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1997

Fall 8-15-1997

ENG 4300-002: Senior Seminar: The Ironic Mode

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Recommended Citation

McCormick, Frank, "ENG 4300-002: Senior Seminar: The Ironic Mode" (1997). *Fall 1997*. 124.
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English 4300/FALL 1997
SENIOR SEMINAR: THE IRONIC MODE

Instructor: Frank McCormick
Office: CH 339D
Phone: 581-6121/345-9773
Office Hours: MWF 9:00-12:00,
and by appointment)

- Required Texts:
1. Abrams, Norton Anthology of English Lit., 1 & 2
2. Austen, Emma
3. Moore, Self-Help
4. Spark, Prime of Miss Jean
5. Twain, Connecticut Yankee
6. Voltaire, Candide

SUPPLEMENTARY PURCHASE Spiral notebook (for this course only)

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT: I welcome your questions about any of our assignments for this course. Ask and I'll be happy to clarify. If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

SYLLABUS

- AUG 25 Introduction to the course. In class today, let's make arrangements to watch the new video version of Emma--a delightful introduction to the Jane Austen novel we will begin reading next week.
- 27 Photocopied New Yorker letter to "Mrs. Phelps."
Buy and bring to class a spiral notebook--to be used as a journal for this class only. Prepare a journal entry in response to the "Mrs. Phelps" letter.
Carefully read your "REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY" handout.
- 29 In your journal, write your own letter in imitation of Huck Finn's New Yorker letter to Mrs. Phelps. In YOUR letter, assume the voice of the literary character of your choice--Hamlet, Scarlet O'Hara, or whoever. The purpose of your letter will be to make a satirical (wittily critical) commentary on some aspect of contemporary American life. Do so by employing IRONY. Create a character who (like Huck in the New Yorker letter) is confident that what s/he believes or does is thoroughly admirable--but whom your alert reader will recognize to be deceived or foolish or contemptible or immoral. Have fun with this project. Use your imagination.
- SEP 1 Labor Day. No class.
- 3 Jane Austen, Emma, 1-43.
Remember to prepare a journal entry. I'll begin this and most of our future class sessions by asking several of

you to read from your journals. It's a good conversation starter.

- SEP 5 Emma, 43-97 (to end of Vol. 1)
- 8 Emma, 97-153
- 10 Emma, 153-201 (to end of Vol. 2)
- 12 Emma, 201-259
- 15 Emma, 259-313 (end of novel). In class today (for the benefit of several of you who may wish to choose some aspect of Emma as the topic of your term paper for this course, I will offer some suggestions concerning potential Emma topics. (Relax: your term paper will not be due until NOVEMBER 17--two months from now.)
- 17 **NOTE:** Our class will meet today in BOOTH LIBRARY, Rm. 132 (Technology Classroom--2nd floor). Prepare for today's session by spending 2-3 hours developing a new Emma journal entry of approximately 1,000 words. Develop your entry as follows:
 (1) Formulate a question or articulate a problem concerning some aspect of Emma which interests or troubles you. Devote approximately 250 words to this task.
 (2) Locate a page or two in Emma which in some way illustrates or clarifies the question or problem you have identified in (1) above. (Please do NOT choose pages that we've discussed at length in class or that you have examined in your previous journal entries.) Write approximately 750 words of analysis of the material in the Emma page(s) you have located. Explore the pages carefully, from as many different perspectives as possible. (I will [hint, hint] very likely do a spot check of journals at the beginning of today's session.)
- 19 Spark, Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, 1-61
- 22 Prime, 62-144
- 24 Prime, 145-187
- 26 In Norton Anthology, I: Pope, Rape of the Lock, Cantos 1-2, pp. 2233-2241. (Delightful on a third reading. Do read these nine pages carefully three times before class.
- 29 Rape of the Lock, Cantos 3-4, pp. 2241-2249; read three times.
- OCT 1 Rape of the Lock, Canto 5, pp. 2249-2252; yep, 3 times.

- OCT 3 In Norton Anthology, Vol. 2, Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, Chapter Three, pp. 1947-1956. Why does Woolf assert that "it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius" (p. 1951)? For a portion of your journal entry today, write six to twelve lines of iambic pentameter in imitation of Pope's Rape of the Lock. Consider writing from a feminist point of view--making a conceited male the object of your irony.
- 6 No class. Optional conferences today. Work on your first 250-word paper--due at our next meeting along with your journal.
- ** 8 Journal and first 250-word paper due at beginning of today's class. In class today I will discuss your term paper assignment, explain documentation procedures, and offer suggestions to help you get started.
- 10 Gulliver's Travels, Part 4, pp. 2136-2157.
- 13 Gulliver's Travels, Part 4, pp. 2157-2181.
- 15 Following carefully the guidelines specified in your SEPTEMBER 17 assignment (1) & (2), write a new 1,000-word journal entry on some aspect of Gulliver's Travels, Part 4 that particularly interests or perplexes you. (Recall the "hint" at the end of the Sept. 17 assignment.)
- 17 Swift, A Modest Proposal, pp. 2181-2187. (QUESTION: what sort of person is the fictive narrator of Modest Proposal? In what ways do his assumptions and habits of thought differ from yours--and probably from Swift's? In what ways do his assumptions and habits of thoughts RESEMBLE yours?)
- 20 In your journal, write your own Modest Proposal. Offer a Swiftean solution ("fair, cheap, and easy") to a current social problem. Try to imitate both the style and the organizational scheme of Swift's Proposal.
- 22 In Norton, Vol. 2: Burns, "Holy Willy's Prayer," pp. 85-88. (NOTE: the speaker, "Holy Willy," is a hypocrite.) In Norton, Vol. 2, Browning, "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," pp. 1188-1190. Question: what similarities do you see in the attitudes and behaviors of the speakers of these two poems? What differences?
- 24 Photocopied excerpts from Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary (ca. 1752) and Mark Twain's "Letter II. Satan to Michael and Gabriel"

- OCT 27 Twain, Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, pp. 1-66
- 29 Connecticut Yankee, pp. 67-140
- 31 Connecticut Yankee, pp. 141-214
- NOV 3 Connecticut Yankee, pp. 215-274
In class today we will do some brainstorming to find potential topics for your term paper.
- 5 For your journal entry today, spend at least three hours developing your preliminary plans for your term paper. Bring to class the text(s) of the work(s) you plan to discuss in your paper. In class today I will answer your questions about the project and discuss your plans with you in the hall if you wish. We will also do some writing activities that will help you generate information for your paper.
IMPORTANT: remind me today to distribute a handout entitled "**QUICK INTRODUCTION TO SOME RESEARCH TOOLS.**"
ALSO IMPORTANT: Today, in class, SIGN UP FOR A TERM-PAPER DISCUSSION CONFERENCE
- * 7 Conference day(s). Bring to your conference (in my office) a 150-word description of your preliminary plans for your term paper. (Keep a photocopy of the description for your own use. I will collect the original during our conference.)
- 10 Spend at least two hours working on your term paper before our meeting today.
NOTE: CLASS WILL MEET TODAY IN BOOTH LIBRARY--ENTRANCE TO REFERENCE ROOM, 2nd FLOOR. Sometime before class, spend **AT LEAST TWO HOURS** in the Reference Room on the 2nd floor familiarizing yourself with the REFERENCE BOOKS I HAVE CITED IN ITEMS 1, 2, 3 OF YOUR HANDOUT "**QUICK INTRODUCTION TO SOME RESEARCH TOOLS.**" When we meet in the library's Reference Room today I'll be happy to answer your questions about how to gather information for your term paper in this and your other courses. The Reference Room is the place to start--and the online MLA INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY lets you do in three minutes some things that took ME three weeks to do when I was a senior English major back in the Dark Ages.
- 12 Prepare a ROUGH DRAFT of your term paper, and make a clear photocopy to turn in to me at the beginning of today's class. I'll ask each of you to offer a brief progress report. Remind me to ask for 3 volunteers to present 12-15 minute term paper reports at our Monday, Nov. 21 meeting.

- NOV 14 No class today. Work on your term paper--due at the beginning of our next meeting. (Make a photocopy for your files.)
- ** 17 Term paper due today. (Keep photocopy for your files. I'll swap the photocopy for the graded version.) Three term paper reports. Reminder: Please give your classmates' reports the courteous attention you will wish them to give to your report.
- 19 Three term paper reports. We will likely need to schedule a supplementary morning or evening session for some of your term paper reports. Let's work out a time at today's class meeting.
- 21 Term paper reports.
NOTE: If you wish to revise your term paper, please schedule a conference with me right away so that we can discuss revision strategies.
- 24, 26, 28 Thanksgiving Recess. No class.
- DEC 1 Moore, Self-Help--"How to be an Other Woman," 1-22.
- 3 Moore, "Amahl and the Night Visitors," 99-116; "Go Like This," 67-81
- 5 Moore, "Kid's Guide to Divorce," 49-52
"How," 55-64
"How to Talk to Your Mother (Notes)," 85-95
"How to Become a Writer," 119-126"
- 8 Moore, "To Fill," 129-163
- 10 For your assignment today, write (in your journal) a minimum of 250 words in the style of Lorrie Moore. Develop your own subject matter, but make certain that your material, language, and technique echo Moore's. And at some point in your imitation, make certain you employ IRONY. [If what you write pleases you, consider polishing it and submitting it to The Vehicle.] Your journal and second 250-word paper are due at our next meeting.
- ** 12 Last class day. Journal and second 250-word paper due today. If you have chosen to revise your term paper, your revision, along with the original graded version (with my comments), is due in my office no later than 3:00 P.M., Wednesday, Dec. 17.

Good luck on your finals! I will be in my office most mornings and afternoons during final exam week.

ENG 4300/Fall '97/McCormick
REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

You will be expected to attend class regularly, to contribute to class discussion, and to perform all reading and writing assignments promptly. Your grade will be determined as follows:

- 1/3 = class participation, two oral reports, & occasional pop quizzes over assigned readings;
- 1/3 = journal and two 250-word papers based on your journal entries;
- 1/3 = term paper.

The above requirements are described in detail below. Please read through this material carefully and bring your questions to class or to conference. Your questions are always welcome.

1. PARTICIPATION, 2 ORAL REPORTS, & POP QUIZZES = 1/3

In a seminar the instructor does not lecture. Instead, seminar members take turns making brief presentations and asking and answering questions of one another and the works under consideration. The success of this seminar will depend on the energy and good spirits you bring to class discussion. We will all need to find ways of helping one another to speak up in class. If, like me, you are shy and fear that people will laugh at you when you speak, come talk with me and I'll offer encouragement, as will your classmates. Again, I will expect you to attend class regularly and to read the day's assignment before coming to class. There will be occasional pop quizzes over the day's reading. You will also be expected to do the following:

- listen to your classmates' reports with the courtesy and alertness you would wish them to give to your own reports
- read from your journal (see p. 2) when called upon
- contribute to class discussion by raising and helping to answer questions
- make two fifteen-minute reports. First Report: you will make a fifteen-minute presentation (accompanied by a handout) on some aspect of the day's reading assignment. (I'll distribute a sign-up sheet one day soon and have each of you sign up for a specific class session in the first half of the semester.) Early in the semester, schedule a conference with me so that we can plan the content of your report. Second Report: in the final weeks of the semester you will present some aspect of your term paper to the class. (You may not simply read your paper. You will need to find some way of bringing some specific portion of it to life.)

2. JOURNAL & TWO 250-WORD PAPERS BASED ON YOUR JOURNAL ENTRIES = 1/3

A. JOURNAL ENTRIES:

Length of entries: Write at least 150 words before each class meeting on some aspect of the day's assigned reading.

Purpose: To give you regular, brief writing practice and to stimulate you to record your impressions of the works you read for this course so that you can help make class discussion productive. Your journal entries will also give you a treasury of material which you might wish to draw upon in devising a topic for your term paper.

Spiral notebook: Record your journal entries in an 8 1/2 by 11 spiral notebook (buy one before next class and bring it to the class meeting) containing at least 200 pages. You will need 400 pages if you write only four or five words per line.) We will set up our class dates in the notebook at our next meeting--one date at the top of every other page.

Evaluation of journals: I will collect your journal (and a 250-word paper--see B. below) at mid term and again near the end of the semester. Both times I will evaluate your journal by RANDOMLY SELECTING FOUR (4) ENTRIES and assigning you between 0 and 10 points for each of the randomly-selected entries. The minimum number of points you will receive for an entry of 150 words is 6--6 if your journal entry meets the minimum 150-word requirement but is generalized or unengaged. A 6-point entry might (a) rehash points made in class discussion or (b) contain unsubstantiated, generalized sentences such as these:

This poem is really terrific (or really boring). It has lots of neat (or hard) words (followed by no specific examples or critical analysis). I really like (or hate) the poem's ideas (followed by no specific discussion of the loved or hated ideas). The main character Joe is really a far-out guy (or a dodo bird--this again unsupported by specifics).

You will receive more than 6 points for an entry--up to a maximum of 10 points--if your entry not only meets or exceeds the 150-word minimum but also shows that you have thought carefully about the assignment and have responded to it energetically, specifically, imaginatively, critically, and independently.

What to write?: Again, write 150 words or more (before class) You may write whatever you wish--so long as you respond specifically and thoughtfully to the assigned reading(s). Here are some suggestions that will get you started:

1. Examine in detail a passage, situation, or character that interests or vexes you.
2. Record recurring images--references to food, to dogs, to earthquakes, or whatever.
3. Find moments of IRONY in the assigned reading. Examine the ironic moments in some detail. Here are some useful dictionary definitions of irony:

2a: the use of words to express something other than and esp. the opposite of the literal meaning;
2b: a usually humorous or sardonic literary style or form characterized by irony;
2c: an ironic expression or utterance;
3a: incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected result . . . ;
3b: incongruity between a situation developed in a drama [or poem or novel] and the accompanying words or action that is understood by the audience [or reader] but not by the characters in the [literary work].

(from Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition)

4. Write a creative response to the work you have read. For example, re-write the ending or the beginning of the work. Or re-write one scene or paragraph in a fashion that you find more satisfying or amusing than you found the original version.
5. Disagree with the views of the writer or one of her fictional characters--or agree with them, showing in either case precisely why you agree or disagree.
6. Express in two or three sentences the major theme or idea of the work.
7. Record and analyze significant or otherwise interesting things that characters say or do.
8. Make a list of questions you have about the assigned work: things you didn't understand and might wish to ask about in class.

9. Note similarities and differences of subject matter or technique among the assigned works. (Again, you might use your journal entries as a source of potential ideas for your term paper.)

10. Record things in the assigned work that amuse, irritate, startle you; that challenge your beliefs, or that confirm them.

11. Explain how you or someone else you know would have behaved in the situation described in your assigned reading.

12. Write a plot summary, and a brief list of characters' names and qualities. (NOTE: An entry consisting mainly of plot summary will receive 7 points. A good job with most of the other suggestions in this list can earn more than 7 points.)

B. TWO CAREFULLY POLISHED 250-WORD PAPERS BASED ON TWO OF YOUR JOURNAL ENTRIES: I would prefer that you type your two 250-word papers (one typed, double-spaced page = approximately 250 words). For each paper, search through your journal and locate an entry that you find especially interesting. Then carefully revise and polish some portion of that entry. Submit the first paper along with your journal at mid term, and the second along with the journal when I collect it again near the end of the semester.

C. HOW WILL I CALCULATE YOUR FINAL JOURNAL/250-WORD PAPER GRADE? As with the four randomly chosen entries which I will evaluate at mid-term and again at the end of the semester, your two polished 250-word papers will earn between 0 and 10 points each. That will give me a total of ten journal/paper items to evaluate: $4 + 1 + 4 + 1 = 10$. I will use a 100-point scale in determining your final journal/250-word paper grade. That is, a total of 87 points would earn a B+ for your journal/250-word paper grade; 71 points would earn a C-; 95 points would earn an A, etc.

3. TERM PAPER = 1/3

Topic: The topic is negotiable. In a later handout I will offer specific topic suggestions which you may use or adapt, or you may devise your own topic in consultation with me, whichever you prefer.

Due date: Toward the end of the semester, and I will return it in time for you to revise and re-submit if you wish. (See "Option to Revise" below, and see syllabus for due date.)

Length: 10-15 typed pages (double-spaced).

Documentation requirement: Your paper must make use of a minimum of three (3) library sources. At least one (1) of The sources must be a learned journal rather than a book. (Later, I will explain how to locate appropriate journal articles listed in the online MLA International Bibliography.) Use the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers as a guide in documenting your library sources. You will find a copy of the MLA Handbook in the Writing Center. You may purchase a copy for \$10.50 in the MLK Union Bookstore. Attached is a photocopied page from the MLA Handbook for you to study.)

Note on Plagiarism: Remember your obligation to document borrowings both of other writers' ideas and of their words. Failure to document your borrowings by using endnotes and quotation marks appropriately constitutes plagiarism, for which the penalty is an F for the paper and no opportunity to revise it in hopes of earning a higher grade.

Option to Revise: With the exception noted above, if the grade you receive on your term paper is lower than you and I might have wished, you may elect to revise the paper and re-submit it during final exam week in hopes of improving the grade.