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## ENGL 215-01, The Imperial Idea in British Literature: Promoters, Doubter, Enemies and Aftermath, Fall 2012

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**Rhodes College  
Department of English**

**Prof. Michael Leslie  
Office: Palmer 400**

**Tel: 843 3715**

**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: 13122**

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

**Palmer 211**

**Schedule and Course Document, Fall 2012**

**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.

## 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 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 cannot 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.

**NOTE WELL: Absences to either side of a College Recess will count double against you. Tell your parents, grandparents, long-lost uncles and any mythical family members as soon as possible not to make travel arrangements for you that conflict with the schedule – I am impervious to the argument that begins, “But my mother didn’t know and has already bought the ticket ...”. You are a legal adult and I hold you responsible for your attendance at this class.**

## 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.

### *The format of papers*

- Please use Times New Roman 12 point and number the pages.
- Use the spell-check tool, but do so with care: some of the great virtues of the computer derive from the machine's “stupidity” – it will do exactly what you say and not think about it. Make sure you check for appropriateness any corrections proposed by the machine.
- Use the grammar checker, but with even more attentiveness.
- When you have completed your paper, use the word-count tool and write the total number of words on the front page.

### *Length of Papers*

I don't like assigning a “set length” for papers – some writers need to develop ideas over a considerable span, others achieve high-quality work in astonishingly few words.

The latter are rare indeed and I know I'm not one of them. As a guide, I would say that you are unlikely to achieve thorough, nuanced expression of an idea or topic in under 1,500 words for the first two papers. Brevity is a great virtue in writers, but only if it is achieved without damage to sophistication. We'll discuss the final paper at a later date.

### *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; 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 22 August	Intro to the course: Concepts of empire
2	Friday 24 August	continued

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

3	Monday 27 August	Thomas More’s <i>Utopia</i>
4	Wednesday 29 August	continued
5	Friday 31 August	Shakespeare, <i>The Tempest</i>
6	Monday 3 September	<b>LABOR DAY – NO CLASS</b>
7	Wednesday 5 September	continued
8	Friday 7 September	Daniel Defoe, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
9	Monday 10 September	continued
10	Wednesday 12 September	Jonathan Swift, <i>Gulliver’s Travels</i>
11	Friday 14 September	continued

12 Monday 17 September **NO CLASS – MPL AWAY**

13 Wednesday 19 September **NO CLASS – MPL AWAY**

14 Friday 21 September **NO CLASS – MPL AWAY**

#### **Commerce and Liberty**

15 Monday 24 September John Denham, *Coopers Hill*  
**1st paper due**

16 Wednesday 26 September continued

17 Friday 28 September Joseph Addison, 'Letter from Italy'

18 Monday 1 October James Thompson, 'Britannia' and 'Liberty'

19 Wednesday 3 October continued

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

20 Friday 5 October Slavery in 18th-century literature

21 Monday 8 October The "Inkle and Yarico" tradition

22 Wednesday 10 October continued

23 Friday 12 October continued

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

24 Monday 15 October William Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*

25 Wednesday 17 October continued

26 Friday 19 October continued  
**Second paper due**

27 Monday 22 October **FALL RECESS – NO CLASS**

28 Wednesday 24 October Rudyard Kipling, tales of empire

29 Friday 26 October continued

30 Monday 29 October **MPL AWAY – NO CLASS**  
Screening of *The Rising: The Ballad of Mangal Pandey*

31	Wednesday 31 October	continued
32	Friday 2 November	continued
33	Monday 5 November	J.M. Coetzee, <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i>
34	Wednesday 7 November	continued
35	Friday 9 November	continued Screening of <i>Breaker Morant</i>
36	Monday 12 November	continued
37	Wednesday 14 November	continued
38	Friday 16 November	continued

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

39	Monday 19 November	<i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i>
40	Wednesday 21 November	<b>THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS</b>
41	Friday 23 November	<b>THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS</b>
42	Monday 26 November	continued
43	Wednesday 28 November	continued Screening of <i>East is East</i>
44	Friday 30 November	<i>East is East</i>
45	Monday 3 December	continued Screening of <i>Bend It Like Beckham</i>
46	Wednesday 5 December	<i>Bend It Like Beckham</i>