

Course Title: ENG 685 Comp Lit Forms & Themes. Topic: Key Literary forms: Epic
Term: Spring 2008
Course Schedule: http://www.nku.edu/~rkdrry/685forms/ENG_685_sched.html

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Class Blog: <http://rkdrry.english-nku.org/ENG685/>

Online Office Hours: Virtual Office Hours as posted on the class schedule:

Course Description:

This web-based course is designed to provide an overview of the study and analysis of a key literary form—epic or heroic literature, a form that ultimately evolved into tragic drama, the novel, and even some forms of film today. References to these works are everywhere in popular culture today, yet we don't always recognize their origins or what part they play in the fabric of our contemporary culture.

We will consider one particular chain of influences, along with contemporary responses to these works, in writing, film, and art. Many of the works we will discuss are considered so important by contemporary poets that they published one of the translations you will read during the course.

We will begin with two of the earliest classical Greek epics, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which narrate legendary and mythic events occurring during and after the Greek siege of Troy. Next, we will view Aeschylus' trilogy, *The Oresteia*, which describes the fate of Agamemnon and his family. The next work we will discuss is classical Roman literary epic, Vergil's *The Aeneid*, which deals with the aftermath of the Trojan war from the Trojan perspective (ironically, we don't get a description of the fall of Troy and the deception of the Trojan horse until this later, Roman work). Because myth and classical religion plays such an important role in epic (and, through allusion, in literary works in English from nearly all periods), we will next read Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, an anthology of narratives that each include a metamorphosis (as you will see, each narrative also metamorphoses into the next). From here, we move on to Christian European epic and one Italian inheritor of the epic tradition, Dante Alighieri, whose *Inferno* includes Vergil as a character. Finally, we will look at John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, considered by some to be the last true epic (though some have disagreed).

This is not, however, the end of the tradition. All of the works we will read are themselves parodies or extensions of the earlier works, made new to meet the needs of a different culture and time. And the works are still studied, parodied, satirized, and updated today. Consider [this film](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs3SfNANtig) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs3SfNANtig>) and [this film](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQHx-SjgQvQ) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQHx-SjgQvQ>) on YouTube today.

Other works are included because they are central to the work of literary scholars in general, and you should be aware of them. Two plays we will discuss briefly are Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone*. One representative Anglo-Saxon epic that belongs more to the Norse saga tradition than to Anglo-Saxon epic is *Beowulf*.

This course is open to graduate students from different backgrounds and with different research interests; consequently, during the first week you will also post a profile on the course blog identifying your interests and area of focus for the course. Also, some of you have considerable experience with the materials, whereas others may never have read them. Consequently, each unit in Blackboard will include background materials that review of important concepts and of historical contexts as we work toward developing a common critical language, level of analytical skill, and confidence.

Extremely important aspects of epic poetry are its origins in oral performance (implying the existence of a performing poet and an audience) and its ability to express cannot be expressed in everyday language, both in particular times and places and across time. In addition, as you will see, virtually all of the literature we will consider this term is written in the predominant poetic line and form of the time. Consequently, we will need to review these features as well.

Textbooks and Other Materials

Textbooks

Homer. The Iliad. Tr. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin, 1998. ISBN 0140275363.

Homer. The Odyssey. Tr. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin, 2006. ISBN 0143039954.

Aeschylus. The Oresteia. Tr. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin, 1984. ISBN 0140443339

Sophocles. The Three Theban Plays. Tr. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin, 2000. ISBN 0140444254

Virgil. The Aeneid. Tr. Robert Fagles . New York: Penguin, 2008. ISBN 0143105132.

Ovid. Metamorphoses. Tr. Charles Martin. New York: Norton, 2005. ISBN 039332642X

Alighieri, Dante. The Inferno of Dante. Tr. Robert Pinsky. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997. ISBN 0374525315

Anonymous. Beowulf. Tr. Seamus Heaney. New York: Norton, 2001. ISBN 0393320979

Milton, John. Paradise Lost. Ed. Merritt Hughes. 3rd Ed. New York: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005. ISBN 0872207331

Software, Readers, etc.

You may need to view or listen to materials encoded in a variety of formats. Please ensure that the following are operational on your computer by the second week of classes:

Software/Function	Format/Download Information
Word processing	If you are not using MS Word, please save any work you submit in rich text format (*.rtf).
Adobe Acrobat Reader 8.1	Reads PDF files. Download free at http://www.adobe.com/
Adobe Flash Player 9.0	Video viewer. Download free at http://www.adobe.com/
Quicktime	View and hear media in encoded Apple formats. Download it free at http://www.apple.com/quicktime/player/
Windows Media Player	View and hear media http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/default.mspx
Real Player	View and hear media http://www.real.com/freeplayer/?rppr=downloadcom1

PowerPoint Viewer	If you have PowerPoint on your system, you don't need this viewer. If you do not have PowerPoint, however, the viewer will allow you to view presentations without actually creating them. Download it free at http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/orkXP/HA011362871033.aspx
Java Chat Utility	If you have not used the chatroom within Blackboard, you will need to download it before participating in online chats. When you log onto the chatroom (listed under Communication), you will be provided with a link to the chat utility.
Trailfire	Trailfire is a free plugin for Internet Explorer that enables users to construct trails through a series of internet sites, add commentary, and share it with others (download the toolbar at http://www.trailfire.com/pages/download.php).

If you do not already eliminate spyware from your computer on a regular basis, the following free software programs are recommended:

Ad-Aware	http://www.lavasoft.com/products/ad_aware_free.php
Spybot	http://www.safer-networking.org/en/download/index.html

Learning Objectives & Assessment

In this course, you will develop and practice skills that will enable you to

Learning Objective	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and understand epic literature and construct a close reading of passages, taking into account its cultural context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation on class blog Seminar Paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain and apply terms and concepts used by literary scholars in analyzing poetry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation on class blog Seminar Paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the general development of epic as a genre, tradition, and antecedent to contemporary forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation on class blog Seminar Paper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice engaging in analysis with others with similar research interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation on class blog Creation of internet site trail
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain a deep understanding of a particular topic and construct an original argument assing how it fits within the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final research project

Online Courses

Taking an online course requires substantial commitment and initiative. We will not be meeting for in a traditional classroom setting; however, you can expect to spend at least as much time working on the course as you would in an offline graduate seminar in literary studies. Typically, such courses meet in the classroom for 3-4 hours; undergraduate courses require an additional 2 hours outside the classroom for every hour spent in the classroom. Graduate courses require even more.

Every effort has been made to provide pathways through the materials in the course, as well as to provide flexibility so that participants can work according to their own schedules, within the constraints of the class modules. You are expected, however, to complete each course module and its assignments *on schedule*. Failure to do so will prevent your work from being included in the course discussions. *Please ensure that you remain on the course schedule*

Also, a separate blog posting schedule has been created for your convenience. *It is recommended that you print out the blog posting schedule, mark your participation days with a highlighter, and post it in a prominent place so that you do not forget to post.* The course is designed so that you can work ahead, but we will not be able to make accommodations for late posts. On this blog, late posting is considered poor community citizenship. *If you post late, your classmates are under no obligation to go back and respond to your post.*

Also as a matter of courtesy, you are also expected to interact with your classmates and the instructor thoughtfully and respectfully through both asynchronous and synchronous means. In this course, **asynchronous** interaction (where not everyone is online at the same time) will take place through the blog assignments and through e-mail. You are expected to e-mail me immediately whenever you need assistance or clarification. **Synchronous** interaction (where everyone is online at the same time) is also available through scheduled chat sessions. As soon as I know your schedules, I will choose one hour each week during which I will be available to chat in Blackboard (the online chat tool is located in the *Communication* area of Blackboard. Log onto the course, click the Communication tab, and proceed from there). Most of you have been in web courses before and so have downloaded the free chat reader. *Please note that if you have not previously used the online chat feature, you will be prompted to download a free chat reader from within the Blackboard site.* Depending upon your internet connection, this download can be fast, although on at least one occasion last term, it took three hours. Don't worry—if you have trouble logging on, send me an email with a phone number, and I'll get back to you.

Grading and Assignments

The course is divided into several modules. Each week's assignments will become visible on Monday of that week; assignments will be due incrementally during the week. The modules are designed to be completed in sequence; however, you should look ahead to the final project early in the term. In addition, you can work ahead if you are confident of the materials by referring to the blog post schedule.

Graded assignments are as follows.

Assignment	Grade
Rough responses (250-500 words each)	20%
4 Blog Posts (500-750 words) @ 10% each	40%
Comments Posts (100-200 words each)	20%
Seminar Paper (20 pages)	20%
Total	100%

Please note that students must complete every segment of every assignment to pass the course.

General descriptions of each written course component follow.

Written Component

Overview

In most graduate seminars in literary studies, students engage in extensive oral discussion of both texts and written materials. In a web course, most of this discussion must take place in writing, whether it is conveyed through formal written work or less formal written formats, such as online chats, discussion board posts, and e-mail.

This course is writing intensive. The assignments have been planned both to create an online community discussion and to develop more formal writing skills at the graduate level. The assignments are structured to culminate in a final paper that will represent your original thought on a particular genre of literature. In the process, you will generate a large body of writing, upon

which your grade will be based. The course will take a holistic, developmental view of your writing; writing that you generate earlier in the course may be weighted differently than writing you generate later in the course.

Please note that although the blog is set so that it does not report to search engines, it can be read by the outside world.

Blogging and Blog Demos

Before beginning to blog, please familiarize yourself with the blog environment. A set of interactive screen shots is available in Blackboard, on the class blog, and at [http://www.nku.edu/~rkdrry/685forms/Course Introduction](http://www.nku.edu/~rkdrry/685forms/Course%20Introduction). After viewing the screen shots, proceed to the blog at http://rkdrry.english-nku.org/ENG685/blog_inst.pdf. Log in and begin by updating your profile and exploring the site. Then introduce yourself to the class through an introductory blog post (tag: intro; category: intro)..

Whether you are a featured author or a commenter, please don't wait until the last possible moment to post. Allow yourself and the technology some leeway.

Theme/Topic

During the first week of the course, you are expected to **identify a single theme or topic of interest** during the first week in the term. If you choose wisely, you will be able to write about all your chosen theme or topic all term as you consider the works on the schedule. Ideally, what you write will then serve as the rough-draft basis for your final seminar paper. *Please e-mail me when you begin to focus in on a topic so that I can offer some advice. This will allow me to suggest secondary sources.*

Examples of viable themes/topics considered by literary scholars today include include constructions of gender (or, more narrowly, masculinity or femininity, etc); heroism; national identity; political organization; leadership; uses of figurative language; religion; attitudes toward war; morality; loyalty; marriage; the family; good government; democracy; authority; issues involved in translation; film criticism of adaptations of epic in film today; satire and parody; honor, etc.

Structure & format

Informal Responses

Frequency: weekly, beginning in week 2.

Length: 250-500 words

Due: on **Sunday** of the week due

Submission: in MLA format, submitted to rkdrry@nku.edu as an attachment

Beginning in the second week of the course, you are expected to **write a 250-500 word response** addressing the materials on the schedule for that particular week as they relate to the theme/topic you have chosen to pursue throughout the term. Informal responses should be formatted in MLA format, as should your final paper. (If you are not sure what MLA format looks like, see the sample at http://www.nku.edu/~rkdrry/685forms/MLA_format.pdf and refer to the Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue).

Once you are satisfied with your informal response, e-mail it directly to me as an attachment. (Please note that I can receive materials sent in MSWord formats, including Vista. If you are using MSWorks or WordPerfect, please save your documents in rich text format.) *Be sure that you are really finished writing. I only want to receive one e-mailed informal response from each person. Also, do not forget to state the assignment name and number in the subject line, and do*

not forget to tell me who you are in the body of the message. Note that I will have well over a hundred responses by the end of the term. Any that can't be identified won't be graded.

Also—if you don't do as well as you expect on your first response, don't despair—I'm interested in what you learn and how your work develops over the whole term.

Blog Posts

Frequency: four times during the course, as posted on the schedule.

Length: 500-750 words

Due: on **Thursday** of the week due

Submission: Pasted directly into the

In addition to your weekly informal responses, you are required periodically to integrate your work into a more formal, thoughtful, **500-750 word blog post** that you will submit to the class blog at <http://rkdrry.english-nku.org/ENG685-Sp08/>. Your integrated blog post should demonstrate higher level work than your informal posts, including your ability to analyze literary texts through close reading; to use and integrate quoted evidence from literary texts; to discuss relevant secondary texts; and to explain your ideas in an articulate manner.

Blog dates have been chosen and rotated as fairly as possible.

Please assign appropriate tags to your blog post (e.g., a blog post about issues of masculinity in Homer's *Iliad* should be given at least the blog tags, separated by commas, of "iliad, masculinity, gender, homer."

Please note that your classmates who are not writing blog posts in a given week will be commenting on your blog post. Consequently, *if you don't file your blog post on time, your classmates will have nothing to write about. Late posts will be eligible for no more than 50% of the possible points. In addition, commenters are not required to respond to late blog posts.*

Comments Posts

Frequency: on weeks when you are not responsible for a blog post

Length: 100-200 words

Due: on **Sunday** of the week due

Submission: Pasted directly into the blog as a comment

Deleted: 12 posts,

During any week in which you are not required to write a 500-750 word blog post, you are required to post a **substantive, helpful, critical 100-200 word comment** in response to each 500-750 blog post.

Writing helpful comments is an art and requires preparation and thought. You need to have read the work before attempting to post, as well as the blog post itself. Comments of the following types are rarely helpful and will receive few (if any) points:

1. Suggestions that the person start over, throw out the post, or drop the course
2. Statements that focus on the identity, beliefs, or views of the person writing (i.e., *ad hominem* attacks)
3. Suggestions completely unrelated to the periods and works addressed, or about materials we have not read, or about materials unrelated to the topic the writer is trying to address (i.e., off-topic remarks designed to turn the conversation)
4. Statements that suggest the post is just perfect the way it is (everyone needs help).

Instead, consider some combination of the following strategies:

1. Try always to identify what you can say about the post that is positive. *Be specific and refer to particular points the person has made.*

2. If you think that the person has misread some part of the text, has drawn an improper conclusion, or has missed the point, try to determine where the person went wrong, then tactfully suggest an alternative reading.
3. If you have run across something in your reading that would truly be helpful to the poster, you might suggest it. *Be certain that what you suggest is truly helpful so as not to waste the blog poster's time.*

Seminar Paper

Frequency: Once

Length: 20 pages

Due: Friday of Finals Week

Submission: e-mail to rkdrury@nku.edu

Your final project will be a seminar paper, formatted in MLA style, that is 20 pages long (including Works Cited). Your paper must advance an original argument about some aspect of the works that we will read during the term, as viewed from the unique perspective you have gained by viewing the work through a particular theme, topic and what it tells us about, for example, one of the following: (1) epic literature as a genre; (2) cultural views in a particular time and place; (3) epic literature as it has influenced or been adapted in later times; (4) epic literature as it speaks to audiences today; (5) another idea you propose and discuss with me. You need to discuss what you plan to write about once you begin to narrow down a topic.

Course Grades. Assignments will be graded according to these categories:

Truly outstanding, unique, exceptional achievement	A	90-100%
Exceeds all or most expectations	B	80-90%
Meets all or most expectations	C	70-80%
Meets some or few expectations	D/F	69% and below

Disability & Accessibility

Every effort has been made to design this course so that it is accessible for students with disabilities; however, further accommodation will be considered for students who explain early in the term. Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments, auxiliary aids or services, etc.) for this course must register with the Disability Services Office (DSO). Please contact the DSO in the University Center, Room 320, immediately, or call 859-572-6373 for more information. Verification of your disability is required by the DSO for you to receive reasonable academic accommodation. Further details can be found at the [DSO website](#).

Plagiarism

The use of sources (ideas, quotations, argument structures, and paraphrases) must be properly documented. In addition, all work submitted for this course must be written exclusively for this course unless written permission is given by instructors in both courses. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will result in assignment of a grade of "F" for the entire course.

The [Honor Code](#) is a commitment to the highest degree of ethical integrity in academic conduct, a commitment that, individually and collectively, the students of Northern Kentucky University will not lie, cheat, or plagiarize to gain an academic advantage over fellow students or avoid academic requirements. The full text of the [Honor Code](#) may be found at the [Dean of Students' website](#).