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# ENG 2009G-002: Literature and Human Values: Love, Hate, Obsession

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**SYLLABUS**  
**English 2009G Section 002, Fall 2007**  
**Literature and Human Values: Love, Hate, Obsession**  
 MWF 11:00–11:50, Coleman 3609, E.I.U.

Professor: Dr. Letitia L. Moffitt  
 Office: Coleman Hall room 3821  
 Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00–4:30pm, or by appointment  
 E-mail: llmoffitt@eiu.edu (for questions only; do not e-mail assignments without my permission)

### Objectives

How do we define love? Our descriptions tend to be vague (it conquers all, it makes the world go around), yet as universal as we believe love to be, it is also highly personal and individual—after all, we don't love *everyone*. How do we reconcile the paradox that love may be seen as both universal and subjective? What happens when universal concepts of love clash with a reality that may never fit our idealized standards? (To put it more cynically, why do people buy Hallmark cards with generic messages and give them to their supposedly one-and-only loves?)

How does hate complicate our definition of love? We think of them as opposites, but don't we need one to create and define the other? If we are honest with ourselves, we'll admit that the strongest feelings of love often engender the strongest feelings of hate; as much as we would like to think that those who love us would never hurt us, they do—often deeper than anyone else, precisely because they are so close to us. How then do we reconcile this additional paradox?

Finally, we often think of love and hate as basic emotions that everyone feels in one way or another—yet taken to extremes, love and hate can veer into obsession. How then do we make the distinction between “ordinary” and “obsessive”? Perhaps the difference is “blindness”: Obsessed lovers refuse to see flaws in the beloved—refuse even to see how their obsession might harm their loved one or themselves. Obsessed haters refuse to acknowledge the relativity of hatred, the fact that they may be focusing solely on the perceived negative qualities of the person or thing they hate. But aren't we always just a little bit blind in love, as in hate—and isn't that what makes these emotions so powerful, given that our blindness gives us an intensified focus on what we *do* perceive? Moreover, can't that kind of intense focus also lead to understanding and truth? What do we see when we love, hate, or obsess?

In this class we will examine a wide range of texts in light of these and other thematically relevant questions. Note that we will discuss both the literary themes *and* literary techniques in these texts—that is, not just what the texts are about but also how they are written.

### Grading Breakdown

Paper #1, due Friday, September 21 .....	20%
Paper #2, due Friday, October 26 .....	20%
Paper #3, due Monday, December 3 .....	20%
Final Exam, on Wednesday, December 12 .....	20%
Reading Quizzes, daily .....	10%
Participation, daily .....	10%

## Texts

- 3X33: *Short Fiction by 33 Writers*. Mark Winegardner ed.
- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*.
- Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Copies of other texts will be provided by me in class from time to time as well; if you miss class when I hand these out, it is your responsibility to get a copy. Always bring the appropriate text to class (and when in doubt, bring everything—I will not accept “but I didn’t know what to bring” as an excuse for showing up empty-handed).

## Papers

I will provide detailed instruction sheets for each paper, but I won’t repeat anything I’ve already said here—for example, I’m not going to tell you every time that you must double-space papers; I’m going to assume you’ve learned that already. As such, refer to this syllabus whenever you write a paper; many of the answers to your questions are already here.

**Format:** All papers must be typed and printed in readable font (12 pt. Times New Roman or equivalent), normal margins (1 inch top and bottom, 1.25 inches left and right), double-spaced, your name on each page, all pages numbered, all pages fastened together with a staple.

Don’t get cute with margins or font size in order to stretch a too-short paper. If you are required to write three full pages, and the third page has any amount of white space, or if the paper fills three pages with a lot of repetition and “fluff,” that won’t be considered three full pages. If you run out of things to say before you reach the minimum page requirement, you need to do a lot more than just fill up the empty space; you probably need to go back and put more thought into your paper as a whole.

**Editing:** Final papers must be free of hand-written corrections or blobs of correction fluid, and *must* be thoroughly proofread. Give yourself enough time to correct any errors *before* you print the final version. If you have a brilliant paper that is unreadable because of grammatical, punctuation, spelling or typographical errors, no one will know or care that it is in fact brilliant.

**Deadlines:** Papers are due at the *beginning* of class on the due date. If your paper is late by one day (that is, if you turn it in during the middle or end of the due date’s class, after class, or at the beginning of the following class), your grade will go down one *full* grade level (that is, from A to B, A- to B-, etc.). If you don’t hand in your paper at the beginning of the class following the due date, I won’t accept it and your grade for that paper will be F.

**Important notes:** Do not e-mail me papers without my permission, or put them in my mailbox or slide them under my office door or leave them in the classroom if I’m not there, because I might not get them this way unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand. I can’t grade a paper that you honestly tried to get to me but somehow got lost; I can only grade what actually exists, *in my hands*, by the deadline.

I accept *no excuses* for late papers, and I grant *no* excused extensions—not even for “good” excuses (illness/athletic event/doctor’s appointment/job interview/wedding/funeral). I am especially not interested in technological glitches (printer not working/computer ate my file/no computers available). You have the schedule in your hands right now, so you know when the papers are due: plan ahead. If you can’t make a due date’s class, for whatever reason, get a

friend to hand in your paper. It is not my responsibility to get your work from you; it is *your* responsibility to get it to me.

I don't make this rule to be mean, but simply because we are on a tight schedule and it is crucial that you do not fall behind. If you do, you may never catch up again. Besides, handing the paper in is the easy part; writing it is the hard part. Don't ace the hard part only to blow the easy part.

### **Participation**

Participation means more than just saying whatever you feel like saying. It is also more than a matter of raising your hand and saying something, anything, just to "get it over with" in order to "fulfill" your participation requirement. Students who come to class on time, listen to others, help and encourage others, ask or answer questions, contribute to discussions, focus on and engage in classroom activities—these are all students who are actively participating.

### **Reading Quizzes**

That got your attention, didn't it. Don't worry: this is a *really* easy 10% of your grade—if you do the reading. Each time you are assigned a reading, at the beginning of class I will give a very short quiz (usually only one or two questions) based on that reading. The questions will be extremely easy, such that anyone who has read the text all the way through should be able to answer them instantly—but anyone who hasn't read (or only read part of it) probably won't be able to guess. (There will also be discussion questions on the quizzes; your answers to these won't count as part of the quiz grade, but they will form the basis for our study of the text and will count toward your participation grade.) If you didn't do a particular reading, please don't insult my intelligence (and yours) by trying to fake an answer—and don't even think of copying someone else's answer. These quizzes may seem inconsequential, but cheating is still cheating and still gets you an F.

Final quiz grades will be on a standard percentage: 90–100% = A, 80–89% = B, 70–79% = C, 60–69% = D, lower than 60% = F. We will end up with somewhere in the neighborhood of 30–40 quizzes total, so this means that each grade level reflects around 3–4 missed quizzes. I don't carry my gradebook with me, and I certainly don't memorize it, so if you want to know how you are doing at any point in the semester, you need to keep track of everything *yourself* (and I'll always return your graded quizzes the following class so that you may do just that).

The point of all this, if you haven't figured it out already, is to ensure that you *do the reading*. Students sometimes think reading assignments don't matter because they don't require handing anything in. That would be a mistake: Reading is a crucial part of this class, and you can't possibly pass if you don't read. Every semester a few students skip class and/or neglect to do the reading and are shocked when they receive less than an "A" for their final grade. They shouldn't be shocked at all. Do the math: if you miss one quiz a week, either because you missed class or didn't read, you'll end up with an "F" for your quiz and participation grades. These account for 20% of your final grade, so you can't possibly get anything close to an "A." Related to this...

### **Attendance**

I will not take formal attendance for this class. *HOWEVER...!* If you got excited when you read that and figured you'll only have to show up once a month or so, think again. In *every* class, we will do something that counts toward your grade, and most of these activities cannot be made up

if you miss them. I will not give make-ups for reading quizzes, for example, and unless you have a time machine, you can't possibly make up in-class activities like group work or discussions. Just because I don't pass around a sign-in sheet or do a "role call" doesn't mean that your absences won't matter.

I maintain this policy for one key reason: The point of coming to class isn't so that you can "get credit" for being in class. Attendance means substantially more than having a pulse. If you show up to class but then take a nap, text friends, work on assignments for other courses, talk about things that have no relevance to the class, etc., you might as well have stayed home because you aren't really "attending," and in fact you may be annoying other students. (Look it up in Webster's: the first definition given for "attend" is "to pay attention," not "to be present.")

Sometimes students who miss class are anxious to let me know that they really wanted to attend but couldn't because of circumstances beyond their control. I understand, but the truth is the reason why you were absent doesn't matter, because it doesn't change the fact that you still missed what happened in class. I don't want to see notes from your doctor, your coach, your parents, or anyone else, because you don't need an "excuse" if you are absent; you need to keep up with the work. If you come up to me and announce "I was sick!" and push a doctor's note at me, all I can say is, "Sorry; hope you feel better," which does *not* mean the same thing as, "Don't worry, it won't affect your grade," given that it *could* very well affect your grade—after all, you are now one class behind everyone else.

Related to this, if you are absent, do not simply ask me "what did I miss" and expect me to tell you in 10 words or less; I can't condense a 50-minute class into one sentence. If you are concerned that you may fall behind because of an absence or absences, come to my office hours and we'll see what we can do.

Again, my point here is *not* that you should slavishly drag yourself to class when you have a fever of 104. It is natural to expect that events may force you to miss class. My point is simply this: attend as many classes as you humanly can (and *come prepared*); if you miss class, for whatever reason, make sure you keep up with the work, and expect there to be consequences that range from negligible (if the absences are isolated incidents) to severe (if you make a habit of it).

### **Final Exam**

The final exam will consist of short essay questions covering all of the reading materials for the course as well as films and other materials. The exam will be open book, open notes. More details will be forthcoming as we get closer to the exam date.

### **Plagiarism Warning**

Plagiarism means word-for-word unacknowledged copying of another writer's work *or* unacknowledged paraphrasing of another writer's ideas. This can range from something as small as using a sentence from a website without properly acknowledging the source, all the way up to turning in someone else's paper as your own. The minimum penalty is a grade of "F" on the assignment. In addition, you may fail the course, be placed on probation, or even be expelled.

Most students would never even think of turning in someone else's paper as their own. But this is not the only way plagiarism occurs. It is important to understand that plagiarism is based not just on intent but on deed. This means that it is not acceptable to say, for example, "I didn't

mean to plagiarize; it just so happens that what I wrote sounds very similar to this source I read. I went to this website to get ideas for my paper, and what I read must have influenced me without me realizing it.” Does that sound familiar? Well, guess what: that’s still considered plagiarism, because you paraphrased someone else’s ideas without citing the source.

It is very easy to avoid this problem. First of all, none of our papers require research, so there is really no reason for you to look at outside source material; rather, you should rely on your own literary analysis using the texts themselves as supporting evidence. However, if you do look at *any* other source during the writing process, be aware of how influential that source may be. If you think the source could make its way into your paper in any way, whether word-for-word or as a paraphrase of a general idea, *cite the source* using proper MLA citation format. That way, the worst you can be accused of is using an inappropriate source (if, for example, you used Wikipedia or a blog or anything similarly unreliable—remember, *anyone* can write these, including people who are making it all up), and you aren’t likely to get an “F” for that, whereas you will definitely get an “F” if you don’t cite the source.

The bottom line: absolutely do not consider plagiarizing any part of any assignment, ever. It’s simply not worth it. If you are having trouble writing an assignment or meeting a deadline, or if you aren’t sure what might be considered plagiarism, please come and talk to me about it.

### **Extra Credit**

There is none—don’t even bother asking. Every semester around Week 14 or so, a few panicky students will realize that they are in danger of getting a less-than-desirable grade and will frantically ask, “What can I do to get my grade up?” My advice is that you ask yourself that question *now*; don’t wait until Week 14, because...well, duh, obviously it will be too late by then. The semester starts *today*, so your work begins today, not the last two weeks of class. And what exactly can you do to get your grade up? The answer, I’m afraid, is another “duh”: do the reading, come to class, pay attention, participate, put care and effort into your papers and turn them in on time.

### **Final Word**

This is probably not the most exciting document you’ve ever had to read in your life, but please: *Keep this syllabus!* Refer to it whenever you have any questions about the class, because I guarantee you that a good half of the questions that are asked during the course of a semester have already been answered here. Do not let this document somehow fly out of your hands the second you leave the room.

Also, if you ever have questions about anything in this document (or, really, anything at all related to the class), *ask them*. *You* are responsible for doing what needs to be done in this class; it is not an acceptable excuse for you to say, “I didn’t understand what you meant so I couldn’t do the work.” If you don’t understand, find out. That’s why you’re here, after all!

### Grading Criteria for Papers

#### Purpose:

“A” range: The essay has a clearly focused purpose and is sufficiently narrowed for a short essay.

“B” range: The essay has a fairly clear purpose and, but the writer doesn’t always consistently craft the essay toward that purpose.

“C” range: The essay has a purpose, but that purpose may be too broad.

“D” range: The essay has little clear sense of purpose; instead of focusing on a single topic, the essay jumps from one topic to another and makes no clear point.

#### Reasoning and Supporting Evidence:

“A” range: The writer provides specific, clear supporting details, offering enough evidence to make a point convincingly. The reasoning is valid, and there are no irrelevant details.

“B” range: Reasoning and evidence are fairly clear and appropriate but not always vivid and convincing.

“C” range: The writer’s evidence may be too general to fulfill the essay’s purpose effectively. The essay may offer a few specific details but not enough to be convincing. There may be a few irrelevant details or flaws in reasoning.

“D” range: Evidence or supporting details are few and possibly irrelevant, and there may be several flaws in reasoning.

#### Organization:

“A” range: The arrangement of ideas in the essay is appropriate for the writer’s subject and purpose. The introduction is engaging; the conclusion is satisfying. Transitions are effective, clear and varied. The reader can easily understand the direction of the essay.

“B” range: The essay is usually easy to follow, though introduction, conclusion, transitions and/or overall arrangement of ideas may be less than completely effective.

“C” range: Some thought has been given to the arrangement of ideas, but supporting points may not be in their best order. Introduction and/or conclusion are present but not well thought out. Lack of transitions may make the essay hard to follow.

“D” range: Organization is confusing. The reader may have great difficulty following the essay.

#### Writing Style:

“A” range: Writing is under the writer’s control. Wording is thoughtful, varied, and precise. The writer has obviously edited and proofread, and there are few if any grammatical, punctuation, spelling or typographical errors.

“B” range: Writing is competent, perhaps not varied and accurate enough for the “A” range, but effort is there.

“C” range: Wording is generally correct but “bland,” or perhaps the essay contains exaggerated language, wordy structures, or clichés. The essay also likely contains errors of grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling.

“D” range: Essay bears the clear markings of something the author dashed off without giving sufficient thought (typos, grammatical mistakes, redundancies).

F papers: An “F” assignment either doesn’t exist (meaning that the writer didn’t turn it in on time as specified), or did not meet any of the minimum requirements of the assignment, or was plagiarized (in part or in whole).

Note #1: An “A” grade is the top grade that can be achieved and does not simply reflect good effort; it reflects a combination of strong effort and superlative results. There are no “easy A” grades; moreover, grades you’ve gotten in other classes are irrelevant to your grades in this class. It doesn’t matter if you’ve always gotten “A” grades on your writing before; you’re being graded on your work for *this* class.

Note #2: All grades are final. I do not negotiate grades.