your final project. Here’s what to do:

**Prepare a 3-4 page critical reflection, employing the MLA style guide for both essay formatting and citations, on a published journal article on a work we’ve read this semester. In your reflection, identify the critical school of the author and offer evidence from his/her analysis. Finally, give your response to the author’s findings: do you agree or disagree, and why? This response needs to draw specifically from both the article and the work of literature you’ve selected.**

**Stage One:** Choose one of the works we’ve read this term. Ideally, this should be a work you’ve enjoyed and felt you really understood. This will put you on a firm footing to wade through journal articles in search of the one that interests you.

**Stage Two:** Put on your waders. Turning to the databases to which you have access as a Delta student – especially JSTOR, but also InfoTrac and EBSCO if you can’t find anything there. Find a **peer reviewed journal article** on some aspect of the work of literature you’ve selected.

**Stage Three:** Once you’ve got a good understanding of the article you’ve selected, turn to the Purdue OWL page on literary criticism (the same one we’ve used already). There’s a link to it in the Final Project Resources module. Try to identify the critical approach employed in the article you’ve found.

**Stage Four:** Write that essay. Feel free to use the suggested structure below – but if another structure works better for your essay, use it.

**Suggested Organization of Final Project**

Part One: Introduction

* Introduce the article and work you’ve selected.
* Provide a brief overview of the subject of the article (the article abstract – at the very beginning of the article – could be a useful resource for this)
* Do you agree or disagree with the author’s conclusions.

Part Two: Summary of Article

* Summarize the article. Your summary should highlight the key elements of the author’s argument as well as his/her conclusions. It is often a good idea to occasionally quote from the article to highlight key evidence or conclusions.

Part Three: Identify Critical Approach

* Applying the description of the critical school from OWL (especially those questions), make a case for which critical approach you feel the author has taken. What elements of his/her argument or conclusions (which you’ve just summarized) look through the lens of that approach?

Part Four: Your Take

* Finally, share your thoughts on the article’s findings. Do you agree or disagree? Support your conclusions with passages from the original work – passages that either support the author’s position or point out possible shortcomings in the author’s case.

**Important Note:**

Don’t panic.

You need to put in your best effort. You need to get the MLA format and citations right. You need to draw in passages from the article and the work it’s written on.

I do not, however, expect perfection in your analysis. The goal of this assignment is to give you a taste of the science of literary study, to see what critics do, and to take a shot at it yourself. Take full advantage of the Help!!! Forums and of me directly throughout the process if you have questions or concerns. Start early, plan out your time so you’re not stuck in a last minute scramble, and, again, reach out if you’re stuck.