



# *Research Methods and Bibliography: English*

## *697.01 Fall 2007*

**Instructor:** Robert Donahoo  
408 Evans Complex  
Office Phone: 936-294-1421  
Office e-mail: [eng\\_rxd@shsu.edu](mailto:eng_rxd@shsu.edu)  
Home Phone: 281-298-1442  
Office Hours: 10:00-Noon MWF

**Class Meets:** 6:00 p.m., Mondays, University Center

**Texts:** Gibaldi and Franklin, MLA Handbook 6<sup>th</sup> edition, ISBN: 0873529863  
Booth, Williams & Colomb, The Craft of Research 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ISBN:  
0226065685  
Altick/Fenstermaker, Art of Literary Research 4<sup>th</sup> edition, ISBN:  
0393962407  
Malpass & Wake, The Routledge Companion to Literary Theory, ISBN:  
0415332966  
Graff and Birkenstein They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in  
Academic Writing, ISBN: 0393924092

There will be several electronic reserve readings throughout the term. These will be noted in the weekly class schedule below. However, the password for entering electronic reserves for this course is **abstract**. In addition, if you are unfamiliar with electronic reserve, a link for reaching it is provided on blackboard for this course.

### **Introductory Thoughts:**

Throughout your experience in graduate school and beyond, so long as your work or interest is connected to literature and language, you will be looking for information about texts. As undergraduates, the sources of our information are most often, the physical texts themselves assigned to us by professors and the professors themselves. However, beginning with a student's first day in graduate school, that situation no longer holds. You must find your own sources of information. You are free, of course, to turn only to your own soul and intellect, but doing so not only limits the range of your insights, but it cuts you off from the academic conversations that have been and are going on about a variety of subjects. The purpose of this course is to help you improve your skills in finding an understanding that conversation.

In doing so, the course will divide into three major -- if not always separate -- areas of focus:

- Research connected to establishing a text.
- Research connected to understanding or explaining a text.
- Research connected to contextualizing a text.

Undoubtedly, we will spend more class time on the first two of these than on the third, but a graduate education needs all three.

The methods, we will use to cover these areas are reading and practice. By these, I simply mean that you will have assigned readings and assigned tasks -- both of which are intended to explain the concepts we are covering. If at times, the tasks seem limited in scope, this is due to the limitations of your instructor. I can only teach what I know, and what I know is limited by what has held my attention for over 20 years in this profession and by what interests me. Therefore, if our research seems slanted toward American literature and historical approaches, you not only can understand why but you can recognize the areas in which you'll need to be responsible for teaching yourself. I believe much of what we will examine is transferable to other fields of interest -- British or other national literatures as well as linguistics and composition. Also, a significant section of our class time will be spent with students reporting on their research, as it is manifested in several projects. This means that we will be teaching each other -- something that requires, not just showing off our successes, but reporting on our difficulties and failures as well. For, in the final analysis, most about learned the most about research by simply doing it while being aware of how we -- and our peers -- do it. The bad news is that the ITV format is not conducive for great dialogue, but we have no option except to use it. Neither students nor instructor should allow the awkwardness of button pushing and limited visual sight keep us from conversing. I will attempt to treat every student as if he or she is in the same room with me, and I ask each of you to do the same. At the same time, I encourage students to make the effort to get to the location where I am physically teaching as often as possible. It is far from required, but both student and instructor will benefit from seeing each other as flesh and blood rather than merely an image on a small screen.



project in literature

**Course Objectives:** As Elizabeth Barrett Browning might say, let me count the objectives:

1. To become aware of the concept of textual history and its implications for literary study
2. To become better able to evaluate scholarly research resources and to learn what resources are essential to all research
3. To gain awareness of the rudimentary elements of literary theory
4. To learn how to structure and begin to write a research

### **Grading:**

Of course, you're probably wondering, "How am I going to earn my grade for this class?" The answer is that each student's grade for the course will be determined by three major factors.

First, we will have **three** exams. Two on these will occur during the semester, and the third is a take-home exam due at the time scheduled by the University for this course's final exam. Each exam will focus on the material covered most recently in the course, but students may need to refer to concepts from previously tested material in order to do their best work. **All exams must be written in a blue book and use some form of ink unless a writing lab is available and they may be printed.** My eyes are aging too rapidly due to the stress of trying to read faint pencil scratches. All of these exams will use the essay format. Collectively, a student's three exams will determine **one third** of his/her course grade.

Second, each student will complete **three** project/paper assignments. Assignment one involves learning about the text of a specific poem of the student's choice. Assignment two involves collecting information about scholarly journals. Assignment three is a formal paper analyzing the reception of particular literary text. The specifics for these assignments are listed on assignment sheets that can be found attached to the syllabus for this course. Each of these projects has the same weight in terms of the course grade; collectively, they will determine **one-third** of the course grade.

Third, each student will work on a semester-long research project. This will require them to locate specific information, and be able to explain how that information was found. The specifics of this assignment are located on a separate assignment sheet that is attached to the syllabus for this course. This project will determine **one-third** of the course grade.

### **Policy for Exams, Papers, and Presentations:**

Exam dates are clearly stated on the daily calendar section of this syllabus. If for any reason a student must miss an exam, a make-up exam can be scheduled if either of the following conditions are met:

- the student speaks with the instructor prior to the scheduled exam and obtains permission to take a make-up exam.
- the student contracts the dean of students office and that office verifies medical, legal, or personal reasons that require a make-up exam to be given.

Students receive no grades for class presentations in this course, but they are required to pass along results of their work and research. This is not optional. I will call on students who hold back in the attempt to involve them in discussion. I will also remind you about using technology to insure everyone hears oral comments. Failure to participate in discussion, following one warning from the instructor, will result in the lowering of a student's final grade by a letter grade.

The specific dates for the papers for this course are noted on the daily calendar section of this syllabus and named in the paper assignment section of this syllabus. No late papers are acceptable without specific and prior permission from the instructor. This will be given only in extraordinary circumstances.

**Attendance Policy:** Simply, I expect students to attend class—every class. Missing class sessions deprives other students of your insights and you of theirs. It also means missing opportunities to practice applying theory and being criticized, without grade damage, for your applications. At the same time, circumstances may arise that make missing class a necessity. No one wants a vomiting, leaking, or contagious student sharing the classroom. Plus, life circumstances may interfere. No one should miss a parent's funeral, for instance, to attend a lecture. As graduate students, you are able to make decisions about attending class without conferring with me. If you miss class, I will assume you had a good reason for doing so; you need not contact me or offer an explanation—unless the absence involves missing an exam or paper submission (see above for such instances). However, I do follow the University policy (Academic Policy Statement 800401) which states, "a student may be penalized for more than three hours of absence." This means that in this course a student may miss **two** classes without any penalty (assuming on exams or presentations are involved). Beginning with the third absence, however, a student's course grade will be lowered one letter grade for each additional absence.



**Academic Dishonesty:** All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. Plagiarism—the use of another person’s writing without proper documentation (a full, technical definition and detailed discussion of plagiarism—both intentional and unintentional—are found in the [MLA Handbook](#), 6<sup>th</sup> ed, pages 66-75). Any work found to be plagiarized earns the grade of “F.” If you have questions about plagiarism, ask me and check the [MLA Handbook](#).

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

**Religious Holidays:** Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. Students should notify the instructor prior to the holiday of the desire to observe the holiday.

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.



**Visitors in the Classroom:** Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

**Instructor Evaluations:** Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester. As these evaluations may effect the University’s academic standing, the frequency of a course being offered, and the instructor’s income, students are encouraged to participate in this evaluation process and give serious attention to their responses.

**Classroom Rules of Conduct:** The Code of Student Conduct and Discipline is found at the following link: <https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>. Section 5.2.22

defines classroom disturbances. My major concern is that students treat each other and me with respect and courtesy. Though some instructors have strong feelings about cell phones in classrooms, I do not. At times, you or I may need to be reachable via our cell phones. However, I would ask that text messaging not take place during class, and that, should your cell phone ring, you exit the room if you need to answer it.

**Study Tips:** Graduate school is a job—if not a full-time job for every student, still a job with responsibility and demands. It goes best when students see themselves as part of a community of scholars and life-long learners. Some issues discussed in this class will be straightforward and clear; others may seem complex and foreign. Therefore, students are strongly encouraged to talk among themselves, set up a discussion board on Blackboard, and meet with the instructor for help with any quandaries or questions. We all learn best by helping each other—especially in sharing knowledge of resources. Also, graduate students need to claim a space in the larger community of scholars beyond our classroom—something they can do by beginning regularly to read an academic literary journal such as PMLA, American Literature, American Literary History, Cultural Critique, Milton Studies, or Studies in the Novel. You could be truly radical and check out the library shelves on literary theory or specific authors/eras! For help with writing, think about dropping by the writing center. Its hours can be found on the web at <http://www.shsu.edu/~wctr/>



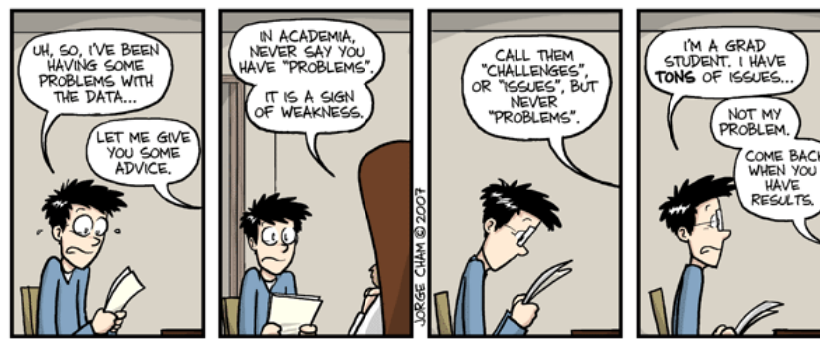
**Requests for incompletes (X or I) for the course:**

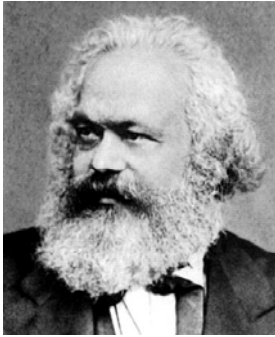
Except and highly exceptional cases, these requests will be denied.

**Contacting the professor:**

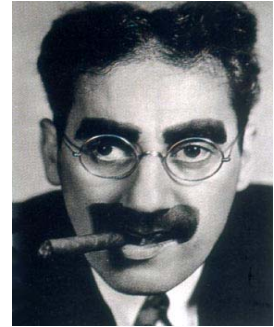
The information for contacting me is printed at the top of this syllabus, but I realize that many graduate students cannot come to Huntsville during my office hours. Therefore, I encourage you to make use of the contact information to schedule times to meet with me, either before or after our class or on any evening here at the University Center. Since I live in the Woodlands, I can be available to me you at the University Center if an issue cannot be resolved by phone or e-mail. I try to check e-mail daily, but if you need to have information from me within a few hours, call.

**"the best method to learning ... is indefatigable (soe farr as the bodie will beare) industrie, and assiduitie, in reading good authors, such as have had the approbation of all learned ages."  
--Meric Casaubon, a 17<sup>th</sup> century scholar**





## ***On Your Marx:***



### **A Weekly Calendar/Schedule of Assignments & Readings**

<b>Week One, Aug. 20 class</b>	Intro to the Course: What is Research Methods?
<b>Week Two, Aug. 27class</b>	Orientation to the libraries and electronic research First Research Reports due (no grade) Read: Altick and Fenstermaker, chapter 1-2 Booth et al, Prologue, chapter 1, & “The Ethics of Research”
<b>Week Three, Sept. 3 class</b>	<b>Monday: University Holiday</b> – Labor Day. Read: Altick, “The Case of the Curious Bibliographers” and “Shades of Mrs. Grundy” (e-reserves) Donahoo, “Adapting Flannery O’Connor: Horton Foote’s ‘Displaced Person’” (available on Blackboard, class documents)
<b>Week Four, Sept. 10 class</b>	Topic: Establishing a Text Read: Altick and Fenstermaker, pages 61-106 West et al, “ <u>Sister Carrie</u> : Manuscript to Print” and “Editorial Principles” (e-reserve) Tanselle, “Textual Criticism and Deconstruction” (e-reserve) McGann, “The Text, the Poem, and the Problem of Historical Method” (e-reserve) <b>Friday</b> : Last day for dropping half-semester courses without a grade of “F”.
<b>Week Five, Sept. 17 class</b>	Topic: More on Texts Read: Johnson, “Establishing a Text: the Emily Dickinson Papers” (e-reserve) Franklin, “Introduction” (to the variorum edition of <u>The Poems of Emily Dickinson</u> ) (e-reserve) Polk, “Where the Comma Goes: Editing William Faulkner” (e-reserve) Brammer, “The Manuscript of <u>The Professor</u> (available on jstor)
<b>Week Six, Sept. 24 class</b>	<b>Exam One</b> <b>Poetry Editing Project due</b> <b>Editing Poetry Reports</b>
<b>Week Seven, Oct. 1 class</b>	Topic: Scholarly Journals and Books Read: Altick and Fenstermaker, chapter 4 Booth et al, Chapter 5 Joeres, “Elusive Theory and Illusive Practice? Editing <u>Signs</u> ” (e-reserve)



Thomas and Hrebenar, "Editing Multi-author Books in Political Science" (available on jstor)

**Week Eight, Oct. 8 class**

Topic: More on Journals and Books  
Read: Chinitz, "T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide" (e-reserve)  
Cox, "Johnny the Horse in Joyce's 'The Dead'" (e-reserve)  
Greenblatt, "Racial Memory and Literary History" (available through jstor)  
Yaeger, "Prologue" to Dirt and Desire (e-reserve)  
Weinstein, "Introduction" to Weinstein, "Introduction" to The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe (e-reserve)

**Week Nine, Oct. 15 class**

Topic: Reception Histories  
Read: Smith, "A Critical History of Frankenstein" (e-reserve)  
Brodhead, "Manufacturing You Into a Personage" (e-reserve)  
Tompkins, "Masterpiece Theater" (e-reserve)  
Budd, "Introduction" to New Essays on Huckleberry Finn (e-reserve)

**Journal Projects Due**  
Journal Reports

**Week Ten, Oct. 22 class**

**Exam Two**  
**Friday No Class due to Horton Foote Conference**

**Week Eleven, Oct. 29 class**

Topic: Recognizing Theoretical Approaches  
Read: Altick and Fenstermaker, pages 106-164  
Routledge chapters 3,5,6,8

**Week Twelve, Nov. 5 class**

Topic: More on Theory  
Read: Routledge chapters 1, 4, 7, 10

**Week Thirteen, Nov. 12 class**

Topic: More on Theory  
Read: Routledge chapters 9, 11  
Donahoo, "Subject to Limitations: O'Connor's Fiction and the South's Shifting Populations" (e-reserve)  
**Reception History Paper due**

**Week Fourteen, Nov. 19 class**

About Writing:  
Read: Altick and Fenstermaker, Chapters 6, 7, 8  
Booth et al, Chapters 3-4 and 12-14

**Nov. 21 WEDNESDAY**

**Thanksgiving holiday**

**Nov. 23 FRIDAY**

**Thanksgiving holiday**

**Week fifteen, Nov. 26 class**

**Still Writing**  
Read: Booth et al, Chapter 16  
Selected grad student papers (e-reserve)

**Week Sixteen, Dec. 3 class**

**Semester Research Project Due**  
**Graff and Birkenstein, They Say, I Say**  
**Friday: No Class--Final Exam Study Day.**

**Dec. 10 MONDAY**

**FINAL EXAM at 6-9:00 p.m. or at time set by the university**

"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention."—Sir Francis Bacon, "Of Studies"

## Poetry Editing: Project One Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to give you some firsthand knowledge in how literary texts are created and reach readers. Students should bear in mind that the final product will not be a formal paper but a packet of information. Below are the components of the project:

1. From a college anthology or an Oxford UP or Columbia UP anthology, select an anthologized British or American poem that was first published between 1700 and 1870. The poem should be at least 14 lines long, but no more than 60 lines long. Make a photocopy of the poem as it appears in the anthology. On a separate, attached sheet, type the correct MLA citation for the poem in the anthology.
2. For the same poem, provide a typescript or photocopy of the poem as it appeared in its first publication. This publication may be in a book, newspaper, or journal, but it should be the first publication you can find for the poem. On a separate sheet, using MLA style, provide a correct citation for this first publication. Students should be aware that they are likely to find reproductions of first publications and scholarly editions, on microfilm, or on a web site. However, if you are unable to get a copy of the original publication, you can use scholarly sources to reconstruct the exact original text. In this case, in addition to the materials already mentioned, please provide a copy of the pages you used to create the reconstruction.
3. Collate your copy of the original with the text found in the anthology. If there are no differences, merely say so; if there are differences, construct a collation list. In either case write one or more paragraphs of commentary explaining how the differences affect the poem or how the poem was transmitted without variations. Students should be aware that these explanations may only be hypothetical ones, though any facts you find should be reported.
4. Write annotations for the original poem, using high school students as your projected audience. These annotations should enable them to understand the literal level of the poem. In other words, provide necessary information rather than interpretation.

When completed, the packet you turn in should include:

- A photocopy of the poem in anthology with attached bibliographic citation.
- A photocopy or reconstruction of the poem's first printed appearance with attached citation.
- A collation page and applicable interpretive paragraphs concerning the collation.
- A page of annotations for high school readers.

This project, must be turned in for evaluation on **Monday, September 24**. On this same date, you may be called on to give a brief (no more than 5-6 minutes) report to the class about your work on this project: difficulties and discoveries.

The grade for this project will determine one-third of your paper/project grade for the course.





## Scholarly Journals: Project Two Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to give students, some firsthand knowledge of scholarly journals as sources for information and as potential homes for their own writing. Below are the components of the project:

1. On **Monday, September 10**, students will be asked to have selected an English or American author who wrote between 1700 and 1940 as the focus for this assignment and for the reception history assignment.
2. Once an author has been selected, students must select **five** different scholarly journals that have published articles on your author in the last 10 years. These may be journals, whose focus is highly specific or quite broad. For help in deciding what is and is not a major scholarly journal, students should consult James Harner's Literary Research Guide: A Guide to Reference Sources for the Study of Literatures in English and Related Topics as well as our Altick and Fenstermaker text.
3. Using the most recent MLA Directory of Periodicals and/or journal web pages, students should learn about:
  - The types of articles (subject matter and approach) each journal publishes.
  - The stated editorial aims of the journal.
  - The submission requirements (be aware of different requirements for different types of writing: articles, notes, book reviews, etc.).
  - The affiliation, if any, to an institution or organization.
  - The editors and editorial board.
  - Numerical information concerning circulation.
4. Examine carefully the issue of the chosen journal, which includes an article on your author. Seek to discover such things as:
  - If and how the stated guidelines are fulfilled and practice. Pay close attention to matters of content and style.
  - Variations in length of the articles, notes, and reviews.
  - The general level of difficulty found in the journal's contents; how accessible are the journal's articles, notes, and reviews?
  - Any conclusions, you can reach concerning contributors to the journal.
  - Why, you would or would not recommend the journal to a colleague.
5. Armed with this information, students should prepare an annotated bibliography for the five articles. However, this bibliography should have an odd arrangement. While most bibliographies are done alphabetically by the first word in each entry or, less often, chronologically, you must arrange your bibliography in an order that moves from the best journal to the worst—not best article but best journal. The bibliographic entries themselves must follow MLA style. The annotations should consist of two brief paragraphs and two paragraphs only: first, a paragraph that summarizes the major argument of the article; second, a brief paragraph that explains how the article relates to the quality of the journal. For a sample entry, see below.

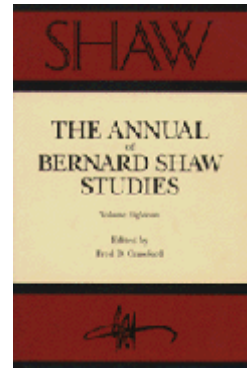
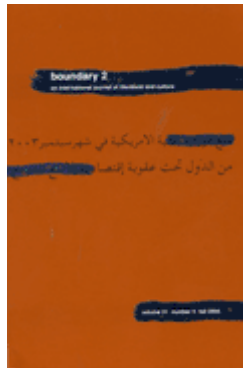
This assignment must be submitted for evaluation on **Monday, October 15**. Students should also be ready to make a brief presentation to the class on their discoveries at this time. The grade for this project will determine **one-third** of your paper/project for the course.

### Sample Bibliography and Annotation

Dunleavy, Linda. "Sanctuary, Sexual Difference, and the Problem of Rape." Studies in American Fiction 24 (1996): 171-191.

Dunleavy analyzes Faulkner's novel Sanctuary from the perspective of gender to discover what the novel says about rape. Her discovery is that, while criticism has tended to view women in the novel as "inherently rapable" (171), the novel actually shows that rape is an act of violence resulting not from biological weakness in women but from social "configurations of power" (172). By this phrase, Dunleavy means that rape occurs as women are made to appear socially powerless. Thus Temple Drake does not cause or invite rape by being sexy but by being in a position of weakness. Moreover, Popeye does not rape Temple because he is attracted to her but because he wants to demonstrate or claim a power over her. Thus the famous physical rape in the novel actually mirrors other relationships of domination in the novel--particularly that of Horace and his wife and that of Temple and her father.

With an acceptance rate of 1 in 25 and a home at Northeastern University, this journal should be better than it is. Its articles come largely from young academics, and they are more provocative than informative. Our of three I read in this issue, only Dunleavy's stood out as strong; indeed, it's solid evidence and use of research on rape made it stand out from the journal as a whole.



## Reception History: Project Three Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to give you greater knowledge on the ways perceptions of particular texts often change over time. Unlike earlier projects, this one is a formal, but brief, paper (4-6 pages). Below are the components of the project:

1. On **Monday, September 10**, students will be asked to have selected an English or American author who wrote between 1700 and 1940 as the focus for this assignment and the scholarly journal assignment. For this assignment, students will need to focus on one of the major works by the author they have selected -- preferably a work they have already read and studied.
2. Students will research to find scholarly trends in the reception of this text in the author's home country. This research should focus on **three** different historical points in the text's existence. You must use **three** sources for **each of the three time periods** you work with. One of these time periods, should be that of the work's initial publication. Another time period should be that of contemporary criticism (1995-present). The third time period should be something in the middle of these two time periods, preferably a moment of importance in literary history. For example, if you were to choose Emerson's 1847 Poems, you would need three discussions of the book that appeared around 1847. You would also need three discussions of the book or some of its contents that have appeared in 1995. Finally, you would need three discussions of the book from some middle period—for instance, the era of the 1930s when social criticism was encouraged by the Great Depression. These discussions may be from any type of source: reviews (obviously in the period immediately following publication these are needed), scholarly articles, scholarly books, even text books.
3. Based on their research, students should write an essay that explains trends in the reception of the text, as well as notes particular critics or commentaries that have had a major impact on our understanding of the work. Students may consult research, other than the pieces they are writing about, to help determine the most influential commentators.
4. Students should include in their papers at least one paragraph assessing how knowing the work's reception history enlightens our understanding of the work.
5. A "Works Cited" page is expected to accompany this paper. Students should use proper MLA-bibliographic style.

This assignment should be submitted for evaluation on **Monday, November 12**. It will determine the final third of each student's paper/project grade for the course.



## Semester Research Assignments: English 698—Fall 2007

Below are several research assignments. Each of them relates to an actual problem I or another faculty member has run into while seeking to analyze or understand a literary text. Your job is to try to solve the problem by locating and collecting the information required and then to write an essay that explains the process by which you went about finding the information. It is assumed that all these problems will require a number of research steps to reach a solution but that each is solvable. As I hope you recognize, the key word in the previous sentence is “assumed.” Because these are actual problems, I cannot know precisely how difficult or easy solving the problems will be. In my own experience, a problem’s difficulty is often determined by serendipitous knowledge the researcher happens to possess. Luck also plays a role. However, the focus of my grading will be upon your process, rather than your outcome. That means that I expect each student to be able to explain how he or she went about solving the problem -- even if the solution is never reached. With this as an introduction, let me present the problems:



**Problem one:** A few semesters ago, a student in one of my American survey classes decided to write a paper on Claude McKay’s poem, “After the Winter.” In the course of doing so, she found that more than one version of the poem exists, and she came to me to ask which version she should use. Not being a McKay scholar, I was stumped, but I knew I had found a problem for this course.

Graduate students selecting this problem should begin by making a study of the publication history of the poem, looking particularly for the moment when the changes were made. They should also seek to learn as much as possible about

why the changes were made by consulting biographies, critical studies, and editions of the poem. They should then research further to see if such changes are common in McKay’s writing. Did he, for instance, like Yeats, often revise poems years after their original publication in order to update or improve them? Armed with this kind of information, students should return their focus to the specific poem with which this problem began, analyzing the consequences of the changes for our understanding of the poem, our view of McKay and his poetics, and our understanding of the fate of African American literature.

**Problem two:** Problem two is similar to problem one but deals with a work of prose rather than poetry. African American author Charles Chesnutt first rose to public attention with the publication of his conjure stories in the Atlantic—stories that were soon collected and published in book form. However, as I learned the hard way a few years ago, there are different versions of at least one of these stories: “The Goophered Grapevine.” This started me wondering where the changes were made, if similar changes appear in other conjure stories that had both magazine and book publication, as well as what the significance of the changes is. Students who select this problem will seek to examine three of Chesnutt’s conjure stories that had magazine and book publication, with one of the three being “The Goophered Grapevine.” They will do research to see what can learn about the publication history of the stories as well as about editorial changes

made as they moved from magazine to book. Finally, they will seek to establish why these changes are or are not significant for readers of Chesnutt's work.

**Problem three:** In Faulkner's 1938 short story, "Barn Burning," readers find the following passage:

That night they camped in a grove of oaks and beeches where a spring ran. The nights were cool and they had a fire against it, of a rail lifted from a nearby fence and cut into lengths—a small fire, neat, niggard almost, a shrewd fire; such fires were his father's habit and custom always, even in freezing weather. Older, the boy might have remarked this and wondered why not a big one; why should not a man who had not only seen the waste and extravagance of war, but who had in his blood an inherent voracious prodigality with material not his own, have burned everything in sight? Then he might have gone a step further and thought that that was the reason: that niggard blaze was the living fruit of night passed during those four years in the woods hiding from all men, blue or gray, with his strings of horses (captured horses, he called them). And older still, he might have divined the true reason: that the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being, as the element of fire spoke to other men, as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing, and hence to be regarded with respect and used with discretion.

Such a passage, attempting as Faulkner often did with Ab Snopes to justify or explain Ab's action on the basis of his past suffering, is reminiscent of the legal defense based on the psychological condition and experience of the accused—a defense made prominent by Clarence Darrow in the famous murder trial of Leopold and Loeb in the mid-1920s. This suggests the problem of finding the source or sources for Faulkner's use of such a defense: does it lie in history (Darrow's famous case, for instance), psychological theory as Faulkner would have understood it, some theological idea, or somewhere else? Students interested in this connection should begin by examining Faulkner criticism related to psychology, justice, and "Barn Burning." However, it should also carefully look at biographies of Faulkner and histories of the South during the Faulkner's time. The end result would be to develop an argument that attempts to explain Faulkner's source for this idea and what its effect is in the story at hand—particularly, whether or not it makes a new reading of "Barn "Burning" possible.



**Problem four:** The novels of Jane Austen are among the few works by a female author, prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that have maintained a significant readership from their first publication to the present day. Recent years have seen numerous attempts by films to translate Austen's work for the visual age, suggesting that her current readership is highly diverse. But one has to wonder if this was true of her early readers. To be more specific, just who were Austen's early readers and how does one go about building a profile of these people? For the student who undertakes this problem, it will involve research in biographies and critical studies of Austen as well as seeking to discover, as far as is possible, information about her initial publishers, reviewers, and the audiences to whom they generally appealed. It should also involve learning about the price of her books when first published and the format as that is reflective of price and audience. The goal will be to build as specific a profile as possible of Austen's early readers and then to examine the opening chapter of one of her novels to look for ways in which she appeals, consciously or unconsciously to those readers. In short, the students who work with

this problem will ultimately apply his or her research to explain what is going on in one of Austen's chapters—how the chapters reach out to Austen's audience.

**Problem five:** Horton Foote is one of Texas's most honored writers, but he remains relatively obscure. This project would attempt to do some work to remedy that situation by working on a reception history to Foote's most famous work, Trip to Bountiful—a work that exists in at least three forms: a television script from the 1950s, a film script from the 1980s/90s, and a stage script. This project will collect major initial critical responses to all three versions (if possible) as well as examine recent scholarly attention the play and its author have received. The goal will do to write a paper that enlightens us on two fronts: the nature of the work's reception with an awareness of the variations due to medium and an attempt to understand or theorize why Foote's writing remains largely at the obscure edges of popular and critical perception. In short, it will use his reception to found an argument explaining his literary status.



**Problem six:** Is a writer affected by the critical reception of his/her work. This project will explore that issue with either Robert Browning's poem collection, Men and Women or Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. Students will need to begin by doing a through study of the initial reception of one of these works. They should then do a careful study of the publications that follow either Men and Women or The Bluest Eye. Is there textual evidence or implications that the author is responding to his/her critics either by making changes in the work or by repeating praised successes? Added

to this would be critical studies of the subsequent work as well as any letters, interviews, or other materials outside the fiction that might be relevant. The final result will be a measuring of the literary author's awareness of and attentiveness to the immediate reception of major works.

**Problem seven:** Authors, like all of us, have to deal with basic problems of life as well as create works of art. One such problem that can have an interesting effect on literary work are health problems. Three 20<sup>th</sup> century American authors who suffered from major health issues are Robert Lowell, Flannery O'Connor, and Elizabeth Bishop. In the case of O'Connor several recent critics have speculated about the effect of her lupus upon her work but none have made convincing cases tied to close knowledge about periods of intense difficulty verses periods of health. This is work that needs to be done. The writer who selects this problem will choose one of these writers, learn as much as possible about his or her physical ailments and attempt to connect the onsets on the ailments with a time-line of their writing. Where, if anywhere, does the illness make itself manifest in the poetry or fiction? How does it do so? Of course, this will also require the student to learn basic information about the disease and its symptoms and course. But the result will be a better understanding of how writing is related to disease.

**Problem eight:** In the 1950s, Texas author Carol Hoff published two children's books: Johnny Texas and Johnny Texas on the San Antonio Road. In recent years, both books remain on recommended reading lists for Texas elementary school children. A cursory search of mainstream literary databases tends to suggest that the books have not received much critical comment, despite their "classic" status in the state. This is especially interesting because the books are ostensibly historical. Do they merit continued reading, and are there problems with the books' "history"? Is it possible to learn anything about the book's production or their author? To solve this problem, students will need to examine one or both books (I'd had few students pay much attention to the sequel—hint, hint) as well as to any commentary they can find on them.



They will also need to establish some sources of historical data that can be used to evaluate the book's value as history. The final product should be a paper that presents any possible background information that would aid in interpreting the book and, more importantly, compares the books to historical data that goes beyond place names and events. For instance, do the books' presentation of minorities reflect attitudes that commonly existed in their historical setting or do they reflect attitudes of the 1950s? The key here is to bring together hard research in biography, publication history, and state history to give insight into the value or lack of value in these books.

Students should carefully look over these problems and quickly select one to be the focus of their research. In several cases, I may be able to help students get started by providing additional background to free students from extensive reading of primary texts -- though such reading is encouraged. Also, if none of these problems interest a student, he or she may suggest a different problem -- possibly something in preparation for a thesis or something that can be used in another course. However, I need the idea to reflect a clear research, not merely an interpretation, problem.

The end result should be a 10 to 12 page paper (plus bibliographic material) that argues a clear thesis based on a reading both primary and secondary texts. The paper should be in MLA-format. It must be submitted for evaluation no later than the start of class on Monday, December 3. REMEMBER: the content of the paper may be EITHER a straightforward answer/resolution to the problem or it may be a presentation of the methods/steps a student took trying to solve the problem and, if unsolved, an explanation of what work remains to be done and why it couldn't be done for this course. Students should also be ready on that date to give a 10 to 15 minute presentation to the class concerning both their discoveries and the research methods that enabled them to arrive at their results.

Good Luck!!!!

