English 285: Text and Context
The Incident Room: Investigations into Literature,
Tina Barr (tinabarr@rhodes.edu, office is 308B Palmer Hall, 843 3979)
Office Hours Wednesdays 1:30 to 3:30 and by appt.

Like detective work, literary study involves methods of analysis; we learn critical writing and critical thinking in the process of asking questions and positing conclusions with regard to the challenges of technique as well as content. In this course we will consider twentieth century and contemporary novels, short stories and poems that present us with psychological mysteries. The three genres will include work by fiction writers such as William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence and Cormac McCarthy, poets Robert Lowell, James Dickey, Elizabeth Bishop, Countee Cullen, Robert Hayden, Philip Levine and others. Each discussion will invite students to consider the influence of literary ideas and backgrounds, as well as understanding literary terms.

English 285 is designed to equip majors with the tools required for middle- and upper-division courses in English. It will focus on the necessary skills for understanding the verbal texture of literature, the development of argument and critical response, and the ability to frame discussion of texts. The course will introduce a critical vocabulary through the demonstrated use of these terms in analysis and through the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*. As a gateway course, this class will be writing intensive, allowing students to practice their analytical writing skills as well as thinking critically about the literature under discussion.

You will be expected to generate ideas of your own under the leadership of Professor Barr. The class will be conducted as a discussion, with an extensive number of classes devoted to group work, which will result in student presentations, based on Professor Barr’s circulation of directive questions. The discussion questions are designed to allow and encourage you, the student, to “discover” important ideas, techniques and motifs in the multi-genre texts. Rather than being told or lectured on these points, you will be required to discover them for yourselves. In addition, it’s crucial to understand that in the interpretation of literary texts, there are a range of responses. This is not a science course, which requires you to understand fixed realities, but rather, this is a course in a literature that asks you to think, explore and investigate. As such, it will be challenging, perhaps frustrating, but it will prepare you for the endeavor of literary study.

Class Schedule: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 to 3:15, Buckman 330

Course Requirements & Grading: Students will fulfill all reading and writing assignments by the due dates. There will be four required essays, each counting for 20% of the grade. Class participation and preparation for discussion will count towards (20%) of the final grade. If anyone knows he or she has difficulty or questions with punctuation or grammar, he or she should attend a series of tutorials at the Writing Center, and should set these up himself or herself. Essays that include grammatical or punctuation errors will receive a grade no higher than a C range.

Course Structure: The course will begin with a focus on analytical writing and the process of revision. We will be reading some Frost poems, a Hemingway story, and a Lawrence story during the first part of the course, which will bring the students to focus on their writing and on work-shopping their essays. We will move on to a segment that incorporates the analysis of McCarthy’s novel, followed by a longer segment on short stories and poems, which will incorporate student presentations as a result of their discussion groups, as well as composing essays.

Essays: Since the course has a focus on close reading with attention to specific techniques, the student should be aware that in all his or her essays, he or she will need to quote extensively from the requisite text. This course does not ask the students to use critical resources outside the text itself, but develops the students’ abilities to read closely and to write analytically. The course will thus prepare the student to move on to higher level courses that involve research, but only after he or she can write a brief, analytical essay.

A Note on Illness: It is likely that some of the class members will become ill during the semester. If you are sick, with a cold, runny nose, sore throat, coughing, fever, queasy stomach, aching muscles, in short *any symptoms at all, DO NOT COME TO CLASS*. I will send you home immediately, and *I will not be pleased*. You run the risk of spreading your infection. You can email me with questions you may have about the reading assignment, and I will leave copies of any materials distributed during the class in the bin attached to my office door. Ask a friend or roommate to either drop off or collect any materials you need from the bin or deposit any assignments due. You are entitled to miss 4 classes without any effect on your grade. DO not miss class for any reason other than a death in the family, an illness or an unforeseeable conflict such as a traveling for a sport. I will allow the 4 absences because of the strong expectation of flu this Fall, but do not abuse the privilege or your final grade will be reduced due to excessive absences.

Week 1: (Thursday, August 27th) Introduction to course, paired interviews, diagnostic. Hand out grading policies.
Assignment for next week: Read Frost poems “The Oven Bird,” “Birches,” “The Silken Tent,” and “Come In.” In addition, read the story, “A Clean Well-Lighted Place” in your Coursepack. Read the following entries in The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms: allusion, sonnet, alliteration, assonance, consonance, connotation & denotation, metaphor, symbol.

Week 2: (September 1st --- pick up your diagnostic, with comments, outside Professor Barr’s office door-----if indicated see her in conference on Wednesday afternoon, September 2nd, she will email you if she needs to meet with you.) Class on September 3rd Discussion of techniques used in the Frost poems and the Hemingway story (voice, metaphor, narrative structure, ambiguity, imagery, point of view). Use Penguin dictionary to research any unfamiliar terms. Punctuation and common errors discussed. Hand out class contracts.

Assignment for next week: Write first essay. Read the Lawrence story, “Tickets, Please” in your coursepack, page 20 and on. Read in Penguin Dictionary about the following terms: essay, exegesis, figurative language, flat and round characters, free indirect discourse.

Week 3: (September 8th & September 10th) Turn in essays. We will begin discussion of “Tickets Please.” Discussion of essay writing as a process.

Assignment for next week: Revise essays as needed.

Week 4: (September 15th – no class on 17th, attend Alumnae Poetry Reading at 7:30 pm in Blount auditorium by former Rhodes Poetry Students)

Discussion of Lawrence story and poems. Turn in revisions of essays as required.

Assignment for next week: Read poems “Skunk Hour,” by Robert Lowell & “The Hospital Window” and “Falling” by James Dickey. Read about the lyric, and internal rhyme in the Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms.

Week 5: (September 22nd & no class on 24th, Dr. Barr away for poetry reading in Georgia) Discussion of poems on 9/22.

Assignment for next week: Read Cormac McCarthy’s The Road. Read the entries on symbol, symbolism and subtext in The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms.

Week 6: (September 29th & October 1st) Discussion of The Road. Organize student presentations.

Assignment for next week: If you have not finished reading the McCarthy novel, please do so!

Week 7: (October 6th & October 8th) (student group reports)
Student presentations on various aspects of *The Road*. Handouts on topics for second essay, due on October 13th.

**Assignment for next week:** Read Bishop’s poem “The Man Moth,” Philip Levine’s poems, “To a Child Trapped in a Barber Shop,” “They Feed They Lion,” and “Genius.” Also read Countee Cullen’s “Yet Do I Marvel.” Discuss the element of mystery in these poems.

**Week 8:** (October 13th & October 15th) Turn in second essay. Discussion of poems. (student discussion groups & reports on Levine poem)

**Assignment for next week:** Have Fun over the break.

**Week 9:** (October 22nd) Optional workshop on the 22nd, as per instruction of the professor, in conjunction with return of essays. Watch for email which will give you instructions for Thursday.

**Assignment for next week:** Read the Faulkner story in the *Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*, “A Rose for Emily.” Read the interview with Faulkner on page 1636. Read the entries on “short story,” and “tragedy” in the *Penguin*.

**Week 10:** (October 27th & October 29th) Discussion of Faulkner story & interview. (student discussion groups & reports)

**Assignment for next week:** Read the Hemingway short story, “Hills Like White Elephants,” in the *Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*, as well as, on pages 1685 and 1640, the interview with Hemingway and Fred Busch’s comments.

**Week 11:** (November 3rd & November 5th) Discussion of Hemingway story and related materials.

**Assignment for next week:** Read Robert Hayden’s “Mourning Poem for the Queen of Sunday,” “Those Winter Sundays,” and William Stafford’s, “Traveling Through the Dark,” “At the Bomb Testing Site,” and “Monuments for a Friendly Girl, etc.”

**Week 12:** (November 10th & November 12th) Discussion of poems. **Assignment of Topics for Essay. (On short story OR poem)** There will be no class on Thursday, so that you may have the opportunity to stop by Professor Barr’s office if you have questions about the third essay. She will be in her office during the class period.

**Assignment for next week --- Write the Third Essay—**

**Week 13:** (November 17th & November 19th) Turn in your essay on Tuesday outside Professor Barr’s office door by 2pm. Class will be scheduled as needed on Thursday for student work-shopping of essays.
Assignment for next week: Read three Heaney poems, including “Bogland,” Punishment” and “Requiem for the Croppies.”

Week 14: (November 24th) Discussion of Heaney poems on Tuesday, including information on the “bog” poems and political context.

Assignment for next week: Write Final Essay on Heaney poem.

Week 15: (December 1st & December 3rd) Turn in Essay on Tuesday. Essays returned by the end of week.

Week 16: (December 8th) Final Class and Party.