I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

English 200A is an introductory survey of British literature from the Middle Ages (the fourteenth century) to the middle of the eighteenth century. Although it is a required course for English majors, it is also suitable for non-majors or students majoring in other disciplines. There is no prerequisite for English 200A, though previous courses in English will be an asset.

The course will focus on works by four representative authors—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Swift. These four will be supplemented by a selection of poems by John Donne.

For students wishing to continue their study of English literature, English 200B (Survey of British Literature II) is a natural follow-up for English 200A, though this course will serve as a useful preparation for any other course offered by the Department.

Objectives

English 200A has five related objectives.

1. To give you practice and training in reading and interpreting individual pieces of literature with greater insight and in making comparisons among them.

2. To make you aware of the historical context of the works.

3. To make you aware of the different artistic forms of the literature.

4. To give you practice in critical analysis of individual works and comparative analysis of several works.

5. To help you improve your writing ability.

These objectives will be achieved by your own reading and studying of the primary texts, by reading the secondary historical and critical material included in the texts, and by writing essays and examinations.

II. TEXTS

Required

Norton Anthology of English Literature, Major Authors Edition.
Thomas, W.K. Correct Form in Essay Writing. University of Waterloo.

Recommended

A good college dictionary (e.g., The Random House College Dictionary).
King James version of the Bible.
III. SYLLABUS

1. Chaucer
   a) “General Prologue” to The Canterbury Tales
   b) “Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale”

2. Shakespeare
   a) Much Ado About Nothing
   b) Othello

3. Donne
   a) Songs and Sonnets
      1) The Indifferent
      2) Song (“Go and catch a falling star”)
      3) Break of Day
      4) The Funeral
      5) The Apparition
      6) Loves Alchemy
      7) The Flea
      8) The Good-Morrow
      9) The Sun Rising
     10) The Canonization
     11) A Lecture Upon the Shadow
     12) A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning
   b) Elegy 19. Going to Bed
   c) Holy Sonnets

4. Milton. Paradise Lost (selections)

5. Swift. Gulliver’s Travels (selections)

IV. ESSAYS AND EXAMINATIONS

1. Two essays about 6 pages in length each (1500 words), each worth 30% of the final grade.

2. Final Examination: three hours in length covering the entire syllabus, worth 40% of the final grade.

V. RATIONALE AND POLICIES GOVERNING THE ESSAYS

1. If the suggested essay topics do not appeal to you, I will entertain other suggestions as long as you consult with me in sufficient time with an outline of the topic you propose to work on.

2. I have framed the topics for the essays in a way that will require a careful and thoughtful reading of the texts and little or limited use of secondary material. That is, the topics are not research essays that require consultation in secondary sources. However, if you want to do some extra reading in critical material, feel free to do so. But because plagiarism is a serious offence punishable by suspension or even expulsion, make certain that you acknowledge borrowings from all your sources.
VI. Grading and Assessment of Essays

1. I will follow the Faculty of Arts grading scale by assigning a letter grade from A+ to F- on your essays. For purposes of averaging, I will use the numerical equivalent assigned to each letter grade from a 95 for an A+ to a 32 for an F-.

2. Besides marginal commentary and internal corrections, I will attach to the essays a summary evaluation sheet, pointing out strengths and weaknesses and offering suggestions for improvement.

3. In the "General Instructions for Preparing a Formal Essay" that follow, I note some of the qualities I look for in a good essay. Since most students who take this course are either in their first or second year of study, I will be grading your essays within that context. The main purpose of my assessment is not to attach a label to your essays, but to provide you with suggestions on how to improve your work.

VII. General Instructions for Preparing a Formal Essay

1. The assigned topics provide you with a central theme or problem which is intended as a focus for your paper.

2. Before you start to write an essay, it is essential for you to do some concentrated thinking about the issues raised by the topic. I suggest you make a list of "random reflections" as a way of surveying your thoughts on the subject. Once you have such a list, try to order these reflections in some coherent manner. Make an outline of the main divisions and subdivisions in your argument. Then, try to keep to your outline as you compose the essay.

3. Limit your analysis and discussion to the topic and avoid introducing peripheral or extraneous material that has little or no bearing on your topic.

4. You must support your analysis or interpretation with evidence from the text(s) in question. This may take the form of a direct quotation or a brief paraphrase or summary. However, try to avoid including summaries for their own sake or evidence that may be either peripheral or redundant.

5. Organize your essay carefully so that it has a central idea or argument and a coherent structure. Make sure that there are adequate transitions between the various paragraphs and sections of your essay and that it ends with a logical conclusion based on the evidence that you have provided in support of your argument or thesis.

6. In topics requiring comparisons and contrasts, organize your essay around points of comparison and contrast rather than examining each work separately and then drawing some comparisons. This type of organization will help you to avoid repetition.

7. Write your essay in a style that is clear, precise and concise. You should use as few words as necessary to make your points clearly and precisely. Avoid loose and rambling sentences and exclude all redundancy and repetition. Avoid vagueness, ambiguity and awkwardness in expression. If a sentence seems awkward to you, rephrase it.
8. After you have completed a rough draft, I suggest you let it sit for a day or two before beginning revisions. This is to allow for second thoughts and reconsideration. In revising make sure that your points are well supported, that there are adequate transitions between parts of your essay, and that the essay has a firm conclusion. Finally, examine the essay for style. Remove all verbiage, tighten and rephrase sentences, try to vary the syntactical structure of your sentences, and especially avoid sentences that string together clauses joined by the conjunction "and." Needless to say, you should insure that your sentences are grammatically correct and that your spelling and punctuation are accurate.

9. I do not insist that your essays be typewritten, though I would prefer it. If you turn in a handwritten essay, make it as legible as possible, and please leave a good margin on the left hand side for comments.

10. For matters of form, I refer you to W.K. Thomas’s *Correct Form in Essay Writing*. You are expected to follow this manual for such matters as the correct form for quoting from a text, for footnoting, and for bibliographies.

**VIII. ESSAY TOPICS**

**A. Essay I**

**Instructions:**

1. Choose **one** of the topics listed below.
2. Write an essay of about 6 pages in length (1500 words)
3. Weight: **30%** of the final grade
4. Due Date: **26 October 1993**

1. Chaucer used a pilgrimage to a religious shrine as a means of bringing together a representative cross-section of his society. Imagine a parallel occasion today and explain who you would include to represent your society. Imitating Chaucer’s style and descriptive technique, describe two of the members of your group. Your descriptions can be in prose, but if you wish, you may write them in Chaucerian couplets. Limit your descriptions to about one page each.

2. The Wife of Bath’s Prologue has been described as an intimate confession of a woman’s experiences in a male-dominated society. How do you think modern feminists would respond to the Wife’s narrative? Explain why.

3. Imagine you are a marriage counsellor who has been engaged by the Wife of Bath and one of her old husbands. After listening to their accounts of their marriage, write a report outlining your analysis of their problems and the advice you would offer them.

4. Imagine you are Beatrice writing a letter to a close friend sharing your experiences and your reactions to the society in which you live.

5. The state of Venice has commissioned an inquiry into the deaths of Othello and Desdemona. You have been appointed to the commission and asked to submit a report on your analysis of the circumstances surrounding the deaths. You have access to written testimony of all those witnessing or participating in the events, as well as letters between Iago and Roderigo and between Desdemona and Emilia. Also you have permission to interview Iago while he is awaiting trial.
B. Essay II

Instructions:

1. Choose one of the topics listed below.
2. Write an essay of about 6 pages in length (1500 words)
3. Weight: 30% of the final grade
4. Due Date: 6 December 1993

1. Donne’s love poems frequently reveal disturbing truths about men. Discuss by referring to a representative sample of Donne’s love poems.

2. Donne’s “Holy Sonnets” may be read as a record of an unhappy love affair, with God in the role of the dominant male and the speaker in the role of the submissive and frustrated female. Discuss by referring to specific sonnets.

3. Milton’s God in Paradise Lost may be compared to a father who does everything in his power to provide the opportunity for his children to lead a happy life, but ultimately has to let them make their own choices, even if their choices are bad ones. Do you think this analogy fairly represents the way Milton represents God? Explain why or why not.

4. In Satan, Milton has created a compelling portrait of what damnation feels like and what behaviour it prompts. Discuss.

5. Adam’s relationship to Eve is complicated because he is torn between his responsibility to act as Eve’s guide and his impulse to put her on a pedestal. Discuss.

6. In Book I of Gulliver’s Travels, Swift offers a satiric commentary on the politics of his own time. To what extent is his critique valid today?

7. After returning from the land of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver has become a misanthrope. Why?

IX. OTHER INFORMATION

1. Instructor
   a) Office → HH 258, Phone 885-1211, ext. 2121
   b) Office Hours → 9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (or by appointment)
   c) Home Phone → 884-8395

2. Incompletes
   Incompletes will be permitted only by prior arrangement and for an agreed period of time. Thereafter, a grade based on the work actually completed will be submitted.

3. Rewrite
   Essay I may be resubmitted without penalty.

4. Late Essays
   Unless acceptable reasons are presented, late essays will be penalized half a grade.