

ENGL 260-01, Introduction to English Literature, Fall 2001

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Rhodes College
Department of English

English 260: Introduction to English Literature

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Fall 2001
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Class Meets: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 1:50-2:50 p.m., Buckman 207

In this course, ladies and gentlemen, I am not concerned with generalities, with ideas and schools of thought, with groups of mediocrities under a fancy flag. I am concerned with the specific text, the thing itself. We will go to the center, to the hub, to the book and not vague summaries and compilations.

Vladimir Nabokov

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 10:30-11:30 a.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 before climbing all those stairs - usually, Mrs. Mary Allie Baldwin, my assistant, will be there and will be able to confirm whether or not I am.

Text

Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume 1, 7th edition, eds. M.H. Abrams, et al.

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 a degree-level 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 headnotes and introductions in our anthology, 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 exam	15%
Final paper	20%
Final exam	15%
Participation	20%

Everybody wants a top grade for all their courses, and – as Garrison Keillor says of society in Lake Wobegon – we think that we are all above average. But life isn’t really like that. Before you complain of harsh 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 1999 (I was on sabbatical leave last year) was between B and B-.

Requirements

Participation

Your assessment for this course includes a substantial component for participation and you should be in no doubt that I use the full range of grades. Participation is important because learning is a not a passive activity and one person's failure to be actively engaged in a class adversely affects the experience of others. Participation can take many forms; speaking-up is only one of them. A student who is comparatively silent but who is also obviously attentive and committed to the class is making a contribution to the overall atmosphere. Conversely, students who attend, but don't bring the text, are visibly bored, wear hats or caps, fall asleep, talk among themselves, or who are repeatedly late ... such students can't expect to be rewarded for participation even if they make the occasional contribution to discussion.

Attendance

You are expected to attend all the sessions of the course and any unjustified absence will affect your grade. With the fifth such absence, I shall assume you have withdrawn from the course, with an automatic F if your name continues to appear on the class roll. You are also expected to be on time, to remain in the classroom throughout the class, and not bring food or drink into it.

Papers

Completion of all written work is required to pass the course; failure to do so is an automatic F. All papers must be submitted by the agreed date. If you encounter difficulties, you must contact me before the agreed deadline. I shall deduct 10% per day for late papers up to one week after the due date; thereafter, although the paper is still necessary for the completion of the course, I shall record a zero as the grade.

Rewrites

I encourage rewrites, but these must be substantive: merely changing a few words I've queried or deleting things I've found challengeable will not do. Indeed, if I find that I have wasted my time reading a rewrite that is not substantive, expect my frustration to be made manifest in the overall grade for the course. Bear in mind that the difference between, for instance, a paper that receives a B and one that receives an A is not the occasional error or infelicity but 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 (but not the final paper, for obvious reasons) one rewrite is permitted, and it should be presented within two weeks of the return of the paper. The recorded grade will be the average of the first and second grades.

What are the characteristics of the different grades of performance?

Full description of what will lead to various grades is impossible and the attempt would be 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: they seek to grapple with substantial subjects, which they pursue with clarity, accuracy, determination, and rigor, and they reread and rewrite their work before submitting it. They are perceptive and make sophisticated, educated, and independent-minded enquiries concerning issues to do with literature, language, and culture more generally. They seek to present their work with professionalism and proof-read it carefully before handing it in.

Poor students have poor attendance records. They have put little into preparation for class and they are often 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 only one 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.

PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE

All schedules are the product of hope and ambition, so we shall probably have to adjust this in the light of experience as the semester goes on.

1 **Wed., Aug. 22** Introduction to the course

English and Scottish Medieval Literature

2 **Fri., Aug. 24** Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale” from *The Canterbury Tales*

3 **Mon., Aug. 27** continued

4 **Wed., Aug. 29** Robert Henryson, “The Cock and the Jasp” from *The Fables*

5 **Fri., Aug. 31** *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Parts 1 & 2

6 **Mon., Sept. 3** **LABOR DAY RECESS - NO CLASS**

7 **Wed., Sept. 5** *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Parts 3 & 4

8 **Fri., Sept. 7** Sir Thomas Malory, selection from *The Morte Darthur*

England Meets “The Renaissance”?

9 **Mon., Sept. 10** Sir Thomas Wyatt, “My galley ...”, “Whoso list to hunt ...”, “They flee from me ...”, and “The Lover showeth ...”

FIRST PAPER DUE

10 **Wed., Sept. 12** Sir Thomas Wyatt, “The long love ...”, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, “Love that doth reign ...”, and Petrarchism handout

11 **Fri., Sept. 14** Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, “Epitaph on Sir Thomas Wyatt” and selection from *The Fourth Book of Virgil*

12 **Mon., Sept. 17** Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* numbers 1, 2, 15, 21, 31, 41, 45, 47, 49, 89, 91, and 108)

13 **Wed., Sept. 19** continued

14 **Fri., Sept. 21** Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*

15 **Mon., Sept. 24** continued

16 **Wed., Sept. 26** continued; and Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1, Canto 7, stanzas 1-19

17 **Fri., Sept. 28** Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book 3, Cantos 1 and 6

18 **Mon., Oct. 1** continued

SECOND PAPER DUE

19 **Wed., Oct. 3** William Shakespeare, Sonnets 73, 74, 106, 116, and 129

20 **Fri., Oct. 5** John Donne (“The Canonization”, “Air and Angels”, and “A Valediction: Of Weeping”)

21 **Mon., Oct. 8** John Donne (“A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy’s Day”, “The Apparition”, “The Funeral, and “The Relic”) and John Milton (two brief selections from *Paradise Lost*, Book 4, lines 358-535, and Book 9, lines 960-1098)

Jacobean Drama

22 **Wed., Oct. 10** William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (study also the judgement of Samuel Johnson on the play, p. 2734 *et seq.*)

MIDTERM EXAM

23 **Fri., Oct. 12** continued

24 **Mon., Oct. 15** **FALL RECESS: NO CLASS**

25 **Wed., Oct. 17** continued

26 **Fri., Oct. 19** Ben Jonson, *Volpone*

27 **Mon., Oct. 22** continued

28 **Wed., Oct. 24** John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*

29 **Fri., Oct. 26** continued

Religious and Elegiac Poetry of the Early Seventeenth Century

30 **Mon., Oct. 29** John Donne (*Holy Sonnets* and “Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westwards”)

31 **Wed., Nov. 1** George Herbert (“Easter Wings”, “Prayer (1)”, “Jordan (1)”, the last to be compared with Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* 15)

32 **Fri., Nov. 3** George Herbert (“The Collar”, “The Pulley”, and “Love (3)”)

33 **Mon., Nov. 5** John Milton, *Lycidas* (study the passage on *Lycidas* in Samuel Johnson’s “Life of Milton”, p. 2738 *et seq.*)

34 **Wed., Nov. 7** continued. Study also the section in “Poems in Process” on *Lycidas*, p. 2890 *et seq.*

- 35 **Fri., Nov. 9** **NO CLASS – MPL AWAY**
- 36 **Mon., Nov. 12** **NO CLASS – MPL AWAY**
- 37 **Wed., Nov. 14** **NO CLASS – MPL AWAY**

Seventeenth-Century Secular Lyric

- 38 **Fri., Nov. 16** Robert Herrick (“Delight in Disorder”, “Corinna’s Going A-Maying”, “The Hock-Cart, or Harvest Home”, “Upon Julia’s Clothes”), Richard Lovelace (“The Grasshopper”), and Andrew Marvell (“The Garden”)

FINAL PAPER DUE

Restoration and Augustan Literature

- 39 **Mon., Nov. 19** Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* ((study also the section in “Poems in Process”, p. 2892, on this poem; and the judgement on Pope by Samuel Johnson, p. 2746)
- 40 **Wed., Nov. 21** **NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING RECESS**
- 41 **Fri., Nov. 23** **NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING RECESS**
- 42 **Mon., Nov. 26** William Congreve, *The Way of the World*
- 43 **Wed., Nov. 28** continued
- 44 **Fri., Nov. 30** Jonathan Swift, “A Description of a City Shower” and *A Modest Proposal*
- 45 **Mon., Dec. 3** Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (study also the section in “Poems in Process”, p. 2895, on this poem)
- 46 **Wed., Dec. 5** Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (study also the section in “Poems in Process”, p. 2896, on this poem)

TUESDAY, DEC. 11, 8:30-11:00: FINAL EXAM