

# Rhodes College Department of English

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**Office Hours:** M/W/F, 2:00-3:00 p.m.; and by appointment.

My administrative role as Dean of *British Studies At Oxford* means that I sometimes have to be out of my office unexpectedly. I shall try to keep my Office Hours, but for your own convenience I recommend that you phone ahead (3715) before climbing all those stairs.

## ***The Imperial Idea in British Literature: Promoters, Doubters, Enemies, and Aftermath*** English 215 CRN: 12232

**Class meets:** Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 3:00-3:50 Palmer 211

### Schedule and Course Document, Fall 2011

#### **Course description: Why study empire through literature?**

*“Empire” is a complex term, not least as it applies to that other complex entity, “Britain” (as opposed to the simpler idea of “England”, for instance). This course will focus on literary texts composed during the formation of both Britain and what came to be the British empire(s). We will examine the representation and ideas of empire; different attitudes to English dominance in the British Isles; different responses to the growth of English and British commercial dominance and territorial expansion; and both positive and negative evaluations of the imperial project. The course will end by considering some of the literature of the dissolution of Britain’s empire.*

*An integral part of this course will be participation in a series of events – lectures, presentations, movies, discussions. Students enroll also in History 105: The British Empire and Its Enemies.*

Two famous statements to consider by very different literary theorists:

“To the carrying out of the job [of cultural criticism] literature has a unique relevance . . . because literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity and difficulty”.

Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York 1950), p. xv.

“Knowledge is coarse, life is subtle, and literature matters to us because it corrects this distance”.  
Roland Barthes, *Leçon* [Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France], Paris 1978.

## Grading

The final grade recognizes the quality of your work over the whole course. It is awarded for a course of study successfully pursued, not simply for a few pieces of written work, and you are expected to be intellectually engaged at all times. Provided that I am confident that that is the case, the exact final grade is normally determined according to the scheme set out below. However, there are two thresholds you must cross successfully before I will award a grade above "D".

First, this is an English course, and I expect any formal piece of work to be written with correct grammar and spellings. All students now have access to word processing programs with a spelling checker, so there is little excuse for handing in misspelled work. Grammar is fundamental to communication, and degree-level written work in English has to communicate accurately. Many WP programs also have a grammar checker, though these are of limited usefulness. If you have any doubts about the accuracy of your English usage, you should use the Writing Center to gain advice. Above all, I expect you to proof-read your work and spot errors before I do – if you present work to me that you could not be bothered to read over, you must expect me to feel that you are treating the task with contempt and grade accordingly.

Second, this course requires that you master some facts concerning the literary, cultural, and political history of the time during which these texts were being written. If I become concerned that you are not mastering the material or preparing adequately for class, I shall issue a series of unannounced tests, each based on factual material found in the texts, in any study-guides I have made available to you, and in our set readings. You must achieve at least a 60% average on these tests to get above "D".

Once across these thresholds, the grade is determined as follows:

First paper:	15%
Second paper:	15%
Midterm:	10%
Final paper:	30%
Final exam:	10%
Participation:	20%

Everybody wants a top grade for all their courses, and – as Garrison Keillor slyly insinuates of the inhabitants of Lake Wobegon – we all think that we are above average. But life isn't really like that. Before you complain of unfair grading, bear in mind that satisfactory performance in this College is rewarded with a grade of C. A grade of B recognizes performance well beyond the simply satisfactory. Grades of A for the course will be given to work that is genuinely and consistently outstanding, and that grade is rarely given. For your information, the median grade I gave for my courses in Fall 2004 (the last time I made the calculation) was between B and B-.

## Cheating

Those I catch cheating, I fail.

receives an A is not the occasional error or infelicity; the difference is in quality of thought. If you decide to rewrite a paper, you should expect to start almost from scratch, using your first version as the foundation for a complete rethinking of the topic and your approach. If you approach rewriting in this spirit, it can be one of the most powerful tools for your intellectual development.

For each of the first two papers one rewrite is permitted, and it should be presented within two weeks of the return of the original paper. The recorded grade will be the average of the first and second grades.

**What are the characteristics of the different grades of performance?**

Rhodes is moving, with its new curriculum, to a 4 credit system, with the expectation that students will normally take four courses only per semester. More free time? Hardly. The purpose of this change is to get students to engage more deeply with the material they are studying. Students will be expected to read and write more carefully, more attentively, more thoughtfully ... and sometimes just more. For this course I will expect you to come to have spent several hours preparing for each class and to spend time after the class reconsidering and consolidating in response to our discussions.

Full description of what will lead to various grades is both impossible and unwise. Again, bear in mind that the satisfactory student should receive a C grade; a B recognizes performance well above satisfactory. A grade of A or A- is for outstanding work and is received rarely.

Here are some of the characteristics of the excellent and the poor student:

*Excellent students* attend the class without fail; they have always prepared for the class well; they are self-motivated learners, using the library and other resources to discover additional materials for the subject; they are curious and enquiring; and they constantly reflect on the relationship between subjects under immediate discussion and earlier discussions in the class. Their writing is ambitious and the subject of growing professional pride: they seek to grapple with substantial subjects, which they pursue with clarity, accuracy, determination, and rigour, and they reread and rewrite their work before submitting it. They seek to present their work with professionalism and proof-read it carefully before handing it in. These students are perceptive and make sophisticated, educated, and independent-minded enquiries concerning issues to do with literature, language, and culture more generally.

*Poor students* have poor attendance records. They have put little into preparation for class and they are visibly disengaged. In their written work they are more concerned with "set length" than with intellectual substance, and they fail to observe obvious professional standards (spelling, grammar, getting simple things like authors' names and quotations right). They produce no preliminary draft of papers and fail to read their work through to ensure its quality and accuracy. They seek simple answers to complex questions and do the bare minimum, rarely bringing to bear any reading or thinking not explicitly required by the professor.

### Active Learning

Here is a good statement for you to consider, in relation to this and every course you take at Rhodes:

Let me speak to you purely as a professor for a moment. Here is a bedrock truth. We can inform you, we can expose you to things you never heard of before, we can explain things, we can sometimes entertain you, we can often bore the hell out of you, we can set up good learning environments (or not), we can test you, we can grade you and credential you, and you can like us or hate us. But however well or badly we do those things, there is one thing that we absolutely cannot do, even if we stand on our heads – and that is: educate you. That is because the educational part of an education requires a personal investment from you that is not in the contract. If you do not make that investment of yourself, you can get a college degree without coming close to an education. By personal investment, I mean a kind of active mental engagement that falls largely outside the routine of going to school.

Theodore D. Nordenburg,  
Professor of Philosophy, Mercer University [October, 2002]

### Syllabus

Session	Date	Assignment
1	Wednesday 24 August	Intro to the course: Concepts of empire
2	Friday 26 August	The Inkle and Yarico tradition: Richard Steele's essay in <i>The Spectator</i>
3	Monday 29 August	John Thelwall's <i>Inkle and Yarico</i>
4	Wednesday 31 August	continued
5	Friday 2 September	John Thelwall
6	Monday 5 September	<b>LABOR DAY – NO CLASS</b>
7	Wednesday 7 September	Visit of Dr Steve Poole: Thelwall
8	Friday 9 September	continued

### Islands and Power: "Consider you are but an island" (Ethan Allen to his English guards, during the Revolutionary War)

9	Monday 12 September	Thomas More's <i>Utopia</i> and reading on "islands"
10	Wednesday 14 September	continued
11	Friday 16 September	Daniel Defoe, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
12	Monday 19 September	continued
13	Wednesday 21 September	Shakespeare, <i>The Tempest</i>

14 Friday 23 September continued  
**First paper due**

15 Monday 26 September Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Book 4

16 Wednesday 28 September continued

### **Commerce and Liberty**

17 Friday 30 September John Denham, *Coopers Hill*

18 Monday 3 October Joseph Addison and James Thompson

### **Slaves, Slave-owners, and Slavery**

19 Wednesday 5 October Slavery in 18th-century literature

20 Friday 7 October The "Inkle and Yarico" tradition – later versions  
**Second paper due**

21 Monday 10 October continued

### **Empire, the Imperialist, and the Home Country**

22 Wednesday 12 October Samuel Foote, *The Nabob*

23 Friday 14 October continued

24 Monday 17 October **FALL BREAK – NO CLASS**

25 Wednesday 19 October William Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*

26 Friday 21 October continued

27 Monday 24 October **MPL AWAY – NO CLASS**

28 Wednesday 26 October continued

29 Friday 28 October continued

30 Monday 31 October Rudyard Kipling, tales of empire  
Screening of *The Rising: The Ballad of Mangal Pandy*

31 Wednesday 2 November **MPL AWAY – NO CLASS**

32 Friday 4 November continued

33 Monday 7 November continued

**When the colonized migrate to the home country**

34	Wednesday 9 November	continued
35	Friday 11 November	J.M. Coetzee, <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i> Screening of <i>Breaker Morant</i>
36	Monday 14 November	continued
37	Wednesday 16 November	continued
38	Friday 18 November	<b>MPL AWAY – NO CLASS</b>
39	Monday 21 November	continued Screening of <i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i>
40	Wednesday 23 November	<b>THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS</b>
41	Friday 25 November	<b>THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS</b>
42	Monday 28 November	<i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i>
43	Wednesday 30 November	continued Screening of <i>East is East</i>
44	Friday 2 December	<i>East is East</i>
45	Monday 5 December	continued Screening of <i>Bend It Like Beckham</i>
46	Wednesday 7 December	<i>Bend It Like Beckham</i>