

English 285: Text and Context
Fall Semester, 2013
Buckman 212, MW 3:00-4:15 PM

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Text

The history of this word tells us that, in the English language, our word for a written document is related to our word for cloth. A text is “textile.” It is a woven thing, where many tiny threads are interlaced by particular design into a fabric. The look and feel of a piece fabric, its “texture,” may not look like it contains this carefully woven design: it just looks like a whole thing. But if you look closely you can often perceive within it a dense and three-dimensional pattern. A text is a thing woven of language

Context

When we use this word in relation to literature, it usually means something like “background.” When we look at a work “in context,” we think about it in relation to other nearby things: things that happened around the same time (history), things written by the same writer (biography), things that share common ideas (culture, philosophy, or theory). These related things often help us to clarify and amplify what we can see and hear in a particular text. But the word itself, like the word “text” which it contains, reminds us of a basic truth: these historical or cultural “backgrounds” *are themselves texts*, woven of words in other times and places. When we read contextually, we are trying to see the way that threads connect across multiple texts, and often a great critical essay results from our own attempt to weave these threads together ourselves.

In this course, our focus will be on the *verbal texture* of literature. To hone your ear and your eye to this dense and three-dimensional texture, in great fiction or poetry or drama, is a skill at the heart of literary study. It is also a highly desirable life-long skill, one prized in many careers both in the commercial and non-profit sectors. If you can read with this kind of eye and ear, and you can convey your observations in writing, you will be of great service to whatever effort you join in years after Rhodes.

Readings

Shakespeare	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> (Folger)
Brontë	<i>Jane Eyre</i> (Broadview)
Yeats	<i>Selected Poems and Four Plays</i> , ed. Rosenthal (Collier)
Joyce	<i>Dubliners</i> , ed. Brown (Penguin)
Pinsky (ed.)	<i>Singing School</i> (Norton)

Various short pieces available as .pdf files in Bigelow’s public folder

Course Requirements

Reading: Read, reread, mark up your copy of the text, take notes, and prepare questions and comments about specific passage for class discussion. If you have not completed this level of work, then I will not consider you to be fully prepared for class.

Writing Assignments: When grading essays in this class, I will be concerned primarily with your ability to provide detailed close readings of quoted passages from the text you're working with. Close reading requires careful consideration of the "verbal texture," the "woven fabric" of the text as discussed above. A excellent close reading builds an interpretation from detailed analysis of the language of one or more quoted passages. I will discuss grading standards for these papers in class, but if you have questions about these standards I urge you to raise them in class or in office hours.

All writing must be non-fiction, computer-printed, double-spaced, grammatically correct, and carefully proofread. Unless prior arrangement is made, no papers may be submitted via email.

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. In discussion I require an atmosphere of respect, in which we can disagree and discuss disagreements without insult or silent sneer. Disagreement and difference are the very core of reading and writing; indeed if all perceptions were the same, there would be no need for writing, no need for language at all. In all your communication with peers and professor this semester, including email, maintain a high level of respect and decorum.

Consultation: I expect that you will consult with me at least twice in office hours (regularly scheduled or by appointment) to discuss some aspect of your work in the course. This is a minimum expectation. You may plan your visits in whatever way seems most useful to you: you could come to discuss a paper assignment, to go over the first draft of a paper before you revise it for final submission, to explore further an idea that came up in class, etc.

Absences: You may miss up to 3 class sessions for any reason (illness, family emergency, sport, oversleeping, etc.) without penalty. Missing more than 3 classes will lower your final grade for the semester and may result in failure in the course. Note that attendance at the three film screenings listed in the syllabus is mandatory. If you are involved in an activity that may take you away from more than 3 class meetings, be sure to consult with me well in advance about this so we can plan accordingly.

Intellectual Honesty: Be scrupulous in preparing all your 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. Any use of another author's ideas or language without proper acknowledgement may result in referral to the Honor Council and failure in the course.

Grades:

Sonnet Exercise (1p)	5%
Short Papers (2 pp) 3 @ 10% each =	30%
Brontë paper (5pp)	20%
Paper on Joyce or Yeats (5pp)	20%
Final Paper (5pp)	25%

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.

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 Assignments¹

Date	Assignment	Supplemental
Part I: Metaphor		
M 8/26	Shakespeare: Sonnets 1, 2, 15, 16, 17 ²	Barthes, "Death of the Author" (Bigelow Public Folder ³); <i>Dict of Lit Terms</i> : ⁴ "Metaphor," "Tenor & Vehicle"
W 8/28	Shakespeare: Sonnets 18, 130, 145 1-page close reading due in class	DLT "Scansion," "Sonnet"
M 9/2	<i>Labor Day -- No Class</i>	---
W 9/4	Shakespeare: Sonnets 29, 30, 73, 99	DLT "Telescoped Metaphor"
Fr 9/6	Sonnet paper (2pp) due at Palmer 319 by noon	
Sunday 9/8	Screening of Branagh <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>, 7PM at Rhodes Tower 419	
M 9/9	Shakespeare, <i>Much Ado</i> Act I	DLT "Stichomythia"
W 9/11	<i>Much Ado</i> Acts II & III	DLT "Comedy"
M 9/16	<i>Much Ado</i> Acts IV & V	---
W 9/18	Brontë, <i>Jane Eyre</i>	DLT "Novel" (skim)
Fr 9/20	<i>Much Ado</i> paper (2pp) due at Palmer 319 by noon	
M 9/23	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	---
W 9/25	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	DLT "Romance (i)," "Romantic," "Romantic Revival"
M 9/30	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	---
W 10/2	Flex Day: Class Discussion TBA	---
Fr 10/4	<i>Jane Eyre</i> Paper (5pp) due at Palmer 319 by Noon	
Sunday 10/6	Screening of <i>The Awful Truth</i>, 7PM at Rhodes Tower 419 Read Corrigan (BPF) before the screening and use it to prepare comments for class discussion.	

¹ Expect some changes as we proceed. Detailed reading assignments for Parts II and III of the course will be provided at midterm.

² For all Shakespeare sonnets, access at <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/Poetry/sonnets.html>. Read as many sonnets as you can. Print copies of those assigned for discussion, and bring printed copies to class. Use *Oxford English Dictionary* online to look up unfamiliar words or words used in unusual ways:

<http://www.oed.com/>

³ Hereafter *BLP*

⁴ Hereafter *DLT*

M 10/7	Discussion of <i>The Awful Truth</i>	Review Corrigan (BPF)
W 10/9	Discussion of <i>The Awful Truth</i>	---

M 10/14	<i>Fall Break -- No Class</i>	
Tues 10/15	Screening of Wheedon's <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>, 7PM at Rhodes Tower 419	
W 10/16	Discussion of Wheedon Film	---
Fr 10/18	Paper on one of the Films (2pp) due at Palmer 319 by noon	

Part II: History		
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M 10/21	W. B. Yeats, <i>Selected Poems</i>	Supplemental Assignments TBA
W 10/23	"	
M 10/28	"	
W 10/30	"	
M 11/4	James Joyce, <i>Dubliners</i>	
W 11/6	"	
M 11/11	"	
W 11/13	"	
Fr 11/15	Paper on Yeats or Joyce (5pp) due at Palmer 319 by noon	

Part III: Music		
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M 11/18	Poems from Pinsky, <i>Singing School</i>	Supplemental Assignments TBA
W 11/20	"	
M 11/25	"	
W 11/27	<i>Thanksgiving Break -- No Class</i>	
M 12/2	Poems from Pinsky, <i>Singing School</i>	
W 12/4	"	
M 12/9	Final Paper (5pp) due at Palmer 319 by noon	