ENGLISH 9 / Fall 2003
Introduction to Literary Analysis

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On-line syllabus: < www.users.drew.edu/sjamieso/Engl9/>

The Texts

Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, 2nd ed. Bedford, 2002
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Case Study in Critical Controversy), ed. Gerald Graff & James Phelan. Bedford, 2000
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (Bedford Cultural Edition), ed. William E. Cain. Bedford, 1996.
Toni Morrison, *Paradise*. Plume, 1999

NOTE: Please buy the editions specified so that we are all have the same page numbers, and so that you have the essays accompanying *Blithedale Romance* and *Tempst*.

Performance
S.K.Toth's "Festad" (weather permitting) learn more at <www.skthoth.com/SKTHOTH/Home_Pagex.html>

The Class—Objectives

It can be said that everything worthwhile is an attempt to answer a question. The most fundamental question is probably "what does it mean to be human?" but this is closely followed by "how should I live my life?" and "how should I live my life with others?" For some the next question is "how can I make the world a better place?" This course engages two questions that seem pretty important to me (1) how can the language arts help us to understand our world and imagine better worlds? and (2) how do written texts manage to lift us into those other worlds so that we can explore their potential—how do they *work*. It is my hope that by engaging with both of these questions through works of poetry, fiction, and drama we will come closer to finding answers to them. Beyond that, it is my goal that students in this class will deepen their appreciation of literature and refine their ability to read analytically and apply theories and bodies of knowledge and information to texts in ways that deepen our understanding of their content and style.

The Class—Intellectual Goals

ENGL 9 is NOT more of AP English! ENGL 9 is designed to introduce you to literary analysis as college English majors are expected to do it. The goal is to increase your interpretive skills, making them more nuanced and more accurate. We would also like you to become more self-conscious of the "moves" you make when interpreting texts. If you do the work in this class, ENGL 9 will:

1) Extend the nuance and accuracy of your writing about literature, and expand the interpretive strategies available to you;
2) Familarize you with and give you brief opportunities to practice some of the different kinds of projects that literary critics undertake (using biography, defining the realm of the literary, thinking about the

relationship between language and identity, thinking about reader response theory, using a cultural critique, using primary documents from the culture in relation to a literary text);
3) Help you reflect on and evaluate your own acts of interpretation;
4) Increase the flexibility and precision of your thoughts about literature, and helping you to work out your own definition of the literary by introducing you to some literary theory.

The Class—Theme

In addition to asking how literary texts work and how we might read them with sophistication, this class also asks why we might do that. Why do people read literature? Why do people develop and apply theory to works of literature? Why might you want to do that? A reason many people give for loving literature is that it allows them to escape from their everyday lives and enter other lives, see things through different eyes, and imagine new worlds. This latter issues—that literature allows us to see the world through other eyes and helps us to imagine other worlds—are the themes of this section of ENGL 9. In addition to exploring how and why texts work and how we can appreciate them as both art and craft, we will also explore the worlds that created these texts, the worlds created by them, and the things we can learn from entering those worlds. Coleridge's magical "Kubla Khan"; Hawthorne's utopian community, Blithedale; Morrison's all black town of Ruby; Prospero's enchanted island; and Thoths land of Mir; are all invented worlds for us to inhabit and explore. They invite us to enter them, and then present us with what works and what may go wrong in such worlds.

Broadly speaking, this course moves through three stages: writers helping us to see and explore our own worlds; writers helping us to imagine new worlds that could not really exist, and thereby giving us a new perspective on what can and does exist; and writers enacting and exploring new worlds that could, did, or do exist. As we confront terrorism, war, racism, the destruction of the environment, and the other problems facing our own world, temporarily inhabiting a different world and seeing it through the eyes of its inhabitants can help us see our own world in a new way and—perhaps—imagine ways to address some of our problems.

The Methodology (how will you be asked to read these works)

Each stage of this course will build on ideas discussed earlier and analytical skills already practiced. We will begin by exploring words, sounds, rhythms, and the power-base of language through a study of poetry and an application (and exploration of) the literary theory called "formalism." We will read different kinds of poetry and think about the ways that form changes our experience. Once we can articulate the ways that language works to help us explore our lives and see our world in new ways, we will move on to the ways that language constructs characters and places in action. Turning our attention to drama, we will experience the physical enactment of new worlds and the related performance theory that can help us to understand how theatre works. A transition from poetry to theatre comes in the form of the work of performance artists such as Thoth. If possible, you will visit New York City's Central Park to see his performance piece "The Festad" (check his website if you want to know more about this work <www.skthoth.com/SKTHOTH/Home_Pagex.html>). In this segment of the class we will think about different ways that literature can reveal things the author observes while at the same time obscuring others. We will follow our discussion of Thoth and performance theory with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (which you will read and see performed in a BBC version to be shown on Drew television).

We can apply formalist skills to help us gain an appreciation of *The Tempest*, and obviously we can also apply performance theory. But in addition to these, we will look outside the text to consider a reading of the play in its historical context through documents and ideas that were part of Shakespeare's world. This allows us to think about how Shakespeare created this work and what his audiences might have known as they

watched it performed. This leads us into a consideration of ourselves as audiences. We will read postcolonial theory, feminist theory, postmodern theory, and various cultural studies debates about *The Tempest*, and you will formulate your own response to the question of how we should read literature and what we should pay attention to as we do so. A brief exploration of theatre in contemporary South Africa invites us to see the impact of politics and social conditions on a world still being imagined and created as that country moves to recreate itself after apartheid. We will read several short plays by South African writers and use the theories we have studied along with a brief history of South Africa, to try to help us imagine a new world along with these playwrights.

As we move into fiction, you will find yourselves again paying attention to words, images, and the ways that form influences our experience of a text. We will read two works of fiction, *The Blithesdale Romance*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and *Paradise*, by Toni Morrison. As we read these works we will consider how the literary theories already discussed can be applied to help us more fully understand how the texts work. Then we will rethink those texts within their historical and cultural contexts, looking at primary documents produced at the same time as *The Blithesdale Romance* to help us understand the content of the novel more deeply (these documents range from political tracts, religious texts, and philosophical explorations to paintings, posters, and cartoons) and recent political and social history of the United States to help us understand *Paradise* (this includes the migration of African Americans from the south to the north, the formation of segregated communities, and the civil rights and black power movements of the 1960s).

The Work & the Grades

You will write brief response papers on all of the readings in this class (due in class or in the relevant K:/drive folder the day they are discussed) and will be expected to participate in class and/or via the "virtual class" on the electronic discussion board set up for the class on Attic. (See the link from the online syllabus mainpage at <www.users.drew.edu/sjamieso/Engl9/>) From these K:/drive responses you will select six to hand in as part of your final grade. I will review and respond to 5 or 6 responses at random each week and provide feedback to anyone who asks for it on any given response. The main goal of these responses is to prepare you for class, so you should have an idea of whether you were sufficiently prepared by the end of class discussion for that day rather than needing me to tell you that based on reading a response after the fact. It is not possible to earn an 'A' in this class without completing a response by midnight the night before each class. The remainder of the "virtual response" grade will be based on quantity of responses in class and posted online.

In this class you will also write three 5-7 page papers, one on poetry, one on a work of fiction, and one on a play. In each paper you will be invited to explore the work through the lens of theory, and thus to make the moves of a literary analyst.

Grade breakdown:

Paper 1:	15% of the final grade
Paper 2:	20% of the final grade
Paper 3:	20% of the final grade
Virtual class/in-class discussion:	20% of the final grade (timely posting & quality—don't just speak/write a comment for the sake of it!))
Response papers:	25% of the final grade (total number & quality of the 6 selected for grade)

The Virtual Class

This class will also include a shared discussion board to which you should aim to post two comments each week (one for each class) once we begin this process toward the end of September. Each week, five students will also be asked to post a question to the list for us to consider as part of the class discussion the next day. Comments must be posted by midnight the night before class so that we can look at them before class. Please type the comment in a word document, save it, and then paste it into the discussion board so that your brilliance is not lost to the vagaries of the network!

The Rules

Like any community, the classroom community requires work to create and maintain, and there are consequences for those who in any way undermine this community or fail to do their share of the work necessary to maintain it. These consequences will be felt by all because the classroom community will not work if students do not make it work. They will also be felt by the individual responsible. Students must attend class, be prepared for class, be willing to share their ideas, and be respectful of the ideas of others. Lack of respect for classmates will not be tolerated in this class.

The larger academic community depends of the generation of and willingness to share and discuss ideas in discussion and in written texts. For this reason plagiarism will not be tolerated in those seeking to remain in the academic community. (Please see Drew's "Academic Integrity Policy" if you are unsure what it means to use sources correctly, *and The Writer's Reference* or the *MLA Handbook* to correctly create works cited lists.)

The Schedule

Wednesday. September 3:

Class: **Introduction, discussion of theme of the class.** First pass: Describe yourself as a literary critic. What kinds of writing about literature have you found most satisfying? What is the foal of literary criticism? What kind of "moves" do you make as an interpreter of literature (what are your strategies for interpretation?)

Discussion of the poem "Kubla Khan" (Vendler 258-9). Look at the words, the images, the movement of emotion through the text. What is going on here? How does Coleridge make us feel the way we do as we read these lines?

Homework: Write a response to "Kubla Khan" paying attention to the words: the sounds of the words and the combinations of words. Think about the sound of the overall poem as it moves through the various stages of the description. Where does the mood change? How does the language make that happen? Think about images as well, but don't go into discussions of Colerdige's life or drug use. Focus on the poem as if you just found it in a treasure chest and knew nothing about the author, the context, or Kubla Khan. In your response to the poem, play literary critic as you imagine that term. What is going on here? How?

Monday. September 8:

Class: **The role of the strange/unexpected word and the power of metaphor**. We will discuss Louise Glück's poem "The School Children" (Vendler 4-5). What is happening in each of the stanzas? How do the various roles change through the poem? Which words and images does Glück use to make this happen? Pay attention to repetition of sounds and ideas and the way subtle changes in those repetitions change the way we experience

the things in question. Also pay attention to unexpected words, the effects of enjambment, verb tense changes, and shifts in spatial relation of the events in the poem.
Homework: Read the next poem in the collection, E.E. Cummings' "in just—" (Vendler 5-6) and apply the same analysis to it as the analysis we did in class today when we discussed Glück's poem. Based on this analysis of form, what is going on in the poem? As with the notion of the apple for the teacher in "School Children," you will need to look outside of the poem for at least one of the images; however, attend very carefully to the words, sounds, and rhythms Cummings selected and their overall effect.
Reviewing terminology: enjambment, assonance, repetition, verb tense, image, association

Wednesday. September 10:
Class: **Sounds and language.** We will briefly discuss what you found in "in just—" and the overall effect these features seem to have for you. Then we will discuss Walt Whitman's poem "Hours Continuing Long" (Vendler 6-7). Again we will look the effect of sounds and word choices and the way they work together to give us a sense of the feeling of the poem and to enhance the content.
Homework: Instead of responding to a poem tonight, I'd like you to respond to the idea of responding to poems. Read Vendler 39-47 and 152-157 and think about what she is doing. As she responds to the poems in these sections. What kinds of moves does she make as a literary critic? How do you react to them? Did her methods help you to see more within the poems? Do you like her strategies for breaking open or unpacking a poem? As a fellow literary critic, what can you imagine doing in the same way as Vendler? What did you not find so useful?
Reviewing terminology: alliteration, assonance, consonance, formalism, allusion, assertion

Monday. September 15:
Class: **Context and images**. We will begin with a discussion of your role as literary critics. How is it going? Do you like reading this way? Where is formalism frustrating? Where is it illuminating? Unless anyone wants us to revisit the poems that Vendler discusses, we will apply her comments to another poem that she does not discuss in the section you read, William Blake's "London" (88-89) and (if we have time) Gwendoyn Brook's "We Real Cool" (Vendler 85-6) or Michael S. Harper's "American History" (Vendler 48) which depends on external context.
Homework: Look at the poem Vendler refers to at the end of p. 157, John Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" and the discussion of how to unpack it on pages 125-133 and respond to this reading and the extent to which it works for you. What dioes it reveal about the poem? What does it reveal about reading poems? We will practice using this terminology in class on Wednesday, so think about how we might apply it (and the list on page 34) to another poem.
Reviewing terminology: relations (thematic, phonemic, grammatical, syntactic); word function (subject, predicate, nouns, verbs); meaning; emotional curve

Wednesday. September 17:
Class: **poetic structure** (images in sequences) and speech acts. We will review the terms Vendler discusses on 125-33 and then apply them (and the list on 134) to at least one poem, beginning by looking at speech acts in Carl Sandburg's "Grass" (Vendler 115-6) and then at images in Mathew Arnold's "Dover Beach (Vendler 143).
Homework: Read Vendler 27-39 and respond to her readings of the poems we have already read. What does she bring to the reading that is new? What did you see the first time through? What did you see as you reread the poems along with Vendler? How does rereading and reading with different "guides" change the way you see what you read? Highlight your response with quotes from your own position papers on "in just-" and from your notes of our discussion of "The School Children" and "Hours Continuing Long." What did you and your classmates see that Vendler does not mention? What does she see that you did not? What does she see

that does not resonate for you? In this response, once again, I'd like you to respond to a literary critic as a literary critic, discussing her moves and your moves and how and why they do or do not work.
Reviewing terminology: meaning; emotional curve (skeleton); antecedent scenario; climax; agency; speech act.

Monday. September 22:
Class: **Narrative & Lyric poems**. We will discuss several narrative poems (ballads), what makes them work and how they are different from each other. (See Vendler 80 for a discussion of ballad form). We will discuss Anonymous "Lord Randall" (Vendler 62-64), and Anonymous (a different one) "Sir Patrick Spence" (Vendler 364), and a modern narrative poem in a very different form, William Carlos William's "The Raper from Passenack" (Vendler 640-641).
Homework: Read Vendler's "Describing Poems" (107-116), make notes, and return to Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and consider it as a narrative poem. What does it draw from traditional ballad form? (A form that Coleridge used in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Vendler 430-47, for example). Apply Vendler's terminology to "Kubla Khan."
Reviewing terminology: content genres, autobiography, love-poem; speech acts, confessional narration, meditation; outer form.

Wednesday. September 24:
Class: **Sonnets** (*sonnet to's*, "little songs"). Shakespearean (English) form and Italian (Petrarchan) form. We will discuss examples of each in class, including Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 "My Mistress' Eyes" (Vendler 97), John Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (Vendler 125) again, and William Wordsworth's "The World is Too Much With Us" (Vendler 649)
Homework: Compare the sonnets and ballads we have discussed and think about the relationship between form and content. When would one use a sonnet form? When would one use ballad form? Could you imagine rewriting a ballad as a sonnet or vice versa?
Reviewing terminology: **octave, sestet, quatrain, couplet, thematic break**

Monday. September 29:
***Class*: Politics and places. How do poets use identity and voice for political purposes in their poems? We will look at a poem in which the author adopts an identity different than his own, William Blake's "The Little Black Boy" (Vendler 231-2); one in which the author uses his own identity, and mistaken identity, to make a point, Sherman Alexie's "On The Amtrack from Boston to New York City" (Vendler 251-2), and** Lorna Dee Cervantes "Poem for a Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War Between the Races" **(Vendler 415-416).**
Homework: Read Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" (Vendler 249-50) and respond to the way he uses form to add power to content. The form, like that of Blake's "Little Black Boy," is "heroic quatrain." Read what Vendler says about the form immediately after the poem and use that to help you in your response.
Virtual Class: Anything you wanted to say about the poems we discussed in class today but did not have chance to say . . .
Reviewing terminology: heroic quatrain, universal speaker, pathos, persona,

Wednesday. October 1:
***Class*: Thinking about time and one author: Emily Dickinson**. (Vendler 344-352)
Homework: Thinking about the paper, which is due in class on Monday October 18. Review "Writing About Poetry" (Vendler 311-328)