

English 190-01: Literature and Economics  
Spring 2010  
Professor Bigelow  
[bigelow@rhodes.edu](mailto:bigelow@rhodes.edu)

bigelow@rhodes.edu  
Palmer 319  
O: 843-3980; H: 728-4958  
Office Hours: W 10-11, Th 2:30-3:30

### Literature and Economics

In basic terms, economics is simply the study of how societies organize their resources. The great twentieth-century economist Robert Heilbroner makes the point in this way: “Economics, as I see it, is the process by which society marshals and coordinates the activities required for its provisioning.” But if this is true, then in some general way literature has always been about economics. One could say that *The Illiad*, for example, reveals how great a proportion of its resources one society was willing to expend in defense of a particular point of honor. But since the rise of market capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, literature in Britain and America has provided especially focused commentary on economic issues, dealing with poverty and wealth, consumerism, market behavior, and financial crisis. These common economic themes in many works of modern literature (modern here meaning since the rise of capitalism) would be enough reason to study these books and poems together, in a class like this one. However, there is an even more compelling reason to think about literature and economics together when studying the modern period: it was in this period that the discipline of economics itself came into being. Though some ancient writers (Aristotle for example) wrote about management of resources or about money, no one considered economics to be an area for focused study or sustained analysis until the capitalist era. In this course we will read major works of literature that ask questions about economics, and we will survey debates among the most influential economists from the eighteenth century forward. Our task will be to put these two kinds of readings—usually (and problematically, as we will see) thought to be separate and divergent—into conversation with each other.

This course has been designed to promote several goals:

- Skill in the interpretation of literary texts
- An understanding of the way literary texts treat questions about economics (in the broad sense defined above)
- Familiarity with the debates that shaped modern economics, from Adam Smith forward
- Skill in the written presentation of arguments

The first of these is the most important. It requires considerable care, diligence, and practice to argue persuasively about the meaning of any work of literature or art, and it is this practice that will be the decided focus of our attention. The definitive and final form of your arguments will be the essay, and we will also devote considerable attention to the demands of this form.

#### Course Materials

Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui*  
Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*  
Willa Cather, *The Professor's House*  
Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Bookshop*  
William Gibson, *Neuromancer*  
Various Short Readings Posted on Moodle

I recommend the two websites below as excellent resources on economics. Both are user-friendly and offer a tremendous amount of helpful information.

Library of Economics and Liberty: <http://www.econlib.org/library/classics.html>

Generally to the right in its orientation, this site provides access to a library of important texts in economics, from its beginnings to the present day. The texts are searchable and easy to use. In addition the site offers a wide range of commentaries and online “columns” (blogs, I suppose) from economists and commentators. If you want the full text of Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, it’s here.

History of Economic Thought: <http://homepage.newschool.edu/het/>

Generally to the left in its orientation, though extremely comprehensive, this site provides an introduction to virtually every major economist that every lived. You’ll find a brief and (usually) non-technical article that describes the economist’s ideas and influence, followed by a list of other online resources relating to his or her work. If you want a quick introduction to Pareto’s theory of economic equilibrium, this is a good place to begin.

### **Course Requirements**

**Readings:** Readings are due to be read by the day they are listed on the syllabus. You may work ahead, but if you do so be careful not to refer in discussion to material others haven’t read. To prepare the reading for this class, think of yourself as an active participant in and respondent to the material you’re looking at. Don’t simply try to absorb the information on the page in front of you, as if you were a mechanical scanner loading data. Record your reactions, raise questions, and come to class prepared to say something about them.

**Quizzes:** I give short reading quizzes on occasion, without announcement. They are pass/fail, with failure resulting in your being excused from class and counted as absent for that day’s class.

**Absences:** You may miss up to 5 class sessions, for any reason (failing a reading quiz, illness, family emergency, sport, oversleeping, etc.) without penalty. Missing more than 5 classes will lower your final grade and may result in failure in the course.

**Discussions in Class:** My expectation for this course is that every member of the class will speak or ask a question every day. If you’re not talking regularly, expect to be called on in class for your reactions to a reading.

**Writing Workshops:** Several times during the term we will discuss parts of papers from students in the course. The papers will be circulated anonymously. It may not be possible to consider work by every student in the course, but you should expect that something you’ve written may be circulated for a workshop. We will discuss guidelines for these sessions during our first workshop.

**Writing Assignments:** All writing must be non-fiction, computer-printed, double-spaced, grammatically correct, and carefully proofread.

When grading your essays, I will be looking for two things, both of which are of equal importance. First, I will be concerned with your ability to provide detailed close readings of quoted passages from the

texts you're working with. A "close reading" is the building-block skill of all literary analysis, and it involves a detailed examination of the language in a given passage in order to arrive at that passage's meaning. In other words, you derive your interpretation of a given text from your observations about how the writer has crafted it.

Second, I will be looking at the way you discuss the ideas in a given text. Most simply, how do you understand the ideas or arguments you see this author proposing? For example, how and why is Gibson's view of technological change in *Neuromancer* significant? Judging from the work of other authors read in the course, is Gibson's view typical? Does it seem to have been influenced by the way earlier generations have understood the meaning of technology? The best essays of literary criticism combine discussion of broad questions like these with close and detailed examination of quoted evidence. I will provide a handout on the standards for excellent essays in literature classes, but if you have questions about grading standards I urge you to raise them in class or in office hours.

**Intellectual Honesty:** Be scrupulous in preparing all your written work for this course to insure that it conforms both to the terms of the Rhodes Honor Code and to the guidelines on plagiarism in the Rhodes College *Guide to Effective Paper Writing* (available on the Rhodes Writing Center website, <http://www.rhodes.edu/9076.asp>). Be especially careful when working with online sources, including those above. Any use of another authors ideas or language without proper acknowledgement may result in referral to the Honor Council and failure in the course.

**Grades:**

Reading Exercise	5%
2 First-Page Exercises @ 5% each	10%
Essay I	15%
Essay II	20%
Essay III	20%
Essay IV	25%
Work in class	15%

**Late work:** Late papers will lose one third of a grade for each day late. (E.G. an "A" paper turned in 1 day late becomes an A-.) If I need to return a paper to you for proofreading, I'll consider it late until it's corrected and turned in again. Ungraded drafts turned in late will not receive written comments.

**One Final Note:** I have not scheduled a final exam for this course, but I do reserve the right to add one if students are not prepared well for class discussion.

### Schedule of Readings and Assignments \*

1/12	Introduction
1/14	Continuing exercise on Wordsworth's "The World is too Much With Us" Quiz on Syllabus and Wordsworth. Quizzes hereafter unannounced.
1/17	M. L. KING, JR. HOLIDAY
1/19	Wordsworth, "Preface to <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> " (M)
1/21	Wordsworth, "Michael" (M)
1/24	Adam Smith, from <i>Theory of Moral Sentiments</i> (M)
<b>Tues 1/25</b>	<b>Close Reading Exercise (1p) due by noon at Palmer 319</b>
1/26	Smith, from <i>Theory of Moral Sentiments</i> (M)
1/28	Smith, from <i>Wealth of Nations</i> (M)
1/31	Smith, from <i>Wealth of Nations</i> (M)
2/2	Edgeworth, <i>Ennui</i> chs 1-7
2/4	Edgeworth chs 8-10 (Writing Workshop in Class)
2/7	Edgeworth chs 11-18
2/9	Finish Edgeworth
<b>Thurs 2/10</b>	<b>Draft of Paper I due by noon at Palmer 319</b>
2/11	Writing Workshop in Class
2/14	Foley, from <i>Adam's Fallacy</i> (M); Karl Marx, from <i>German Ideology</i> (M)
2/16	Marx, from <i>Capital</i> (M)
<b>Thurs 2/17</b>	<b>Paper I (2-3pp) due by noon at Palmer 319</b>
2/18	Gaskell, <i>North and South</i> chs 1-7
2/21	Gaskell 8-15
2/23	Gaskell 16-22
2/25	Gaskell 23-31
2/28	Gaskell 32-38 (Writing Workshop in Class)
3/2	Gaskell 39-47
3/4	Finish Gaskell
3/7	Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market" (M)
3/9	John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic" (M)
<b>Thurs 3/10</b>	<b>Paper II (5pp) due by noon at Palmer 319</b>
3/11	Jevons, from <i>Theory of Political Economy</i> (M)

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\* Expect some changes and adjustments to this schedule as we proceed.

- 3/ 14-18      SPRING VACATION
- 3/21          Cather, *Professor's House* 3-86
- 3/23          Cather 87-142
- 3/25          Cather 143-209
- 3/28          Finish Cather
- Tues 3/29      Draft of Paper III due by noon at Palmer 319**
- 3/30          Writing Workshop in Class
- 4/1          Fitzgerald, *The Bookshop* 7-40
- 4/4          Fitzgerald 41-100
- 4/6          Finish Fitzgerald
- Thurs 4/8      Paper 3 (2-3PP) due by noon at Palmer 319**
- 4/8          Bourdieu (M)
- Sunday, 4/11: Screening of *Summer Hours* (2008)**
- 4/11          Fullbrook (M); discussion of *Summer Hours* in class
- 4/13          Continue discussion of *Summer Hours*
- 4/15          Ariely, from *Predictably Irrational* (M)
- 4/18          Gibson, *Neuromancer* 3-39
- 4/20          Gibson, *Neuromancer* 41-98
- 4/22          EASTER VACATION
- 4/25          Gibson 99-213
- 4/27          Finish Gibson; Conclusion
- 4/29          URCAS – No Class

**Final Paper (5pp) due Tuesday, May 3 by 2pm at Palmer 319**

## **Department of English Expectations and Policies**

A college course is more than simply a set of assignments; it is an intellectual process, one which requires active engagement from beginning to end in order to achieve its intended results. With this in mind, the Department of English has formulated a number of expectations and the policies that support them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to the syllabus for a particular course, you should address them to the instructor.

**Attendance:** The success of a course depends to a significant extent upon the presence of students alert and prepared to address the subject under discussion. Unavoidable absences should be discussed with the instructor, ideally before they occur. Excessive absences will result in a lowering of grade, in some cases to an F.

**Deadlines:** Writing assignments, test, etc., are carefully scheduled as stages toward the fulfillment of the course's goals and cannot be indefinitely deferred without frustrating those goals. Brief extensions for good reasons may be permissible with the instructor's prior approval; otherwise, late assignments will be penalized and may result in their not being accepted for credit.

**Submission of all work:** All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

**Intellectual honesty:** All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval.

**Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources** (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult your teacher.