AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This course is one of the two most important courses you can take in English literature. Together with English 251, it forms the crucial foundation on which our department bases all further education in English. Literary criticism gives you the tools for close reading of texts and this course provides the canon of the great works before 1800 and the historical and cultural framework which allows competent understanding of those works. We will discuss the canon and especially relevant cultural setting; you will be responsible for learning the more general framework. Your text provides the best source for that information in a remarkably concise form.

In addition to introducing the canon of great literature, this course should provide at least four benefits:

1. the intense pleasure of reading good literature and sharing your responses with a group of compatible individuals who have also just completed the same work (book clubs around the world meet regularly for just such pleasure);

2. by hearing from fellow students and the professor what the work "means" to them and WHY, an increased understanding;

3. a sharpening of your rhetorical speech and writing skills by speaking and writing to the class and the professor on questions which require thought and synthesis, not just rote memory;

4. most importantly, the expansion of your ability to synthesize what you learn by putting together what you learn from each reading assignment, lecture, and discussion with what you already know to form a useful pattern of knowledge to take with you in your advanced courses and throughout your life.

To receive these benefits, you must do your part:

1. Read all the assigned works by the assigned date. You cannot hope to benefit fully from the lectures (which, unlike book reviews, assume a reading of the work) unless you have the expected listening readiness. You insult your classmates by asking questions or making statements based on ignorance of later sections of the work during discussions.

2. Attend class regularly. I don't take attendance, because I assume that if you're not in class you have something more important to do. Conversely, you are responsible for anything you miss, either academic or administrative. However, missing often or without due cause sends a clear signal to your fellow students and to me that you don't believe we can offer you enough insights to compensate you for your time.
3. Think about what you have read and be prepared at any time to comment usefully or to ask perceptive questions (or both) about your reading. Have opinions; express them; defend them with citation and interpretation from the works themselves and from your experience of life.

4. As you read, take notes, make marginalia, ask yourself questions, answer them as you read on. Don't just sit there sucking up the next story, get actively involved with the reading experience. "Escape" reading or reading strictly for pleasure is great fun, but we don't learn as much as when we pay more active attention. Use study notes or questions when available. When you finish a work or a section, sum up. Write a brief response, critique, ask questions about elements that puzzled you. Bring those notes to class and draw on them.

THE TEXTS

The Norton Anthology of English Literature, The Major Authors. 5th ed. in hardback.


COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Time

Normally, students should spend at least two and up to three hours outside class for each class hour. Since this is one of the two most important courses English majors take, let us assign three. For a three-hour-a-week course, that's 12 hours a week of your time or 144 hours by 3 December. That's only six full days and nights, or, spread out, no more than 103 minutes a day! I have calculated an average reading load of 5 hours a week, for a total of 60. That leaves you as many as 52 hours for rereading, taking reading notes, preparing essays and a seminar, and studying for your midterm. Use your time wisely, beginning today. We all know that when students tell professors they need more time to complete the essay, they really mean they did not use their time effectively in the early weeks of the course.

2. Class and Reading Schedule

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<td>C.T. Nun's Priest's Tale</td>
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3. Class Format and Participation

Often I will lecture, hoping, however, to avoid the stereotyped lecture, in which the notes of the professor become the notes of the student without affecting the mind of either. In fact, I recommend taking no notes except marginalia in your texts. At almost any time in any lecture, your question, addition, or correction is welcome. Occasionally I will want to finish a statement, idea, or demonstration before being interrupted and I will say so. But I will welcome your comment when I finish, so jot down a reminder for when I call for your point. This will not be a lecture course entirely, because you need to learn how to read and interpret more effectively and how to defend your interpretations to your peers. From hearing me lecture, you can learn how I and, occasionally, other scholars interpret the works, and you can pick up cues on critical methodology, but you don't learn to do anything just by watching others; you must try it yourself. You cannot depend on an unfounded idea any more than an untried faith. You don't really know how silly or how brilliant your interpretation is unless you let others break it or break themselves upon it.

Therefore, we will have class discussions and small group discussions, allowing you to air your ideas in non-intimidating contexts. These formats entail at least two responsibilities for you:

a. Attend class regularly (see 2 on page 2).

b. Demonstrate your careful reading and critical skill by contributing usefully to the literary analysis.

Offer to present a short (5-15 minute) seminar (from notes or manuscript) to share knowledge and expertise you have (or are willing to obtain) with your classmates. Reserve early because we may not have time for everyone to present. First come, first served. You may cancel without penalty until eight days before (to allow time to offer the seminar to others).

4. Written Work
To feel confident in your newly acquired knowledge and abilities, you will want to test it in some formal way. I will offer the opportunity to write essays (which test how thoroughly and yet efficiently you can demonstrate an hypothesis) and exams (which test how well you can synthesize what you have learned under time constraints).

Essays

You may write one or two essays of no more than 2000 words on a subject mutually agreeable to you, the writer, and me, one of the readers. I will suggest topics later. In considering your topic for approval I will use the following criteria:

1) Will researching or analyzing teach you something new? Or will it overlap my lecture or class discussion?
2) Is it worth doing? Is it large enough, or small enough, for the time and space allotted? Is it significant, meaningful, useful? Will it adequately repay your effort?
3) Is it fresh and interesting? Have I already approved nine other essays on the same topic? Can I bear reading yet another essay on that topic? When I read your essay, will the topic itself suggest intentional or accidental plagiarism?

If you write two essays, you must submit the first by 20 October so you can benefit from the critical commentary in writing your second, due 1 December. All essays submitted by 24 November will receive detailed critical and rhetorical marking in addition to the general assessment and letter grade later papers get. Submit all essays in duplicate. I will mark one and return it to you; the other will be available on reserve to your classmates as an additional study resource. To assist them in finding the information they want and you in checking your essay for focus, prepare a 50-100 word abstract stating your conclusions.

EXTRAS?

From time to time some instructors of 200A (perhaps in cooperation with the English Society) will offer, at little or no extra cost, films of some of the great works. At present time we were trying to arrange for you to see 1 Henry IV, The Way of the World, and Tom Jones. If you have suggestions for other course-related extras, please see me.

THE PROFESSOR

I am available outside of class as well as in and enjoy talking with students, professionally and socially, so come by. I don't bite and I've been known to serve a good cup of tea. Or, if it's late enough in the day we could go for a beer. Or we could just sit and talk business. Although I am often in my office, I often work elsewhere (in the library or at home), so please do not come by expecting to find me outside office hours. Instead, stop after class or call me between 7:30 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Monday through Friday for an appointment.

Office: HH 270
Phone: x2419 or 884-8973

Office Hours:
10:30-11:30 TR
10-12 W
and by appointment