

ENG-L 202: Literary Interpretation
Instructor: Paul G. Cook
Midterm Exam (25%)

Part I: Identification—answer *only* 7 (7.142 points each)

1. John Wesley	2. authorship
3. bub	4. strand(s)
5. narration/point-of-view	6. anomaly
7. Greek chorus	8. Delphic oracle
9. Amontillado	10. the subject
11. signifier-signified	

Part II: Essay—answer *only* 1 (50 points)

Be sure that your response actually answers the question as it is written. You should have a clearly-identifiable thesis statement (you can even underline it on your exam if you like), and you should also be sure to provide adequate support throughout your response. You can use examples from any of the texts and readings we've encountered this semester. Good luck!

1.) Several of our readings and class discussions this semester have touched on language and the way language works, from to our readings in *The Theory Toolbox* on how language shapes our interactions with the world around us to our focus on stories, narrative, and the centrality of story-telling to humanity.

Taking a somewhat broad view of the many eclectic “places” we’ve been thus far this semester (i.e., American short stories, a Greek tragedy from 430 BCE, theoretical concepts, etc.), write an essay in which you examine how language—here broadly construed as storytelling, narrative, and even just the way we speak and communicate with each other (through art, literature, film, etc.)—constructs and shapes us as subjects. This is an eclectic class, so feel free to pull your specific examples from a variety of sources and “places.”

2.) According to Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton, there is no intrinsic quality that makes a given text “literary,” just as Nealon and Giroux might say that there is nothing “essential” about having dark skin or being a female that means that you’ll act a certain way. (Or, to take this idea all the way back to its linguistic roots, there’s nothing about the collection of letters “cat” that intrinsically means anything, much less a furry four-legged critter; “cat” only has meaning within a particular social and linguistic context, namely, the agreed-upon standards of contemporary conversational American and British English.)

Using two texts we’ve read thus far this semester as reference points, write an essay in which you flesh out and discuss the implications and the larger significance of Eagleton’s claim. Are there elements of the texts we’ve read that could be considered literary? Wouldn’t most people agree that a Faulkner short story, say, is different from an article in today’s *Kokomo Tribune*? How might you explain or “unpack” Eagleton’s claim based on the literature we’ve read this semester?

3.) A central theme of *Oedipus the King* is that humans depend to a great degree on our “myths,” our beliefs, whether religious, cultural, technological, etc. These myths can be both large and small: e.g., the myth of the old West, Manifest Destiny, various myths of socio-economic advancement in contemporary society (“go to college!”), the American Dream, and even the unexamined assumptions we have about everything from ethnic identities to human sexuality.

What’s up with this? In other words, why are we humans so connected to our myths—these great explanatory stories about both the way things are (reality) and the way things should be or could be (fantasy)? To what extent do literature and film play into shaping our collective myths? In developing your response, try to think of a handful (at least three) specific examples from our readings this semester to evidence to support your argument/explanation.

Also, it may help for you to focus in your response on one or two specific myths, tracing out their function in contemporary society and in the texts, rather than trying to analyze four or five different myths.

Good luck!