

BELMONT ABBEY COLLEGE
READING LIST FOR ENGLISH MAJORS

The required reading list for English major includes the following:

1. One of the Homeric epics
2. The Oresteian Trilogy of Aeschylus or the Theban plays of Sophocles (Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone).
3. Virgil, The Aeneid.
4. Dante, The Divine Comedy.
5. Beowulf.
6. Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales
7. Two of the later tragedies of Shakespeare.
8. The first two books of the The Fairie Queene or selected poetry of Donne.
9. Milton, Paradise Lost.
10. Fielding, Tom Jones or Joseph Andrews.
11. Pope, An Essay on Criticism, An Essay on Man, or The Rape of the Lock.
12. Wordsworth, The Prelude.
13. Melville, Moby-Dick.
14. Whitman, Leaves of Grass.
15. Dickens, Bleak House or G. Eliot, Middlemarch.
16. One of the following four novels: Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, or Tolstoy, The Brothers Karamazov; or Anna Karenina or War and Peace.
17. Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.
18. Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man or the later poetry of W.B. Yeats.
19. Eliot, The Waste Land.
20. Two major plays by O'Neill or Williams.
12. Woolf, To The Lighthouse.

These works, composed over a period of some 2600 years, constitute the first part of your reading list. You must read and be prepared to discuss nineteen (19) of them before taking the Senior Comprehensive Examinations administered in the semester by the Department of English. Nearly all of them are normally covered in courses offered by the department. Whether you choose to take all of those courses or not, you will be responsible for a familiarity with the nineteen works selected at the time of the examinations. Each is considered a definitive, indispensable component of the literary tradition. Like much of the content of major courses, they are included because of both their intrinsic and their extrinsic value; that is, they are first of all excellent works. Secondly, they

have historical value as significant documents in the history of ideas, of sensibility, and of literary culture. This requirement insures that every graduate of the English program at Belmont Abbey College will have received an adequate grounding in many of the fundamental texts of his or her field.

The second part of the reading list consists of ten works chosen by you. You may select works from any period of English and/or American literature, but you are required to justify your selection in terms of some controlling principle (involving a common theme, genre, technique, etc.). That is, all of your selections should contribute to the understanding of some specific literary issue or development. You might, for example, like to read ten novels which you consider significant examples of the literary technique of stream-of-consciousness. These might include works by Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Faulkner, Edward Albee, and T.S. Eliot. Eliot, on the other hand, might occur on an entirely different list of volumes of poetry by John Donne, George Herbert, Emily Dickinson, and a few modern poets such as Allen Tate, their work being grouped together as examples of metaphysical poetry. Eliot might appear on a third list composed of works of protest against the industrial revolution and the dehumanizing effects of modern mechanization, regimentation, and specialization. Here he could be in the company of John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, D. H. Lawrence, Jack Kerouac, J.D. Salinger, the Beat poets, and many other works of the Contemporary period. Your works might have an historical focus, representing various aspects of a particular period or some of its primary concerns, but the time period covered should be very limited to avoid incoherence.

You might chart the development of a particular technique or genre, following the evolution of the dramatic monologue from Tennyson and Browning through to current examples, or the epic poem from its classical roots to the Neoclassic period. You could study a specific group or school of writers to illuminate their common concerns, such as Neoclassic satirists like Swift, Pope, Whitman, or those novelists normally associated with Naturalism, like Crane, Dreiser, and Frank Norris. Or you might choose an adequate number of works by one of the major figures of literary history, like Shakespeare or Milton, to develop a significant theory about his or her complete works. These are but a few of the many possibilities available to you in meeting this requirement.

The department will interpret quite flexibly the requirement of coherence in your selection; but it does ask that the principle of unity be not entirely superficial or mechanical, that it be significant and realistic enough to permit you to make intelligent, specific comments on the way in which each of the books contributes to the body of related literature which your list constitutes. We may think that you have been mistaken in the inclusion of one or two of your titles, without as a consequence being prejudiced towards your performance.

Nevertheless, the basis upon which your choice is made should represent real thought on your part.

All students who declare an English major should obtain this list and begin their reading as soon as possible, but no later than the second semester of the sophomore year. By the end of the first semester of the senior year, you must submit to the Chair of the English department two copies of your selections for both parts of the list. The necessary official approval will be indicated by the Chair's signature on these copies, one of which will remain in your possession, the other to be entered into the files of the department. Feel free to discuss the list with members of the department before this time, but final approval commits you to the selections listed at that time. And remember, you will be examined on both portions of the reading list as a part of your written comprehensive examination.