

Text and Context

Professor: Jason Richards
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Course: ENGL 285 Sections 1 & 2
 Semester: Fall 2011
 Time: 1-1:50 & 2-2:50 MWF
 Room: 211 Palmer

Course Description

This course emphasizes the close reading of literary texts in relation to their cultural contexts. In order to expose students to a variety of texts/contexts, our readings will cover a wide range of American literature. We'll begin by analyzing J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* as a vision of the American dream colliding with the nightmare of history, and Charles Brockden Brown's foundational novel *Wieland* as a reflection of the anxieties over America's emerging democracy. Then we'll turn to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat," which subtly suggests the horrors of southern slavery, and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, which exposes the brutalities of northern indentured servitude. Next we'll examine the Henry James classic, *Daisy Miller*, a novella that dramatizes the clash between America's *nouveau riche* and European society. Moving to the twentieth century, we'll consider Flannery O'Connor's novel *Wise Blood* as a Gothic meditation on religious faith in the South, and Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* as a portrait of decadence in 1980s New York. The course will conclude with Wesley Brown's *Darktown Strutters*, a postmodern historical novel about the days of blackface minstrelsy, and Joyce Carol Oates' appalling (but fascinating) *Zombie*, the tale of a serial murderer who incarnates America's darkest impulses. A few other texts have been sprinkled in along the way.

This course assists prospective majors and minors in acquiring the necessary tools for middle- and upper-division classes in English. Each seminar will focus on the necessary skills for reading literary texts, the development of critical argument, and the ability to situate the text in relation to significant contexts.

Required Texts

J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (Penguin)
 Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* (Penguin)
 Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig* (Penguin)
 Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (Dover)
 Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
 Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (Penguin)
 Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (Random House)
 Wesley Brown, *Darktown Strutters* (Massachusetts)
 Joyce Carol Oates, *Zombie* (HarperCollins)

Recommended Text

Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory (Penguin)

Grading

Participation/Professionalism	15%
Paper 1 (4-5 pages)	25%
Paper 2 (4-5 pages)	25%
Research Paper (8-10 pages)	35%

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90; **B+** = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80; **C+** = 79-77; **C** = 76-74; **C-** = 73-70; **D+** = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60; **F** < 60

Participation/Professionalism: While I will often begin class with a lecture, this course relies heavily on discussion. You are expected to have all the readings done for the day they are assigned and come prepared to discuss them, and you must always bring the text(s) we are discussing to class. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Part of your participation grade includes quizzes, which are **unannounced** and given at the beginning of class. **If you are late or absent on a quiz day, you cannot make up the quiz.** I will drop your lowest quiz grade. Quizzes must be done on paper with clean edges. Finally, a lack of professionalism (e.g., not following course policies, rude behavior, and so on) will negatively affect this portion of your grade.

Email Policy: **The best way to address questions about our class is by meeting in person.** I am always happy to talk with you during my office hours, by appointment, or after class. That said, I am available by email for **simple and succinct** queries. I typically respond to email once a day between 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. If you do need to email, here are some rules to follow:

- Email is not the place to seek feedback on your writing or ideas; that must be done in person
- Email is not the place to discuss grade concerns or negotiate any kind of special request
- Do not email at the last minute (e.g., the night before an assignment is due) asking for help
- Do not email if you plan to visit during office hours; I'll be there, unless otherwise stated
- Do not email about your absences, unless you are missing two or more classes in a row

Appointments: If you cannot meet with me during my office hours or after class, we can set up an appointment at a time that is mutually convenient. If you need to make an appointment, please plan to do so **at least 24 hours in advance.**

Electronic Devices: No laptops, cell phones, etc. allowed. **Texting is expressly forbidden.**

Attendance: While I expect you to attend every class, you are allowed three absences during the semester. After three absences, every additional absence will lower your final grade by one percentage point (e.g., 80% becomes 79%, and so on). If you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course. **Note: If you miss class, please don't contact me to ask what you missed. Instead, you should exchange contact information with other classmates and ask them what we covered in class.**

Tardiness: Please do not come late to class. Tardiness disrupts the flow of class and distracts other students. If you have a scheduling conflict, you are advised to drop the class. Tardiness will lower your participation/professionalism grade.

Papers 1 & 2: For these papers, you will do a close reading of one or more of our texts. You will receive a handout for each paper.

Research Paper: The final assignment asks you to compose a long paper (consisting of an argument, original analysis, and research) on one or more of the texts we have read this semester. Remember, this is a research paper, which means you must assemble a variety of scholarly perspectives to help build an original, argumentative analysis. You will receive a handout for this paper.

Mode of Submission: Papers are due at the beginning of class. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins on the top and bottom and **1.25-inch margins on the sides**. Please use printer ink that produces a copy dark enough to be easily legible. Place your name, instructor's name, course number, and date in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Your last name and page number should appear in the upper right-hand corner of all pages. Do not include a title page. Place your title above the text on page one and double space above and beneath it. Your title should not be underlined. Be sure to staple your paper. You may lose points for not following these guidelines. **Note: I do not accept papers by email.**

Late Work: All work must be turned in on time. If you will not be in class when a paper is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. A late paper will lose one percentage point for each weekday it is late and two percentage points over the weekend.

Submission of All Work: All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

Intellectual Honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult me.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities should meet with me at the beginning of the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In all cases, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Schedule (subject to change)**Week 1**

Aug 24: Introduction

Aug 26: Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, from Letter 3 (pages 66-90) and Letter 4 (pages 106-10, 124-26)

Week 2

Aug 29: *American Farmer*, Letter 9 (pages 166-79) and from Letter 10 (pages 184-86)

Aug 31: *American Farmer*, Letter 12 (pages 200-27)

Sept 2: Brown, *Wieland*, Chapters 1-5 (pages 1-55)

Week 3

Sept 5: Labor Day: No Classes

Sept 7: *Wieland*, Chapters 6-9 (pages 56-105)

Sept 9: *Wieland*, Chapters 10-16 (pages 106-72)

Week 4

Sept 12: *Wieland*, Chapters 17-23 (pages 173-244)

Sept 14: *Wieland*, Chapters 24-27 (pages 245-78)

Sept 16: Poe, "The Black Cat" (handout)

Week 5

Sept 19: Wilson, *Our Nig*, Chapters 1-3 (pages 1-22)

Sept 21: *Our Nig*, Chapters 4-8 (pages 23-50)

Sept 23: *Our Nig*, Chapters 9-12 (pages 51-72)

Week 6

Sept 26: Whitman, from "Song of Myself" (handout)

Sept 28: **Paper 1 Due**; Presentations

Sept 30: James, *Daisy Miller*, Chapter 1 (pages 1-27)

Week 7

Oct 3: *Daisy Miller*, Chapter 2 (pages 28-59)

Oct 5: O'Connor, *Wise Blood*, Chapters 1-3 (pages 1-60)

Oct 7: *Wise Blood*, Chapters 4-5 (pages 61-96)

Week 8

Oct 10: *Wise Blood*, Chapters 6-8 (pages 97-142)

Oct 12: *Wise Blood*, Chapters 9-11 (pages 143-89)

Oct 14: *Wise Blood*, Chapters 12-14 (pages 190-236)

Week 9

Oct 17: Fall Recess: No Classes

Oct 19: Miller, *The Crucible*, Act 1 (pages 1-46)

Oct 21: *The Crucible*, Act 2 (pages 47-76)

Week 10

Oct 24: *The Crucible*, Acts 3 & 4 (pages 77-134)

Oct 26: McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 1-2 (pages 1-35)

Oct 28: *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 3-5 (pages 36-79)

Week 11

Oct 31: *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 6-8 (pages 80-127)

Nov 2: *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 9-12 (pages 128-82)

Nov 4: **Paper 2 Due**; Presentations

Week 12

Nov 7: Lecture: Blackface Minstrelsy

Nov 9: Brown, *Darktown Strutters*, (pages 1-45)

Nov 11: *Darktown Strutters*, (pages 46-80)

Week 13

Nov 14: *Darktown Strutters*, (pages 81-119)

Nov 16: *Darktown Strutters*, (pages 120-78)

Nov 18: *Darktown Strutters*, (pages 179-220)

Week 14

Nov 21: Boyle, "Greasy Lake" (handout)

Nov 23: Thanksgiving Recess

Nov 25: Thanksgiving Recess

Week 15

Nov 28: Oates, *Zombie*, Chapters 1-13 (pages 1-42)

Nov 30: *Zombie*, Chapters 14-30 (pages 43-90)

Dec 2: *Zombie*, Chapters 31-45 (pages 91-140)

Week 16

Dec 5: *Zombie*, Chapters 46-57 (pages 141-81)

Dec 7: No Class: Optional Conferences

Dec 9: **Research Paper Due**