

## **Sarah Larratt Keefer, Trent, English**

### **ENGLISH 230 History and Development of the English Language,**

**2002-2003**

#### *Course Texts*

Keefer, S.L. *Now and Then: An Basic Introduction to the Shape of Modern English*

Hoban, Russell. *Riddley Walker* London: 1974.

Every student is required to have an active e-mail account and be able to use it. I set up distribution lists for my students to disseminate information, and will assume that they are able to monitor, and be responsible for, any such information sent on electronic mail.

#### *Course Description*

In this course, we work on understanding first the shape of Modern English (MnE) as we speak it now, then its development from its earliest written stages through to the fifteenth century, and finally ways in which English is manipulated in speech, advertising and fiction in modern society. For the first six weeks of the course, we will therefore begin with a look at MnE grammar and a very simple introduction to linguistics as they apply to English. The second six weeks will provide an historical introduction to Old English (OE) which is the ancestor of MnE, using the toolbox of grammar and linguistics that we have already developed. After Christmas, the first six weeks of the new term will follow the changes from OE to Middle English (ME) and the reasons why these occurred, examining a variety of ME texts closely for their grammatical features and ending up shortly after the Winter Term Reading Break back in the modern period once again. The last weeks of the course will examine issues like advertising language, political correctness, slang, swearing and euphemism, and will end with the reading of Russell Hoban's short experimental novel *Riddley Walker*, set in a post-holocaust society where (very like England after the Norman Conquest of 1066) only an eroded spoken English exists and its language becomes a metaphor for both the dissolution of society through nuclear disaster and the aspirations of the politically ambitious to 're-connect' knowledge into 'cleverness' once again.

*Work Expected*

Seminar Participation @ 10% per term, total 20%. I have my students sign into seminar each week: this enables me to learn who you are faster, and provides a written record of attendance that each student is responsible for.

3 tests Fall Term, Week 6 and 12 (Weeks of October 14 and December 2) and Winter Term Week 6 (Week of February 9) @ 5% each, total 15%; there is no final exam. These tests may not be written later, “made up” if missed, or re-written.

8 assignments: You will sign each handed-in piece of work in, in the attendance booklet that circulates weekly (see Seminar Participation, above) by noting ‘Assignment # 1 in’ after your name. This is for your own protection, and once again provides a record of submission, should any assignment get lost.

Students may work in pairs on the *handed-in* assignments if they so choose, turning in ONE assignment between the two of them and each receiving the same grade. They may also collaborate and consult on seminar presentations although each student will present his/her own material during the allotted time period of no more than 10 minutes. I encourage this practice because it often helps to illuminate problems if two minds are at work on them, together. Students may *not* collaborate on the assignments done *during class*.

*Fall*

Week 2 (Week of Sept 16): Name Origins (handed in) 5%;

Week 5 (Week of Oct 7): MnE Parts of Speech (done in seminar) 6%;

Week 9, 10 and 11 (Weeks of Nov 11, 18 and 25): Structure of OE seminar presentations (done in seminar) 6%;

Week 12 (Week of Dec 2): OE Construing (handed in) 16%.

1. Name Origins: write 500-750 words on the origins and meaning of your first and last names, and on why you were named as you were by your family (interview parents or relatives if you have to). You may also include a discussion of whether you like or dislike your name(s), of any nicknames you have (that you either like or dislike), or of names you would have preferred to have been called. Pay attention to the structure

of this assignment and to your means of expression. The purpose of this exercise is twofold: to make you look at the most personal words you know—your own name—as objectively as possible as a prelude to the philosophy behind studying your vernacular and its own origins, and for me to assess the way in which you write, and thus what help you might need in writing assignments during the year.

2. The MnE Parts of Speech Assignment (week of October 7) will be done during seminar time and corrected in class so that you have them to take home afterwards. You may *not* work in pairs for this exercise. You must bring a dictionary, although it will only take you so far in identifying parts of speech;

3. The Structure of Old English assignments will consist of a 10-minute presentation *in class*, for which you hand in your notes at the seminar's conclusion. I will write you an email critique and a grade on your work within twenty-four hours of your individual seminar. We will do two practice weeks on texts before we start you on your own. A sign-up sheet will be circulated the week before Fall Reading Week with four topics to be discussed individually for each of three Old English passages from *Now and Then*, as below (so read over the questions that follow and decide in advance which topic you would be most interested in dealing with):

Week 9: Old English Text 6 (p.134); Week 10: Old English Text 8 (p. 135); Week 11: Old English Text 10 (p. 136-7). In seminar for each of these three weeks, four students will present on four topics pertaining to the Text for that week:

a) *Phonology and Sounds*: come prepared to read your passage aloud in class (so you should sign up for this one if you don't mind 'performing'!) and to coach your fellow students through their own read of short sections of it. Identify the different symbols in Old English orthography and the sounds they make, and take note of letters that are missing: are their sounds missing too or are they represented another way? As you read aloud, take note of words that sound like Modern English words and use your Glossary to see if there is any direct line of descent from OE to MnE for them.

b) *Nouns and Demonstratives*: identify all the nouns and the demonstratives that go with them or stand for them in your passage (you can do this by looking up each word or comparing the OE passage with its translation). Give a short presentation on the variation of forms for each noun and demonstrative, indicating case and therefore their function within each sentence (we will practise this in class before anyone 'goes it alone!').

c) *Verbs and their Subjects*: find all of the finite verbs in your passage (don't worry about participles and infinitives) and locate their subjects. Take note of the verbs' endings that tell you whether the subjects are singular or plural, which person they might be and what tense they are, and give a brief presentation on what techniques in 'verb-spotting' that you have learned from this exercise.

d) *Syntax and Sentence Structure*: be prepared to write out your passage on the blackboard—come a little early to do this at the beginning of class: it will help whoever is doing Exercise (a) to have the text up on the board to read from—and come ready to break up your sentence into its component parts of speech, identifying subjects, verbs, direct objects and any modifiers that go with them and bracketing off prepositional phrases.

4. The Old English Construing Assignment will be done using Old English Text 4 on p. 134-5 of *Now and Then*: how to construe is laid out for you in detail on pp. 116-129 of the text. It is due in seminar period the last week before Christmas (week of December 2).

Total Fall Term Assignments: 33%

### *Winter*

Weeks 3, 4 and 5 (Weeks of Jan 20, 27 and Feb 3): Structure of Middle English seminar presentations (in seminar) 6%;

Week 7 (Week of Feb 24): Etymology (handed in) 10%;

Week 9 (Week of Mar 3): Advertising assignment (handed in) 6%;

Week 12 (Week of March 31): *Riddley Walker* assignment (handed in) 10%.

1. The Structure of Middle English assignment will work much the same way as the Structure of Old English assignment, above. Week 3: Middle English Text 2 (p. 193-4); Week 4: Middle English Text 4 (p. 195); Week 5: Middle English Text 6 (p. 196-7). In seminar for each of these three weeks, four students will present on four topics pertaining to the Text for that week:

a) *Phonology and Sounds*: come prepared to read your passage aloud in class (so you should sign up for this one if you don't mind 'performing'!) and to coach your fellow

students through their own read of short sections of it. Present a brief talk on the following subjects: i) identify the different symbols in Middle English orthography and the sounds they make, take note of letters that are missing, and compare your understanding of the sound of this Text to the way in which Old English sounded and was written. ii) can you hear any elements of dialect in your Text (read the section on Middle English phonology in the book). iii) as you read aloud, listen for native English (Old English) words and for borrowed words from French (use your Glossary to check your assumptions); iv) take note of any words, native or borrowed, that sound like Modern English words and use your Glossary to see if there is any direct line of descent from ME to MnE for them.

b) *Nouns and Demonstratives*: examine the nouns and the demonstratives that go with them or stand for them, and all of the personal pronouns in your passage (you can do this by looking up each word or comparing the ME passage with its translation). Give a short presentation on the variation of forms for each noun and demonstrative, and for each pronoun, comparing the prevalence or reduction of case endings with what you would find in a similar passage in Old English.

c) *Verbs and their Subjects*: find all of the verbs, finite, infinitive and participial, in your passage. Locate the subjects for the finite verbs and take note of the verbs' endings, comparing what you find to the range of endings that you would expect to find in Old English. Compare the infinitive and participle structure with those of OE, and give a brief presentation on what techniques in Middle English 'verb-spotting' that you have learned from this exercise.

d) *Syntax and Sentence Structure*: be prepared to write out your passage on the blackboard and come ready to break up your sentence into its component parts of speech, identifying subjects, verbs, direct objects and any modifiers that go with them and bracketing off prepositional phrases. Then compare the structure of your ME text to the structure of its MnE translation at the back. In what ways are they similar or very different?

2. For the Etymology Assignment, write a short essay of 1000 words on ONE of the following:

- b) the relationship between 'cow' and 'beef,' 'sheep' and 'mutton', 'pig' and 'pork'.
- c) the relationship between 'comprehensive' and 'prehensile;'
- d) the relationship between 'orient' as a noun and as a verb;

- e) the relationship between ‘venerate’ and ‘venereal;’
- f) the relationship between ‘glamour’ and ‘grammar’ (and account phonologically for the link between the two);
- g) the origins of the MnE word ‘silly’ through all of its changes (take it back to Old English).
- h) the origins of the words ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye;’

Method: trace your chosen words back to their very earliest linguistic etymological source. You may have to go back to Latin or Greek, and look at their meanings in the original language; then discuss their first written use, and look at their historical development from earliest meaning to modern semantic fields, and the changes they have undergone. Identify part of speech and morphology for your subject words, and write a few sentences on cognate words (perhaps different parts of speech, perhaps with different meanings, perhaps with meanings common to the original source meaning) in MnE (minimum of three). Your conclusion should take into account a consideration of changing meanings. For this exercise you *must* use the Oxford English Dictionary and a good etymological dictionary as minimum sources: marks will be deducted if you do not use at least these resources. I do not consider the Internet a valid resource for this exercise unless you are citing an Online Dictionary or Encyclopaedia. 10%

3. Your advertising assignment is as follows: Choose one of the following abstract nouns (i.e. something without a physical referent) SPIRIT HEART MIND LOVE FREEDOM THOUGHT and find five (5) hardcopy advertisements (include either original or photocopies of each ad you use: you may use Internet ads if you hardcopy them; although highly creative and entertaining, television is—for obvious reasons—not a good source of ads!) in which ‘your’ word appears as a noun. Try to find as wide a variety of uses as possible and write a short (500-750 word) essay answering the following questions: “How are these advertisements manipulating the 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of this abstract noun in order to sell something?” and “In what ways do meanings change from ad to ad depending on who the ad is directed towards?” To answer the question, concentrate on target audience (where did the ad come from? in what kinds of publications do you find it?) by gender, age, financial, ethnic or cultural background, and pay attention to colour, font and type-face, spatialization on the page, use of images together with text, any ‘gimmicks,’ and double-entendre or visual/intellectual plays on words.

4. The assignment on *Riddley Walker* will consist of taking one of a number of suggested passages (to be given out nearer the time), and writing a 750-1000 word discussion of the ways in which the language and its features contained in the passage serve to reflect the themes and intentions of Hoban's post-holocaust fiction. These may entail comparing two different 'speaks' that appear in the book (the language that the Eusa Story is told in and the language that Riddley uses for his own narrative; or Riddley's narrative and the language of the written text that contains the Legend of St Eustace which Goodparley "interprets" for Riddley), or a close examination of what Hoban does to the language in your chosen passage as a reflection of what Hoban is saying about post-holocaust society.

Total Winter Term Assignments: 32%

Assignments total 65%