**Sample Syllabus**

Instructors use different textbooks, individual works, and organizing principles to survey the literary periods. The following syllabus has been tested and modified in many sections over 39 years of the instructor's teaching it at Queens and has been refined to bring out the Perspectives criteria. Annotations in brackets clarify the relevance of assignments and general course strategy to those criteria.

English 252. British Literature Survey II

Professor Thomas Frosch

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Required Texts:

*The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., eighth edition, Vols. C, D, E.

Note Well:

 Students are expected

 1. To come to class all the time,

 2. To come to class on time,

 3. To come with the assignments prepared,

 4. Not to leave during class for a drink of water or any other reason except an emergency.

 5. To keep their cell phones turned off and not to take them out during class to check for missed calls or text messages.

Course Description

English 252 fulfills the Perspectives (PLAS) requirement in the area of Reading Literature. Students will become familiar with the disciplinary norms associated with literary reading. They will learn to pay close attention to language and be familiar with the reasons for the writer’s particular choice of language. They will learn how the writer uses the techniques and elements of literature and the particular resources of genre to create meaning.  They will learn how texts differ from one another and how they interact with the larger society and its historical changes.

English 252 is a historical study of the diversity of British literature from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, encompassing a range of writing by women and men from various cultural, ethnic, and popular traditions. We will read representative literary works written by important figures in British literary tradition during the Neoclassical, Romantic, Victorian, and early Modernist periods, and we will examine the ways in which literary texts and authors respond to each other within a changing historical and cultural context. Two metaphors will help us understand those responses. The first is that of generational conflict. Authors respond to authors of previous generations somewhat as generations respond to previous generations and children to parents: children, for example, may imitate and learn from parents, argue with and rebel against them, glorify or belittle them, try to measure up to them, try to outdo them, try in various ways to find their own lives and their own individualities in relation to them. In the second metaphor, authors are all alive at the same time, as they are in the act of our reading them, and are all arguing about common issues, debating how life should be lived and how literature should be written, engaged in a clash of visions. In this course we will be not only studying in detail a series of rich and important individual texts; we will also be following a sequence of generational, parent-child struggles and listening to a visionary debate.

Learning Goals

1. You will gain an understanding and appreciation of specific texts that are both outstanding works of literature and representative and important in literary history.

2. You will learn some of the stylistic and thematic characteristics of the Neoclassical, Romantic, Victorian, and Modernist periods.

3. You will learn how cultural, political, and intellectual traditions and tendencies that arose in the sixteenth century and were given new force and urgency in the English Civil War and its immediate aftermath helped shape literature during the entire period of the course.

4. You will learn to understand literary history as, figuratively, both a struggle of generations against their predecessors and a visionary debate.

[These goals incorporate the General Education objectives pertaining to the appreciation of literary language, comparison and difference, the relation of literature to the larger society and to historical change, and particular European traditions.]

Tentative Schedule

Readings for Classes 1, 2, 25-27 distributed by handout. Readings for classes 3-11 in Volume C. Readings for Classes 12-18 in Volume D. Readings for Classes 19-24 in Volume E.

Class 1. Introduction: The English Civil War; Milton, *Paradise Lost*, lines 1-26; Dryden, "Epigram on Milton," conclusion from "A Secular Masque"

Class 2. Milton, excerpts from "Lycidas"; Dryden, "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham"

3. Dryden, "MacFlecknoe"

4. Dryden, "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day," "Alexander's Feast"

5. Pope, "The Rape of the Lock"

6. "The Rape of the Lock"; Aphra Behn, "The Disappointment"

7. Pope, "An Essay on Man," Epistle I

8. Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," Part I

9. Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1

10. *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 2

11. *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 3 (excerpts), Part 4

12. Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; first paper due

13. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

14. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

15. Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey"

16. "Tintern Abbey," "I wandered lonely as a cloud"

17. Wordsworth, "The Ruined Cottage"

18. Keats, "The Eve of St. Agnes"

19. Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (selections)

20. *In Memoriam*

21. *In Memoriam*

22. Browning, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"

23. Rossetti, "Goblin Market"

24. Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," excerpts from prose

25. T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; second paper due

26. Lawrence, "Snake"; Yeats, "The Second Coming"

27. Woolf, excerpts from *A Room of One's Own*

28. Catch-up

Final Exam during exam period.

Grading: Two papers and final, 30% each; participation (including in-class writing exercises and any quizzes), 10%.

[Every class on the syllabus is devoted to the understanding and appreciation of literary language and the thematic and stylistic patterns of literary works. Every class uses comparative methods to bring out change and difference. Every class tries to give students an understanding of perspectives of people from cultures and historical periods different from their own. Every class tries to show how literary study contributes to the liberal arts, showing specifically how literary imaginings and techniques contribute to cultural debates. To illustrate the last point as an example of these goals of the syllabus, I will outline how this is achieved in the discussion of several of our authors. After the English Civil War, with its conflicts, violence, dramatic and stormy social changes, and wild unpredictability, writers like Dryden and Pope seek stability to such an extent that writing couplets, especially in Pope's hands, becomes a psychologically ritualistic gesture to create and reinforce order, strong balance, and beautiful predictability. Dryden and Pope emphasize general ideas and common sense and satirize a radical individuality in which every man considers himself a prophet. They use allusion to idealize an unchanging, classical past as a source of values and stability. Blake, in contrast, in the Romantic era adopts a prophetic and "diabolical" persona and satirizes the Neoclassical satirists to advance social and individual goals associated with the defeated party of the English Civil War, goals that are given huge new energy by the French Revolution and that favor individualism, change, originality, unpredictability, literary innovation, and the future. After the Romantics have broken down the stable order that the Neoclassical writers tried to establish, Tennyson tries in "In Memoriam" to find once again Christian values and a stable, peaceful vision, particularly trying to reconcile science and religion, but he does so through a fragmented literary form and an individual and personal quest for love and personal assurance and for healing in the culture around him. He continues the Romantic trends toward internalization and individualization and toward sublimity, but he also tries, like Pope and Dryden, to recover the emotional comfort of the familiar. At the same time, he anticipates modernism in his anxieties and his questionings of given beliefs and attitudes. T. S. Eliot, in "Prufrock," shows radical new techniques of discontinuity and fragmentation, as well as free verse and anti-Victorianism, but he also shows a return to the techniques of Dryden with allusions that highlight the impoverishment of the present in contrast to the greatness of the past; with satire, especially of unrealistic heroic and ideal longings; and with couplets, or a wishful attempt at couplets, since not all the poem's end-words find their mates. We conclude with Virginia Woof; as Eliot incorporates romantic, Keatsian elements into his style but gives us a Neoclassic vision that emphasizes common sense, realistic values, and limiting one's expectations of life, so Woolf writes in a style that shares Pope's characteristics of elegance and wit but has an optimistic romantic vision like Blake’s about a great new age of creativity and liberation for those whose potentialities have been marginalized or suppressed: women writers and women in general. These are some of the ways in which, within the course material, the resources of literature, such as figurative language, voice, prosody, and narrative, lyric, and satirical imaginings, contribute a distinctive perspective to the study of human experience and cultural development in the liberal arts.]

First Paper

Write a 5-page paper on a specific topic in two works we have studied. *Gulliver’s Travels* should be one, and the other may be any one of the following: "MacFlecknoe"; "A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day"; "The Rape of the Lock"; "An Essay on Man," Epistle I; or "An Essay on Criticism," Part I. You may restrict yourself to one of the four parts of *Gulliver’s Travels* or even a chapter or episode of the work; you may also restrict yourself to a part of one of the other works. Or you may deal with a theme that runs through the full work. **In the case of *Gulliver,* you should make specific references to at least three of the four voyages, even if you concentrate on one of the four.** Your topic can be anything as long as it is specific; I don’t want an over-all comparison. It can be very small and detailed, or it can be a fairly broad subject. Your title should include the specific topic, as well as the two works you're writing on. Consult me if you are having trouble coming up with a topic or figuring out to develop it. It is always impressive if along the way you consider passages we did not go over in class

[This paper reinforces and extends the critical analysis of the works discussed in class and gives students practice in comparison and in connecting literary details with large themes that go beyond the individual work. In preparing for the paper, we consider introductions, conclusions, documentation, and the techniques of quotation.]

Second Paper

Write a symposium, that is, a description of a philosophical dinner party. The guests are William Blake; William Wordsworth *or* John Keats; Alfred Lord Tennyson; John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, *or* Alexander Pope, whichever one you didn't write about in your first paper; and You [the student]. You, in fact, are the host, and the location is your home. Get the guests to your home in any way you wish, but don't spend too much time on those logistics. Don't waste time having them express their astonishment at the microwave, and keep your own cell phone turned off during the evening. You can serve an elegant meal or Domino's pizza, whatever you wish. But the main point of the evening is conversation, and like a good host you should get the guests talking to each other, and you should jump in with your own opinions, as well. Here is a chance to tell the authors what you think of them. You can have the conversation focus on a single topic or a small number of related topics, but make sure the entire paper has coherence and is not a series of disconnected speeches. You can have them talk about some issue in your own contemporary world or some issue they all actually touched on or some issue only one of them wrote about. You can ask them what they were getting at in a particular passage. The authors should know each other's works. The paper should include quotations from each of the authors, whether the authors quote themselves or quote each other. The paper should be 5-6 pages.

You may wish to recall that Pope was 4'6" and was known as Sandy; Tennyson was 6'7" and had a booming voice; Keats was 5'1" and red-haired and had a flaming temper; and Blake, of course, loved to be oppositional and shocking. None was vegetarian.

Have fun with this assignment, but remember that it will ultimately be evaluated as a critical essay, showing your knowledge of the works we have studied, your ability to bring the works into relationship with each other, and your skill at supporting ideas with details and quotations. Remember that this paper is not a spoof of *The Norton Anthology* or English 252; the best symposium papers I have received in the past have ultimately been quite serious and, even, moving.

[This paper is the culmination of the course's learning goal of bringing the authors into a "visionary debate." It is an example of active inquiry that requires students to engage with the material and calls for them to use their creative imaginations. They are both writing about literature and writing in a literary form, a form, indeed, that they have observed in a section of Blake's "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." They are being asked to take the words on the page, words from other eras, and make them come alive as issues that matter. They are being asked to experience what the study of literary works can add to a liberal arts education. In preparatory class discussion, we cover the issues of formatting a narrative with dialogue, including attribution and the punctuation of quoting.]

Two Examples of In-Class Exercises

1. Students are asked to write down all the differences they can see between Milton's "Lycidas" and Dryden's "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham," two poems on the death of a young poet. We go around the room, and each student reads one item from his or her list of differences. Almost all will provide a jumping-off point for discussion, and I use the exercise to focus on the stylistic differences that will be used throughout the course: an extravagant, expansive, romantic, richly fantastic, idealizing style as opposed to a restrained, understated, stoical, pessimistic, realistic style: the way things are, in Dryden's case, vs., in Milton's, the way things should be.

2. In the transitional class between Blake and Wordsworth, students are asked to write down all the differences they can see between the following titles: "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798." Again, we go around the room to hear one item from every student's list. The exercise is used not only to develop skill in close attention to words, inference, and comparison but also to show that Wordsworth's way of writing was as radical in its time as Blake's, although in a totally different way.

Both exercises are used to encourage active inquiry in which every student in the classroom participates.