

English 285: Text and Context
Fall Semester, 2014
TR 11 - 12:15 PM

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Office Hrs: M 1-2, W 2-3:30 & by appt.

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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 of fabric, its “texture,” may not appear to contain this carefully woven design: it just looks like a whole thing. But if you examine 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

Cuddon	<i>Penguin Dictionary of Lit Terms & Lit Theory</i>
Shakespeare	<i>Sonnets</i> (Folger)
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)

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

Course Requirements

Reading: Read, reread, and mark up your copy of the text. If your text is unmarked, then you have no immediate record of your ideas. Take notes and prepare questions and comments about specific passages 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 a way 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
Part I: Metaphor	
T 9/2	Shakespeare: Sonnets 1, 2, 15, 16, 17 ² <i>Dictionary of Lit Terms</i> : ³ "Metaphor," "Tenor & Vehicle"
R 9/4	Shakespeare: Sonnets 18, 130, 145 <i>DLT</i> "Scansion," "Sonnet"
Friday 9/5	1-page close reading due at Palmer 319 by 3pm
T 9/9	Shakespeare: Sonnets 29, 30, 73, 99 <i>DLT</i> "Telescoped Metaphor"
R 9/11	Contemporary Sonnets (BPF)
Friday 9/12	Paper on Sonnet 73 (2pp) due at Palmer 319 by 3pm
T 9/16	Watch <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i> , Dir. Kenneth Brannagh, 1993 (Moodle) Shakespeare, <i>Much Ado</i> Act I <i>DLT</i> "Stichomythia"
R 9/18	<i>Much Ado</i> Acts II & III <i>DLT</i> "Comedy"
T 9/23	<i>Much Ado</i> Acts IV & V
R 9/25	Brontë, <i>Jane Eyre</i> <i>DLT</i> "Novel" (skim)
Friday 9/26	<i>Much Ado</i> paper (2pp) due at Palmer 319 by 3pm
T 9/30	<i>Jane Eyre</i>
R 10/2	<i>Jane Eyre</i> <i>DLT</i> "Romance (i)," "Romantic," "Romantic Revival"
T 10/7	<i>Jane Eyre</i>
R 10/9	Flex Day: Class Discussion TBA
Friday 10/10	<i>Jane Eyre</i> Paper (5pp) due at Palmer 319 by Noon

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

² Read as many sonnets as you can, but prepare those listed here for class discussion. Use the *Oxford English Dictionary* online to look up unfamiliar words or words used in unusual ways:
<http://www.oed.com/>

³ Hereafter *DLT*

- T 10/14 Watch *The Awful Truth*, Dir. Leo McCarey, 1937 (Moodle)
Corrigan (BPF)
R 10/16 Continuing Discussion of *The Awful Truth*
- T 10/21 *Fall Break -- No Class*
R 10/23 Watch *Much Ado about Nothing*, Dir. Joss Wheedon, 2012 (Moodle)
Friday, 10/24 Paper on one of the Films (2pp) due at Palmer 319 by 3pm

Part II: History

- T 10/28 William Butler Yeats, from *Selected Poems*
R 10/30 “
- T 11/4 “
R 11/6 “
- T 11/11 James Joyce, from *Dubliners*
R 11/13 “
- T 11/18 “
R 11/20 “
Friday 11/21 Paper on Yeats or Joyce (5pp) due at Palmer 319 by 3pm

Part III: Music

- T 11/25 Selected Poems from *Singing School*, ed. Robert Pinsky (Handout)
R 11/27 *Thanksgiving Break -- No Class*
- T 12/2 Continue with poems from *Singing School*
R 12/4 “
- T 12/9 “

Final Paper (5pp) due during exam week

RHODES COLLEGE
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.